

Presbytery of Baltimore Policy on Mandatory Dismantling Racism Training

Adopted Unanimously on September 13, 2018

Be it resolved that the Presbytery of Baltimore adopts the following policies and procedures to be added to the Manual of the Presbytery of Baltimore as the “Presbytery of Baltimore Dismantling Racism Policy”:

1. The Presbytery makes a commitment to offer, provide resources for, and to publicize educational opportunities that focus on dismantling racism within our church institutions (Presbytery and congregations) and the communities we serve. The Presbytery intends to provide a training that is both didactic and experiential to incorporate the following elements and concepts:
 - A theological grounding in our call to a Beloved Community
 - Our local Maryland and Baltimore history, including Presbyterian church history
 - Core concepts of institutionalized racism and its manifestation at the individual level
 - A new awareness of the impact of church policies and decisions on people of color
 - Tools and strategies to develop anti-racist behavior and culture within our church life

2. The Dismantling Racism training shall be required at least once every three years for:
 - All Teaching Elders who are serving as pastors to a congregation or otherwise engaged in a Validated Ministry are required to attend Baltimore Presbytery’s educational program on Dismantling Racism, within one year after their arrival. A follow-up report from the training should be submitted to the Commission on Reconciliation within 6 months of the training. Failure to fulfill this requirement within the specified time will result in unpaid administrative leave until it is completed. This requirement will be included in the terms of call. Notation of their participation will be made in their permanent file. The Presbytery of Baltimore will communicate to Pastoral Nominating Committees and presbyteries who are requesting references on the status of candidates with respect to this requirement.

 - Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs) and Ruling Elders elected to serve on the Committee on Ministry (COM) and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) are required to participate in a training within one year of being commissioned (CRE) or elected to COM or CPM.

 - All Candidates for Ministry are required to attend a Dismantling Racism training or similar training (approved by the Presbytery). In the event that the timing or location of a training is not feasible, the candidate may work with CPM to determine an alternative means to meet this requirement.

 - All Presbytery staff is required to attend within one year of hire/election.

3. The Presbytery strongly encourages honorably retired teaching elders, ruling elders serving in leadership roles in the Presbytery, session members and other congregational leaders to participate in such trainings.

4. Proposed Training Schedule & Locations

If the way be clear, the inaugural training will be carried out in 2018. This pilot training will be targeted toward the Dismantling Racism Team members, Presbytery Staff and other interested Presbytery leadership (commission and committee members).

The Presbytery will offer multiple training opportunities during the next two years to ensure adequate time to meet this new requirement. Current members of the Presbytery and staff required to participate in a Dismantling Racism training will be expected to complete their first training by the end of 2020. The trainings will be offered in different locations, to be determined in consultation with the Commission on Reconciliation.

The Presbytery will offer at least one Dismantling Racism training per year beginning in 2021, based on demand.

5. Training Administration & Oversight

This policy will be administered by the Commission on Reconciliation who shall provide oversight of the Dismantling Racism Training Team and authorize the hiring of training consultants. The Commission is responsible for reviewing follow-up reports from training participants and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the trainings.

A Dismantling Racism Training Team shall be established as a Special Committee of the Commission on Reconciliation in order to develop the training curriculum, identify potential trainers and coordinate the training events. The Commission shall appoint the members of the Team who shall make regular reports to the Commission on their activities.

The office of the Stated Clerk is responsible for ensuring notation of TE and CRE participation is made in their permanent files and notifying them of compliance deadlines. The Presbytery of Baltimore will communicate to Pastoral Nominating Committees and presbyteries who are requesting references on the status of candidates with respect to this requirement.

The Social Justice Consultant will serve as staff support to the Team.

6. Provision for Training Evaluation & Policy Review

The Commission shall also undertake an initial review of this policy by the end of 2020 and bring recommendations for any changes to the policy or training requirements to a Presbytery Gathering in 2021.

Funding

The Presbytery shall designate funding in the Presbytery Budget in order to provide these trainings, to be led by an outside organization or consultants. Each training is expected to accommodate 30 to 40 participants.

RATIONALE

In the aftermath of the 2015 uprising, the Presbytery of Baltimore embarked on an effort to address racial injustices in our congregations and communities. As people of faith, we knew that we had to act if we were going to fulfill Jesus' command to care for the least of His children. In that seminal moment, we took the revolutionary step to make race, class and poverty the focus of our Gatherings.

While there has been some progress in increasing awareness of individual racial bias in the past three years among some congregations, we have become more comfortable in talking about race, but we have yet to take meaningful action to dismantle racism in our churches and Presbytery.

This awareness of individual bias or prejudice by itself is not racism. When prejudice is combined with power it becomes racism and supports white privilege and supremacy... In "Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community" the 211th General Assembly (1999) said:

Those who control power have the capacity to transform prejudice into racism by establishing and maintaining institutions and structures that embody group biases... We must be clear and truthful about the centrality of power in perpetuating and sustaining systemic racism. If we are to build a future with justice for all, and it can be done, both personal intervention and institutional transformation are essential for the mission of the church.

Such institutional transformation begins with the leadership of the church. Following the white nationalist rallies in Charlottesville, Va., the leaders of our PC (USA) issued this statement:

...we acknowledge the church's complicity in the creation of white supremacy and racism. We confess the church's failure in challenging and disrupting white supremacy and racism. Too often we have accepted the status quo. Too often we have stood silent in the face of injustice and oppression.

By God's grace may we remember the events in Charlottesville; repent of our acquiescence and failures; and renew our commitment to proclaim and live the good news of Jesus Christ. May that commitment lead us to stand against, speak against and work against racism and white supremacy, this day and every day.

As part of that commitment, the PC (USA) national staff and members of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board already receive mandated anti-racism training on a regular basis. But if we are to heed the admonition of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6: 10-20 to stand against the powers that control our world and resist them with the armor of God, we must begin to train leaders in our presbyteries as well. Our teaching elders, presbytery officers and staff and members of the Committees on Ministry and Preparation for Ministry are the key persons to whom our congregations look for spiritual guidance and leadership.

As the late theologian James Cone once said:

We need some signs of transcending (racial bonding and move toward human bonding). Where will they come from if not from the church? And how will these signs be expressed, except by preachers and priests and rabbis? (Interview, America Magazine, November 20, 2006)

We are locked in a very divisive national battle to determine who we are and what we stand for as a country. Our church has a responsibility to take a prophetic stance in that battle and declare the power of God prevails over the power of money, war and racism. With the 2020 General Assembly coming to Baltimore, we have an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to set an example for the entire church that will fulfill the spirit of Galatians 3: 28: "There is neither Jew or Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The church at large has become comfortable talking about race, but not really doing anything to change the racial dynamic. Through a well-planned and administered program of anti-racism training focused on dismantling institutional racism the Baltimore Presbytery could create a critical mass of persons who are prepared to be prophetic witnesses for God's beloved community. This could set the course for our church for years to come.