

August 28, 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Friends,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Reconciler.

We write to you as former Moderators of the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor churches, as disciples of Jesus Christ committed to the Gospel's witness and promise of reconciliation, and as agents of God's transformative justice in the church and in the world.

The brazen march of white nationalist supremacist groups in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11 and 12, 2017 and President Donald Trump's subsequent responses that equivocated on clearly identifying, denouncing, and condemning those same groups as instigators of hatred and violence brought the spotlight upon the deeply embedded and pernicious poison of racism and white supremacy so endemic in society and, we dare say, in the church. We are increasingly alarmed when notions of nationalism and racial superiority are masked and clothed in terms of the Christian faith, or confused with the Gospel, or somehow supersede the clear exhortation of sacred Scripture to love your neighbor as Christ loved the Church, or when the Christian faith is used to inspire and organize hatred and bigotry.

We are wisely instructed by the struggles of our faith forbearers when fascism in the form of Nazism was on the rise in the 1930s, resulting in the Theological Declaration of Barmen, which categorically and emphatically denounced the effects of Nazism in the church and in society: ". . .we may and must speak with one voice in this matter today. Precisely because we want to be and to remain faithful to our various Confessions, we may not keep silent, since we believe that we have been given a common message to utter in a time of common need and temptation." Then again, nearly four decades ago, our South African sisters and brothers stood courageously against the white governmental policy of apartheid and the theologies that undergirded and rationalized that sinful regime. The Belhar Confession stated: ". . .we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ."

In so doing, we join with our Stated Clerk, General Assembly Co-Moderators, and Presbyterian Mission Agency Interim Executive Director in calling the church to confess and repent of the ways in which we have been complicit and failed to disrupt, challenge, and undo white supremacy and racism. (see their pastoral letter: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2017/8/14/pcusa-leaders-condemn-white-supremacy-racism/>)

As our concerns, sadness, and anger have increased over the state of affairs we find ourselves as a nation, we are also equally determined and committed to active prayer and prayerful action, as we know so many of you are doing in thousands of churches, in counter-protests in streets across the country, in letter writing to and visits with elected officials, in mobilizing through social media, in face-to-face/neighbor-to-neighbor conversations. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in summarizing the 19th century abolitionist leader Theodore Parker, exhorted: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

May we, as the present-future generation of God's people in this time and for this time, work and pray for the reconciliation of all of God's children, and may the Lord grant us grace and courage for the facing of this hour.

Yours in the service of Christ,

The Rev. Dr. Fahed Abu-Akel, 214th General Assembly (2002), PC(U.S.A.)

Elder (Dr.) Thelma C. Davidson Adair, 188th General Assembly (1976), UPCUSA

The Rev. Dr. Susan R. Andrews, 215th General Assembly (2003), PC(U.S.A.)

The Rev. Dr. Robert W. Bohl, 206th General Assembly (1994), PC(USA)

Elder Patricia Brown, 209th General Assembly (1997), PC(USA)

The Rev. John M. Buchanan, 208th General Assembly (1996), PC(USA)

The Rev. David Lee Dobler, 205th General Assembly (1993), PC(USA)

The Rev. John M. Fife, 204th General Assembly (1992), PC(USA)

Elder Price Gwynn III, 202nd General Assembly (1990), PC(USA)

The Rev. Charles A. Hammond, 192nd General Assembly (1980), UPCUSA

The Rev. Robert Lamar, 186th General Assembly (1974), UPCUSA

The Rev. Harriet Nelson, 196th General Assembly (1984), PC(USA)

The Rev. Dr. Neal D. Presa, 220th General Assembly (2012), PC(USA)

Elder (Dr.) Heath Rada, 221st General Assembly (2014), PC(USA)

The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, 218th General Assembly (2008), PC(USA)

Elder Rick Ufford-Chase, 216th General Assembly (2004), PC(USA)

The Rev. Dr. Herbert D. Valentine, 203rd General Assembly (1991), PC(USA)

Elder William H. Wilson, 197th General Assembly (1985), PC(USA)