

SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND MINISTRY NETWORK OFFICIAL STATEMENT AGAINST RACISM

The terms *Imago Dei* are more than fancy theological words. These words contain the essence of humanity. They speak about the fact that “*The crown of God’s handiwork is human life.*”[1] This handiwork is inclusive of people of all colors and tongues. As our nation faces the challenges of responding to racism, biases, injustices and violence, the Church and our Network, cannot remain silent. To remain in silence is to be complicit to the injustices that have been perpetrated for so many years upon communities of color. We realize that these conversations are hard, yet necessary. We encourage you to take the time to read and assimilate the following statements based on: Learn, Listen, Lament, Leave, Love and Lead. The following statement of the Southern New England Ministry Network has been affirmed by our Presbytery.

We commit to learning the history of racism so that we do not repeat it.

In the words of Sydney J Harris, “history repeats itself, but in such cunning disguise that we never detect the resemblance until the damage is done.” We must use the lessons we’ve learned from history to inform our decisions now. The hard truth is that people of color have been oppressed by various forms of racism and it is retraumatizing when events like the killing of George Floyd happen. We must seek to learn from the mistakes made in history - including our own church’s history - so that they are not repeated.

We commit to listening well so that we may love well.

Listening is the door to empathy. Empathetic listening requires humility that asks: what can I learn from you? It requires putting aside our own opinions and lived experiences, going low, and creating space to truly hear others. Listening can be painful; naturally we want to defend our positions, we want to be heard, we want to be right. One of our greatest learned tools as ministers is the art of listening. When we are able to actively listen with the goal of understanding, is when we can gain ground and build bridges. Consider entering into these conversations by saying, “I am sorry for what you are going through. I want to learn. I am listening.”

We commit to lamenting together.

As racial injustice runs rampant in our world, may our collective cry of mourning and lament unify us. Biblical lament gives expression to deep grief and sorrow. It creates the path of complaint and petition for God to move on behalf of His people. Through both individual and communal lament, we are offered an invitation to draw near to our faithful God who weeps with us. One of the first steps to seeking justice and loving our neighbor well is to enter the space of lament. “Mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15). Lament insists we do not stay silent on behalf of those experiencing the evils of racism nor will we protect ourselves from the impact. We follow the example of Christ and willingly enter both pain and sorrow for the sake of loving others more completely and for the sake of standing on the side of justice.

We commit to leave/turn away from all forms of racism and seek God for the healing of our land.

The Lord Speaks in a clear warning in *2 Chronicles 7: 13-14*, "At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land."

It is essential for those who want our land to be restored and for those that call upon the name of the Lord, to personally and corporately turn away from the sin of racism. We can work to accomplish this by embracing the cause of justice for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and the thousands of other black lives who have been lost to blatantly racist people, racist policies and racist systems in our country.

But we also must look within - within our own hearts, our own local churches, and even within our own fellowship, the Assemblies of God. Let us commit to creating opportunities in our churches and in our spheres of influence by elevating the voices and stories of our brothers and sisters of color, who have suffered in silence in our communities and congregations.

We commit to loving our brothers and sisters of color by seeing both the beauty and pain of their lived-experience.

For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. -1 John 4:20b

We have heard white Christian leaders say, "I don't see color." While this sentiment is well-intended it is problematic because our black and brown friends are not translucent, nor are they white. It's not wrong to see color. In fact, to not see color is a disability that we call color blindness. Indeed, different shades of color add beauty to our world and lives. And different cultures, and ethnicities, and colors are lovely elements in God's good creation. In heaven it is said that there will be "people from every tongue, tribe, and nation." Heaven will not erase human distinctions; it will honor and celebrate and use them as part of the panoply in praise to God. But while there is beauty in diverse colors, on this fallen planet, there is also pain. How black and brown people move through this broken world is different than white people; they carry an added load that white people are most often totally unaware of. For white people to say, "I don't see color" can often mean that they don't really want to hear or understand how being a person of color in these United States is painful or hard. So, to love our friends of color well we need to both appreciate the goodness and challenges they face in moving through this world in black and brown bodies.

We commit to lead with humility

Southern New England ministry leaders, when faced with racism, injustice, evil, sin, confusion and brokenness, we are to lead. This means we go first, pray, speak, stand, organize, serve, clarify, sacrifice, listen, seek to understand. We lead, not in our own strength, but the transforming power that works in us. We lead with God's strength (Eph 3:20), to accomplish

God's purposes as we face racial injustice in all of its pernicious forms, both within and outside the Church.

Grace and Peace,

Nick Fatato
Network Superintendent