

“ALL LIVES CANNOT MATTER UNTIL BLACK LIVES MATTER”

A statement upholding the dignity of Black lives
from the Session of
Madison Square Presbyterian Church, San Antonio, Texas

Background

“To confess means openly to affirm, declare, acknowledge or take a stand for what one believes to be true. The truth that is confessed may include the admission of sin and guilt but is more than that. When Christians make a confession, they say, “This is what we most assuredly believe, regardless of what others may believe and regardless of the opposition, rejection, or persecution that may come to us for taking this stand.”¹

Considered to have begun in 1619, when 20 African slaves were brought to the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia, slavery was openly practiced over three centuries, when people were taken forcibly from the continent of Africa and sold as property in the American colonies.²

In 1861, after 11 states seceded to form the Confederacy, the Presbyterian Church split, forming northern and southern denominations. A range of disagreements, including theology, the roles of church and government, and, importantly, the difficult and ongoing struggle over slavery, caused the fracture.

Two decades later, the northern denomination of the Presbyterian Church sent the Rev. William Buchanan to Texas to fulfill the mission of “planting” new churches in the South. In 1882 he was successful in founding Madison Square Presbyterian Church, the only northern Presbyterian congregation in San Antonio at that time. The northern and southern Presbyterian denominations reunified in 1983.

Although the institution of slavery was abolished in 1863, Black people in America continue, into the 21st century, to suffer the indignities, brutalities, and oppression of systemic racism. From the first enslavers, to Jim Crow laws, to redlining, to mandatory sentencing minimums, to laws to suppress minority voters, systems in the United States have led to disproportionate incarceration rates, unequal health outcomes, underfunded and inadequate educational opportunities, and police brutality for people of color.

As Presbyterians of the PC(USA), we believe:

God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In [God’s] reconciling love, [God] overcomes the barriers between brothers [and sisters] and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary...Therefore, **the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it.** (emphasis added) Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize [others], however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess.³

¹ Book of Confessions – The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Part 1, p. v, “1. The Nature and Purpose of Confessions.

² History.com <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery>

³ The Confession of 1967, 9.44(a), Book of Confessions, p. 294

We further believe:

God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of the peace, justice, and freedom...which all powers of government are called to serve and defend...⁴

We believe the church, grounded in God's radical love, is called to dismantle systemic racism in ourselves and in society.

Statement

We confess that while Madison Square Presbyterian Church has shaped its identity as a welcoming and inclusive church, we have not always lived into that foundational promise, nor have we implemented a long-term, sustained effort for the overall community, more specifically and especially for all marginalized groups.

As a community of faith, created by God and as beloved children of God, we affirm the inherent dignity and worth of each person, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socio-economic status, or background. However, our society does not accord equal worth and dignity to each person.

Echoing the sentiment that **ALL** lives cannot matter until **BLACK** lives matter, and:

- **Called by God's reconciling love** to be "one universal family";
- **Called by our faith** to tear down all forms of discrimination rooted in racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary; and,
- **Called to minister** to anyone harmed by the sin of racism,

We, the faith community of Madison Square Presbyterian Church, San Antonio, Texas, formally and proudly join in proclaiming, "BLACK LIVES MATTER." Naming that Black lives matter to us is also our public commitment to intensify our congregational work supporting anti-racism.

We commit ourselves to actively work toward ending racism by recognizing where it exists in ourselves, our congregation, our community, repenting of it, and repairing damage that has been done. Therefore, as a genuine act, we announce the formation of a new ministry, **Racial Reconciliation and Justice**. This ministry will be led by a group of congregants, whose mission will be intertwined in the vision of the church, with specific focus on awareness, education, partnership, fellowship, advocacy, engagement, reconciliation, equality, and justice.

We continue to commit ourselves to active ministries of intentional inclusivity through deliberate diversity with healing and compassion, so that all God's children may flourish.

⁴ The Confession of 1967, 9.45(b), Book of Confessions, p. 294