

**Statement Toward Racial Justice and Righteousness**  
**Black Strategic Readiness Team - Church of the Nazarene USA/Canada**  
**June 5, 2020**

We, the Black Strategic Readiness Team of the Church of the Nazarene – USA/Canada Region, long to see our denomination better connect with and support Black communities, churches, and leaders throughout the United States and Canada. Be it known to all that we stand against racial injustice. We are personally affected and also caring for many who are affected by the recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. We acknowledge that their deaths represent many similar unjust and systematically unheard stories of unarmed Black and Brown people at the hands of those who are tasked to “protect and serve.” Words cannot adequately express our heartbreak for families, churches, communities, and all of humanity in this season of communal grief and urgency. A national outrage ensued that has rapidly spread across the nation and many parts of the world. “Enough is enough!” is the wearied outcry reverberating through the streets of our cities as protesters and allies call for change, not only against another incidence of racial injustice, but against the structures and systems that have historically and continuously devalued and marginalized the lives of Black and Brown people. Indeed, the historical sin of racism is very much a present reality and challenge for the church to address.

We are seeking more than a statement. The complex issues of racism are deeply ingrained in the fabric of our nation, and a mere statement does not alleviate the constant searing anguish Black families and communities continue to endure. As a denomination, the Church of the Nazarene heralds a message of holiness and transformation but tends to remain comfortable with the status quo as the calls for racial justice ring through our congregations and communities. We acknowledge those who recognize and empathize with our raw pain, and we recognize our denomination’s *Manual* statement against racial [“discrimination.”](#) However, this is a crucial moment for the Church of the Nazarene to make commitments toward real change. We sense the need to move toward prayerful, thoughtful, and expeditious action. Our denomination’s growth in righteousness and justice must not be separated. Let us take seriously the Word of the Lord spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)*

We ask leaders and congregations in the Church of the Nazarene to commit to breaking the chains of racial injustice. Join us in both lament and advocacy:

***We lament.*** We lament that racism continues to narrate the nation and negatively affect Christians’ imagination of what is possible. With the Psalmist, we cry out, “How long, O Lord?” We plead for the Holy Spirit to open calloused hearts and closed minds. We plead for the Holy Spirit to make the truth plain to those accustomed to finding their way around the Way of Jesus. Amidst this lament, we recognize that God has given human beings agency to participate in the Way forward and has empowered the church to bear witness to the kingdom of God here and now.

**We stand.** We stand with every church and pastor who continues to trumpet the call for true justice and peace. We stand in alignment with God’s heart for justice to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18)

**We affirm.** We affirm God’s call to holiness of heart and life, which necessarily includes a commitment to racial justice. God chose the oppressed Hebrew community. God also identified with the oppressed people of Nazareth. We are called to illuminate the lives of people who have been systematically devalued in the United States. Affirming the significance of black lives is an essential way of resisting the evil fist of an unjust and prejudiced system that capitalizes on the suffering and death of Black people. We affirm that Black lives matter.

**We call.** We call on the church to welcome and support courageous conversations about race and take bold action against racism in America and the Church of the Nazarene. This includes reflection upon the way racial injustice may be linked to other forms of injustice and will take commitment and intentionality from all levels of our denomination.

**We seek.** We seek unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We seek the peace of our communities. We seek shalom for all, recognizing that we can no longer settle for false notions of amity and reconciliation. True peacebuilding requires the uncomfortable work of unmasking and naming oppressive power structures as well as embracing the diligent work of change.

We, hereby, recommend the following immediate action steps as we engage in longer-term planning:

#### Action Steps on the National Level

1. The General Board should facilitate an honest conversation with church leaders at every level about systemic racism in the Church of the Nazarene.
2. The General Church (GMC) should hire a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) of color for the USA/Canada region. He/she must be a member of the senior leadership team and be given full authority/power to enact hiring practices and recommendations and to ensure their implementation. He/she must also work with District leaders on developing objectives to ensure that districts reflect the diversity of their locality at every level.
3. The General Superintendents should include and recommend on their short list qualified persons of color to fill District Superintendent vacancies in the USA/Canada region.

#### Action Steps on the District Level

1. District Superintendents and DAB (District Advisory Board) should conduct ongoing cultural sensitivity & diversity training for all local pastors and leaders. This training should be led by someone of color, preferably from outside the district.
2. During pastoral assessments, District superintendents should openly engage the local church board/congregation about racial injustice in their congregation.
3. The (DAB) should reflect the cultural diversity of the district that it serves.

4. District Superintendents and DAB's should develop relevant action steps aimed at increasing the presence of Black leaders and churches of color.

#### Action Steps on the Local Level

1. Pastors should intentionally address the challenges that people of color face.
2. Pastors/church boards should promote and encourage intercultural activities.
3. Pastors should seek opportunities to exchange pulpits with ministers of color who are in harmony with the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness.
4. The local church and leadership should develop a plan for the church to reflect the diversity of the community at large and provide resources and support to its constituency.
5. Churches should promote and provide a platform for open dialogues on racism with children, youth and young adults.

#### Action Steps for Black Pastors and Leaders

1. Pastors should encourage their parishioners to exercise their right to vote.
2. Pastors should seek opportunities to exchange pulpits with Anglo pastors and ministers who are in harmony with the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness.
3. Pastors should seek opportunities to preach about racial harmony, justice and a proper response to unjust treatment (e.g. nonviolent direct action, voting, participation in police merit boards, etc....)
4. Pastors/churches should open their doors to community forums that address their community's racial disparities (i.e. health, economic, education, etc.)
5. Pastors, church leaders, and parishioners should participate in District and General church activities throughout the year.

May we move together toward racial justice and righteousness as we seek to bear witness to the kingdom of God here and now. May we move with faithfulness and urgency.

Grace and peace,

Dr. Charles A. Tillman, Facilitator  
Rev. John Wright  
Rev. David Solomon  
Dr. Sidney Mitchell  
Dr. Montague Williams  
Rev. Dianne Bonner  
Rev. Althea Taylor  
Min. Cassandra Trotman