

STATEMENT OF INTENTION REGARDING  
**RACE RELATIONS**  
AT SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

In the Session meeting of October 15, 2001, the formation of a Race Relations Committee was approved. For almost a year, this committee met and had healthy discussion about the subject of race relations in our church and community. On September 16, 2002, the Session approved the work of this committee by adopting this statement of intention including:

- A mission statement for the Race Relations Committee;
- A statement of intention regarding race relations at Second Presbyterian Church
- A ministry plan.

### **I. MISSION STATEMENT:**

The mission of the Race Relations Committee is to help Second Presbyterian Church promote gospel-centered racial reconciliation both individually and corporately, in our church and in our city.

### **II. STATEMENT OF INTENTION REGARDING RACE RELATIONS AT SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH:**

If the Apostle Paul were to have written a letter to all the Christians in Memphis, what would it say? It would probably include a strong charge to seek the peace, well-being, and unity of the body of Christ across all racial chasms. It is hard to imagine a more powerful and meaningful demonstration of the reality of the gospel in Memphis than for the members of all the churches to show their love one for another. By this, they, our unbelieving neighbors, will know we are Christians. We dream of a day when people of all races and backgrounds will live, work, worship and serve together arm in arm and heart to heart under the banner of Jesus Christ in the Memphis region. Nothing less is worthy of the gospel of Christ. We believe this is what Jesus would do.

Because of the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, we were alienated from God and from each other.<sup>1</sup> At the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the principle of reconciliation:<sup>2</sup> reconciliation between God and human beings<sup>3</sup> and reconciliation among human beings.<sup>4</sup> During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ demonstrated actively and clearly that He intends to fulfill the grand vision of Abraham and the prophets in bringing all the nations and ethnic groups into one family.<sup>5</sup> After His ascension, His apostles consistently taught that any and all barriers to unity and oneness in the body of Christ were to be destroyed<sup>6</sup> and that one new humanity is essential to the gospel itself.<sup>7</sup> In Christ, there is no ethnic favoritism or exclusion among believers.

We, therefore, believe that it is vital to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the demonstration of the gospel's reality in our lives that we, His people, actively promote, facilitate, and experience reconciliation with God, our families, and our neighbors. Living in Memphis, we are especially and acutely aware of the historical alienation among neighbors, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 4:8, 23, 24; Matthew 24:7; Romans 7:23; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 2:12; 4:18, 19; James 4:1-5

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 11:6-9; Luke 2:14; 11 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 1:9, 10; Colossians 1:19, 20

<sup>3</sup> Romans 5:10; 1 Peter 3:18

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:13-22; Philemon 8-18

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 2:1-5; 49:6, 60:3; Zechariah 9:10; Matthew 28:18-20; John 10:16

<sup>6</sup> Acts 10; Galatians 3:26-28

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 3:6

the alienation between African-Americans and Anglo-Americans in our region.<sup>8</sup> While we cherish our heritage and thank God for our Christian forebearers, we acknowledge that Second Presbyterian Church's history does reflect incidences and attitudes of racism, which we deeply regret and firmly renounce. Further we recognize the significant needs of other minority groups.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is our intention to be ambassadors of reconciliation among all people, especially our Christian brothers and sisters of different ethnicity, within our church and community, as God gives us grace and opportunity.

We think the believing church in Memphis should lead our community in building up the body of Christ across racial and ethnic lines into a powerful witness to the reality of God's grace and love. We believe the most fruitful actions that can be taken at Second Presbyterian Church are for our members to build meaningful friendships with all people, but especially believers, from all racial groups. These peer to peer relationships require intentional efforts to seek out, befriend, listen to without defensiveness, love, and understand our racially-different neighbor.

In the case of Anglo-American and African-American relations, reconciliation will probably involve prayerfully and carefully studying the historical issues<sup>10</sup> with an open mind, understanding and renouncing negative stereotypes, humbly listening with patience and openness, asking for and receiving forgiveness, and opening our hearts and homes.

Our congregational communities and other small groups should consider including race relations as an important issue to be studied and discussed with a priority on developing specific ministry plans; as we open our lives, hearts, and homes to make more friends and develop relationships with people of all ethnic backgrounds, we should actively invite them to be part of our fellowship and encourage their involvement in every aspect of our church life; we should be intentional about creating peer-to-peer relationships and fellowship opportunities between congregational communities at Second and African-American churches within the community; we should provide leadership and resources to address social and economic inequities; and some of our individual members should consider providing consultation and involvement in emerging African-American businesses.

We believe the members of Second Presbyterian Church must exercise great courage and compassion for our neighbors. We should follow the steps of Jesus who went out of His way to be a part of the lives of ethnically different people groups. We must use our influence in our families, our businesses, our civic and social clubs, and our community to overcome indifference, to abolish status quo attitudes, to promote reconciliation, to increase educational and economic opportunity, to promote racial harmony, to demand equal application of law, and to pursue biblical justice. To do otherwise would be to deny the gospel of reconciliation.<sup>11</sup>

As ordained officers of Second Presbyterian Church, we believe it is especially incumbent upon us to be circumspect in all our attitudes and actions with regard to these issues. We also want to create meaningful and lasting initiatives in several areas of our church life:

We encourage all of our officers and staff to become involved in meaningful, racially-diverse friendships and associations in our city, especially with like-minded brothers and sisters of differing ethnicity;<sup>12</sup>

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8 See Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters*, Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 1988;

and Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White – Separate, Hostile, Unequal*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1995.

9 According to the U.S. Census Bureau, current demographic research suggests that the City of Memphis is comprised of 34.4% White, 61.4% African-American, 1.5% Asian and Pacific Islander, 1.7% Other Races, and 1.0% Two or More Races; Shelby County is comprised of 47.8% White, 49.1% African-American, 1.7% Asian & Pacific Islander, 1.5% Other Races, and 1.0% Two or More Races; and the Memphis Metropolitan Surrounding Area is comprised of 53.4% White, 43.8% African-American, 1.4% Asian & Pacific Islander, 1.4% Other Races, and 1.0% Two or More Races. Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin make up 2.6% of the Shelby County population. According to the Memphis Chamber of Commerce, in actual numbers in the county there are 23,364 Hispanics and in the Metropolitan area there are approximately 27,520. A new survey completed by the University of Memphis approximates the number to be as high as 47,700 and as few as 31,200 countywide. Refer to the U of M Research Manual, which is located in the Mission USA office.

10 See attached "Suggested Reading List."

11 Luke 6:46; John 14:15, 21, 23, 24; I John 2:3-6; 4:20, 21

12 Our officers and members may want to attend special events in our city, which seek to promote African-American causes, or to join associations seeking to advance racial justice in our community, but especially to befriend, include, and empower individuals from all racial backgrounds in our city.

- We encourage our leaders to engage the issues of racial disparity in our economy and educational systems in the Memphis region;<sup>13</sup>
- We encourage our staff to develop strategies to use minority vendors;<sup>14</sup>
- We encourage our senior staff to make good faith efforts to hire a racially diverse staff at all levels that more clearly reflects community-wide ministry; and
- We encourage the formation of a multi-cultural church plant by our church planting committee as soon as reasonably possible.<sup>15</sup>

### III. SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY PLAN:

We believe our ministry plan for 2002-2005 should consist of three elements:

#### A. Encouraging initiatives among our leaders:

- Encouraging the Session to adopt this statement as a clear rescission of previous race relations statements;
- Establishing a permanent Session Committee to develop strategy for implementation and monitoring of this and subsequent plans;
- Encouraging staff and officers to establish friendships locally with members of other ethnicities;
- Encouraging staff and officers to evangelize and minister holistically without regard to race or ethnicity;
- Encouraging racial diversity among our elders and deacons while maintaining the stated requirements for serving as a church officer;
- Increasing racial diversity in our staff;
- Using more minority vendors.

#### B. Raising the awareness of our members:

- Teaching in Sunday School;
- Encouraging related topical reading;
- Leading race relations seminars during MidWeek;
- Participating in the Annual CityServe Day of Service.

#### C. Encouraging active ministry by our members:

- Encouraging our members to read our “Statement of Intention Regarding Race Relations at Second Presbyterian Church” and to consider what suggestions they might put into practice;
- Asking the CC leadership to encourage their members to develop friendships with members of other races;
- Studying to find out what our issues are concerning racial diversity such as discrimination, prejudice, etc. and studying to discover how we can overcome these issues;
- Encouraging some of our members to join our multi-cultural church plant.

*Adopted by Session – September 16, 2002*

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<sup>13</sup> Currently, the average household income of African-Americans in Memphis is 40% of the average white household income. The high school dropout rates and school test scores are similarly disparate.

<sup>14</sup> We should seek the services of the Mid-South Minority Business Council and other similar organizations.

<sup>15</sup> This is now in the planning stages.

## SUGGESTED READING LIST

Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1988)

James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1986)

Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower* (Penguin Books, 1984)

### **Current Lifestyle Comparisons**

Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Scribner's, 1992)

Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith* (Oxford, 2000)

### **Analysis of Our Race Problems**

David Anderson and Brent Zercher, *Letters Across the Divide* (Baker, 2001)

Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993)

William Pannell, *The Coming Race Wars?: A Cry for Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993)

Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (Harper Collins, 1990)

Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown, *By the Color of Our Skin* (Plume, 2000)

### **The Church and Race Relations**

Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, *Separated by Faith, Breaking Down Walls* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993)

Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice, *More Than Equal* (Downers Group, IL: IVP 1993)

Tony Evans, *Let's Get to Know Each Other* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995)

Rodney Cooper, *We Stand Together* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995)