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Dear Members and Elder Commissioners of the Presbytery,

On behalf of the Commission on Reconciliation we would like to share with you the attached Overture to the 225th General Assembly which has been sent to us by the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy entitled "AN APOLOGY TO AFRICAN AMERICANS FOR THE SIN OF SLAVERY AND ITS LEGACY," with a request for our Presbytery's concurrence. The Overture also came up in a discussion led by the *In The Loop Ministry Group* during its series on Reparations. (A recording of the presentations on Reparations can be found here: https://youtu.be/H_Me0rqpe2U)

This Overture from Giddings-Lovejoy offers a series of concrete actions in PCUSA's long and continuing journey towards racial reconciliation. The Overture was shared with both the Dismantling Racism Team and the Commission on Reconciliation for their study and endorsement. On December 8, 2021 the Commission on Reconciliation voted unanimously to recommend to the Presbytery of Baltimore that we concur with the Overture. It further delegated to members of *In The Loop* and the Dismantling Racism Team drafting of a rationale from the Presbytery of Baltimore. We are grateful to Annette Snyder (RE-Hunting Ridge) and Kenny Walker (RE-Knox), the co-conveners of *In The Loop* Ministry Group in 2021 for hosting the B'more Human series and to Chris Watson (RE-Light Street) for bringing this Overture into those discussions. We are grateful to the writing team led by Chris with the careful editing and helpful additions from the Rev. Kenneth E. Kovacs (TE-Catonsville).

We invite you to study, pray and reflect upon these documents in preparation for the Called Meeting on February 10th where you are asked to vote on the following:

The Commission on Reconciliation moves that the Presbytery of Baltimore: a) concur with the Overture from Giddings-Lovejoy and to b) approve the additional rationale. If approved, the rationale from Baltimore Presbytery will be included with the original Overture when it comes before the General Assembly this summer.

In closing, we share these thoughts from the Conclusion of the proposed Rationale:

We concur with this Overture because we see all three of these elements: apology, history, and restorative action as helpful next steps in our journey as a Presbytery and we welcome the invitation to share our history, study, and actions with our Presbyterian siblings as we work both individually and collectively toward the vision of reconciliation so eloquently expressed in the Confession of Belhar.

As noted in the proposed Rationale, this Overture coincides well with the work already begun within our Presbytery. We find many similarities between where we are in our work of dismantling racism and the recommendations from Giddings-Lovejoy. In concurring with this Overture, therefore, we are also committing ourselves to move from study to restorative action. If approved, the Dismantling Racism Team and the Commission on Reconciliation stand ready to support its implementation.

In the name of the One who redeems and renews us, our Savior, Jesus Christ,

Rev. Karen Brown, Chair, Commission on Reconciliation (TE-Hope)

Charese Jordan Moore, Co-Chair of the Dismantling Racism Team (RE-Knox)

Guy Moody, Co-Chair of the Dismantling Racism Team and Former Presbytery Moderator (RE-St. John United)

Rationale for Concurrence from the Presbytery of Baltimore to the Overture to the 225th General Assembly (2022) of the PCUSA from the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy to offer An Apology to African Americans for the Sin of Slavery and Its Legacy

The Overture presented by the Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery and with which the Presbytery of Baltimore here concurs, AN APOLOGY TO AFRICAN AMERICANS FOR THE SIN OF SLAVERY AND ITS LEGACY, offers a series of concrete actions that we believe are the necessary next step in the PCUSA's long and continuing journey toward racial reconciliation.

In particular, the Overture directs the Office of Public Witness to refute arguments and laws prohibiting the teaching of a fully-inclusive history of the United States; directs the Presbyterian Mission Agency to develop curricula on the legacy of slavery to foster repentance, apology, reconciliation, and restorative justice; encourages the components of the Church to examine their own histories; and commits the PCUSA to restorative justice and reparations, including through budget allocations and other tools. The emphasis on apology and restorative justice distinguishes this Overture from prior racial justice actions taken by the PCUSA, and the result of the Overture will be to provide congregations, presbyteries, and synods with the context and resources required to do meaningful and impactful work toward reconciliation.

Additional Theological Rationale

We must acknowledge at the outset that Scripture and theology have long been used to justify and rationalize racial injustice, not only in the form of slavery but in the ongoing perpetuation of a status quo that includes deeply entrenched racial inequities. Rev. Kelly Brown Douglas wrote in *Sojourners*, "One must recognize the way in which Christianity's monotheistic claims not only provided justification for enslaving black people and sacred legitimation for White supremacist policies such as the Discovery Doctrine, but also continue to provide theological legitimation for aggressive policies that dehumanize, if not destroy, people who are seen as religiously or culturally different, tacitly fostering a kind of Christian nationalism."¹

We reject this misuse of Scripture and take to heart these words:

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. – Luke 16:9 NRSV

In the spirit of Luke's Gospel, Rev. Mary Speers has written that we are compelled to put the dishonest wealth accumulated through slavery and White supremacist policies and practices to the work of making friends with those who have been wronged by them.²

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. – Isaiah 58:9-12 NRSV

In doing this work, we seek to repair the breach that the sin of slavery and the legacy of White supremacy have made between us.

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. – Ephesians 6:12 NRSV

We name as our enemies, not individuals of flesh and blood who have benefitted from the status quo of White supremacy but those rulers and authorities, laws and policies, that maintain that systemically and institutionally racist status quo.

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

– Matthew 7:3-5 NRSV

In so doing, we recognize the reality of our own complicity in White supremacy, both individually and in the institution of the Church, and commit ourselves to remedy this hypocrisy by taking the log out of our own eye.

We believe:

- *That the church must stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;*
- *That the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged;*
- *That in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.*

– The Confession of Belhar, The Book of Confessions

We commit ourselves to stand where the Lord stands, against injustice and with the wronged. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his Letter from Birmingham jail, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”³

The Presbytery of Baltimore Experience and its commitment to restorative justice

Following the 2015 killing of Freddie Gray in police custody in Baltimore, there has been a renewed interest in and commitment to the work of racial justice in the Presbytery of Baltimore. For the next year, there were many conversations, Bible studies, prayer services, and dialogues across the Presbytery as we struggled to find a way forward together.

The Presbytery of Baltimore overtured the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to establish a “Racism Truth and Reconciliation Commission” of the PCUSA.⁴ Referencing the 1999 PCUSA General Assembly report “Facing Racism: In Search of the Beloved Community,” the Overture acknowledged that “dismantling racism is a long term struggle.” Several points from the rationale offered there are worth restating here:

“As we make this overture, we recognize that we have not done enough to address racism in our own community. Therefore, we are in the early phases of developing concrete steps to address the issues of racism, injustice and poverty.”

“To be agents of change in dismantling racism in our society, we must acknowledge that it exists within the church. In so doing we recognize our own history of racism both internally as an organization (at all levels of the church) and as institutional members of society.”

“Despite the efforts to change public policies and put an end to segregation, we continue to live in divided neighborhoods with divergent experiences. We have failed to fully comprehend the ways that racism persists today both inside and outside of our church. As an institution founded and dominated by ‘White’ Christians, we need to create opportunities to listen to those who suffer from racist policies and practices.”

“In order for such reconciliation to occur, however, we must be willing to hear and tell the truth of our sins, trusting ‘that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world.’”

In a separate resolution to the same General Assembly,⁵ it was noted that:

“We can learn from the experience of brothers and sisters around the world who have found time and again that reconciliation does not occur without first acknowledging the truth of the harms that have been committed. We can not heal our brokenness until we see what has been broken and confess our role.”

At the September 2018 Gathering of the Presbytery of Baltimore, a Dismantling Racism training policy was adopted, including the formal recognition of the emergent Dismantling Racism Team under the direction of The Presbytery’s Commission on Reconciliation.⁶ The Presbytery soon contracted with Baltimore Racial Justice Action, a local non-profit, to provide racial equity training as part of the implementation of that policy. As of October 2020, 120 individuals in our Presbytery have received this training, which provides a template and “lessons learned” guidance to others as they seek to implement similar programming. In 42 post-training evaluations, 79% of respondents agreed that “the discussion of history of racism in the Presbytery was helpful to [our] understanding of racism in the Church” and in 23 medium- to long-term, follow-up surveys, all but one of the respondents said that they have continued their study of racism.

More recently, congregations in Baltimore have been impacted by and responded to the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others. Many joined in the protests and rallies that ensued. For many, 2020 witnessed a further uncovering of the racial disparities and divisions in our country. At the same time, some congregations experienced internal conflict over differing views about the impact of racism on current events, whether to respond as a congregation, and if so, how. That Fall, the In the Loop Ministry Group of the Presbytery⁷ began a series of online discussions and presentations centered on the legacy of racial injustice called “B’More Human.”⁸ In its first season, the series considered the legacy of slavery, racial disparities in health and wealth, the stolen gift of Black American music, the situation of Black women in America in particular, and Liberation Theology. It has also included an annual spoken word contest in honor of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The current season of the B’more Human series has focused more specifically on restorative justice and reparative action, in part in response to a call from members to explore more deliberately how we can expand our knowledge and understanding of these legacies and transform these

injustices into actions to repair past harms. In that context, the present overture on restorative justice and reparations is timely and welcome.

We understand that the recommendations of this Overture are complex in their implementation. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbytery of Baltimore are institutionally White (that is, majority White membership and White European in its origins and polity). At the same time, we are also a community with Black Americans, Indigenous Americans, and other people of color, and persons of many different nationalities and ethnic origins. Through our conversations and study as part of our Dismantling Racism work, our White members have become increasingly aware of the different histories we carry within our individual churches and the Presbytery, histories that are born of different racial experiences and passed down through different traditions. As a White institution, we have too often privileged the White voices while silencing and obfuscating the voices of Black American members and other people of color. It is, therefore, the burden of the White members to apologize to our Black American siblings within the PCUSA. We confess together and repent together as members of one body, one community of faith, and one institution. These sins, which we are only now willing to confess and acknowledge as "the log in our eye," have been all too visible to our Black American members and have come too late for some.

Teaching a fully inclusive history of the United States

We affirm the importance of revisiting our history, as a nation and as a Church in all its expressions, as necessary to an authentic act of repentance and understanding the work of reparations before us. Our understanding of history must be fully inclusive of voices that have long been silenced. That inclusion requires constant vigilance against continued efforts and measures seeking to conceal or exclude them further. We have heard some who reject the idea of restorative justice, including reparations, as an appropriate remedy for the legacy of slavery and racial injustice in the United States because those who enslaved or who were enslaved are no longer living today or because the federal government does not have the means of implementing such a program. These arguments result from the incomplete record of American history that the PCUSA's Office of Public Witness advocacy would combat under this Overture.

Following the 250 years of chattel slavery that began in the colonies and continued in the United States, 100 years of Jim Crow laws continued the abuse and discrimination of and against Black Americans, including many who are alive today. Even into the Civil Rights era, much of the progressive legislation of the mid-20th century was written in an implicitly racially discriminatory fashion. As Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) argued in a 2019 House of Representatives subcommittee hearing on H.R. 40, "Many of the bedrock policies, in fact, that ushered generations of Americans into the middle class were designed to exclude African Americans, from the GI Bill to Social Security, intentionally designed to exclude Blacks, as was school segregation, redlining..."⁹ Far from distant memories, these injustices continue to contribute to racial disparities in health, education, criminal justice, and economic and environmental well-being. Likewise, there are multiple instances of reparative actions taken or considered by the federal government throughout its history, from the broken promise of "40 acres and a mule" to the newly emancipated and the contemporary reparations that *were* paid out to their former enslavers to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that paid out \$1.6B in reparations to the living victims of the racist internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

In refuting arguments and laws prohibiting this fully inclusive understanding of our nation's history, the Office of Public Witness would work to repair the historic failure of the PCUSA to speak out against such injustices.

Encouraging congregations, presbyteries, and synods to study their histories

The Baltimore Presbytery and many of its churches have undertaken independent studies of their respective and shared histories, a process that we have found generally rewarding and motivating in our pursuit of racial justice and reconciliation efforts. We here share some of what we have learned in the spirit of this Overture that encourages PCUSA congregations to do the same.

The period immediately before the Civil War was a period of general prosperity and rapid expansion for the Presbytery of Baltimore, with eight Presbyterian churches founded in the city between 1844 and 1855 alone.¹⁰ Among them, only Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church was established to serve a primarily Black congregation, and it was founded under a White pastor (indicative of the generally patronizing and paternalistic perspective taken by White Presbyterians of the day towards their Black neighbors). Madison Avenue eventually installed a series of Black pastors in later years, including Rev. Hiram Revels, who later became the first Black man to serve in the United States Senate. In other churches, both free and enslaved Black congregants were counted among their membership. Still, Black congregants were relegated to back seats or the gallery, and separate mission schools and Bible classes were established for them.

It is unlikely that this rapid expansion of the Presbytery could have been accomplished without profiting in some way from the active enslavement of people, which comprised a large segment of the American economy at the time. For example, census reports from 1850 and 1860 reveal that several members of the committee to establish South Presbyterian Church (now Light Street), comprised of representatives from First Presbyterian, Central Presbyterian, and South Presbyterian churches, held ownership over enslaved people.¹¹ Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church was founded in 1869 with a \$150k endowment (equivalent to \$3 million in 2022¹²) from Isabella Brown in memory of her husband, George Brown. George Brown worked in his father's investment banking firm, Alex Brown and Sons, an international trading firm that was the leading exporters of cotton to Liverpool, actively participated in the trafficking of enslaved people across the Atlantic, and as the oldest investment bank in the United States (founded by Alexander Brown in 1800 in Baltimore) provided loans to plantation owners.

The Civil War years were particularly divisive for Maryland as a border state. When the 73rd General Assembly adopted Gardiner Spring's Resolutions (1861), formally opposing secession and committing the Presbyterian church to "promote and perpetuate...the integrity of these United States and to strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal Government... and to [the] Constitution... we profess our unabated loyalty" in Philadelphia in May 1861, the commissioners from Baltimore voted against it. They instead joined a protest motion from Dr. Charles Hodge of New Brunswick Presbytery, which argued that secession was a political matter and not within the domain of the church.¹³ As the Rev. John Chester Backus of First Presbyterian Church of Baltimore argued on a separate occasion, "there could be no justification for allowing political differences to become the subject of discord and division in religious matters."¹⁴ Furthermore, we are aware of at least one pastor from the Presbytery of Baltimore who joined the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America for the duration of the war, only to be reinstated as pastor at a different PCUSA church in Baltimore upon his return at the war's end.¹⁵

Following the Civil War and throughout Reconstruction and beyond, the PCUSA maintained a Board of Missions for Freedman that established schools for formerly enslaved Black youth in the south.¹⁶ These were high-performing and well-resourced educational institutions, with funding reaching \$250k in 1918, equivalent to approximately \$4.7M in 2020 dollars. Nevertheless, the question of whether the Committee on Freedman should be separate from the Board of Home Missions was debated even among Black Presbyterian pastors, and it was eventually folded into what is now the Presbyterian Mission Agency.¹⁷ As noted in the rationale for the Overture provided by the Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery, the early 20th century saw a division of attention by Presbyterian leadership, with a de-emphasis on racial justice in favor of unemployment, the temperance

movement, and other social policies even as Jim Crow laws continued to erase the gains made during Reconstruction.

While the PCUSA did not respond to the Black Manifesto of 1969, which called for \$500M from “White churches and synagogues” to support programs towards economic growth, educational opportunities, and the psychological well-being of the Black community, members of the Presbytery of Baltimore were nevertheless active during the Civil Rights movement. This commitment has continued through the latter part of the 20th century and into the present in participation in community organizing efforts through organizations such as BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development). These efforts have led to a recent, renewed interest in exploring the possibility for restorative and reparative justice actions to be taken.

Conclusion

We understand/acknowledge and reaffirm that dismantling racism is part of the enduring work of the Church, requiring sustained commitment and honest assessment and evaluation. Like the prophet Micah, we ask what the Lord requires of us at this time. And the answer remains the same, “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8). Humility requires honest truth-telling. It is incumbent upon the Church, individually and collectively, to say, to name, to confess—privately and in the public square—all the ways the Church has failed to act justly, love mercy, and in our arrogance refused to walk in the way of God. We affirm this Overture’s call to ground these recommendations for action in the form of an apology. It is a call to public confession and repentance. One of the hallmarks of worship in the Reformed tradition is the corporate prayer of confession, when we humbly confess the reality of sin in our personal and common life.

We are free to confess sin and repent because we are assured of and confident in God’s faithfulness in Christ to redeem, to save, to forgive, to renew, to make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). Confession and repentance open us as the body of Christ to receive God’s grace, which alone has the power to move us, together, into a new day, a new future. Therefore, we applaud the Overture drafters for the comprehensiveness of the proposed apology. In countless meetings of the Presbytery’s Dismantling Racism Team, we affirmed that racism is sin, and therefore the Church’s responsibility to dismantle racism must be theologically grounded. Confession is a matter of the heart. As in all honest confessions, a public apology is not only a message to those who have been wronged, it can also open the hearts of those who confess to repair that which has been broken within and between us and God. This apology is long overdue.

We concur with this Overture for its movement from an apology to restorative action. We have come to understand that simply acknowledging the truth of harms that have been committed and confessing our role and complicity in those harms is not sufficient for achieving reconciliation. After apologizing for the role we have played as a denomination (and individual congregations) to those who have suffered those harms, we must work actively to repair the damage done. We concur with this Overture for the critical connections it makes between studying a more inclusive history to inform our acts of reparation because study without action is hollow and action without understanding lacks accountability. We concur with this Overture because we see all three of these elements: apology, history, and restorative action as helpful next steps in our journey as a Presbytery and we welcome the invitation to share our history, study, and actions with our Presbyterian siblings as we work both individually and collectively toward the vision of reconciliation so eloquently expressed in the Confession of Belhar.

¹ Rev. Kelly Brown Douglas, “A Christian Call for Reparations,” *Sojourners*, July 2020. Available online at: <https://sojo.net/magazine/july-2020/christian-call-case-slavery-reparations-kelly-brown-douglas>

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- ² Rev. Mary Speers, honorably retired, “Unrighteous Mammon – Jesus and the Parable of the Dishonest Steward,” Part of *B’More Human Series*, “Reparations: What We Owe, Part 1,” October, 18 2021. Viewable online at: https://youtu.be/H_Me0rqpe2U
- ³ Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” 16 April 1963. Available online at: <https://letterfromjail.com/>
- ⁴ “Overture to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.,” *Minutes of the 870th Gathering of the Presbytery of Baltimore*, p. 25, Faith Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, Maryland, February 11, 2016.
- ⁵ “Resolution to the Presbytery of Baltimore at its Stated Meeting on February 11, 2016 from the Commission on Reconciliation,” *Minutes of the 870th Gathering of the Presbytery of Baltimore*, p. 27, Faith Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, Maryland, February 11, 2016.
- ⁶ “Report on Dismantling Racism Trainings in the Presbytery of Baltimore,” October 2020.
- ⁷ The *In the Loop Ministry Group* is one of six ministry groups in the Presbytery of Baltimore and is made up of 12 churches in Baltimore City. Ministry Groups are intended to strengthen the bonds among congregations by working together to encourage Christian Formation; Congregational and Leader Development; Missional Engagement, the Creation of New Faith Communities; as well as, Prophetic Witness and Action for Reconciliation. The six Ministry Groups are facilitated by conveners elected by their members.
- ⁸ Recordings of the B’More Human Series are available online at: <https://baltimorepresbytery.org/dismantling-racism/>
- ⁹ Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.), “Hearing on Slavery Reparations,” *Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Constitutional Civil Rights and Liberties, U.S. House of Representatives*, 19 June 2019. Available online at: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?461767-1/house-judiciary-subcommittee-examines-case-slavery-reparations>
- ¹⁰ Rev. Joseph T. Smith, *Eighty Years: Embracing a History of Presbyterianism in Baltimore, with an Appendix*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1899.
- ¹¹ Christopher A. Watson, “Light Street Presbyterian Church and Race: A Historical Perspective,” April 11, 2021. Available online at: <https://lightstreetchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LSPC-Racial-History-Report.pdf>
- ¹² Using a Consumer Price Index Calculator the Brown donation would be the equivalent to \$3,075,022 in 2022 purchasing power. <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/>
- ¹³ *Minutes of the 73rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, Seventh Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 16, 1861.
- ¹⁴ William Reynolds, *A brief history of the First Presbyterian church of Baltimore*, 1913.
- ¹⁵ *Statistical Report, Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America*, 1861; Rev. James Stacy, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in Georgia*, 1912; Willard E. Wight, “The Diary of the Reverend Charles S. Vedder, May-July, 1861.” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 39, p. 68-90, 1955.
- ¹⁶ Kristen Gaydos, “A Look Back at the General Assemblies in Saint Louis,” *Blog of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, June 20, 2018. Available online at: <https://history.pcusa.org/about/blog/st.-louis>
- ¹⁷ *Minutes of the 82nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 1870.