

Shalom Mennonite Church Statement on Becoming an Anti-racist Church

As Shalom Mennonite Church, we want to live representing God's love, justice, and peace to all, with **Jesus of Nazareth** as our nonviolent model. An urgent ongoing problem in the United States, in our state, and around the Earth is racial inequity. We are now at a time when it is not enough to not be racist. Our commitment to racial justice at this time in our history includes becoming an **active, persistent anti-racist church**.

As Mennonites in 1688 in Philadelphia, we developed the earliest US statement advocating the abolition of slavery. We have opposed any form of individual discrimination throughout our history.

But we are also immersed in a nation that has been based on racism from the beginning. White supremacy, the belief that Anglo-Europeans are superior to other races socially, culturally, and religiously, has been foundational for the creation of the United States. Sometimes this belief has been stated explicitly, as in the 'three-fifths clause' of the United States Constitution. At other times it operates subconsciously, for example, when Black suffering is attributed to moral failure while similar white suffering is attributed to misfortune. Either way, it is dehumanizing and deadly. White supremacy became the justification for stealing land from Indigenous people throughout the Americas, and kidnapping millions of Africans for forced, unpaid, brutal labor in the United States for 246 years. Religious authority was added to this through the idea that God's 'manifest destiny' for the United States was to create a 'Christian' nation, sea to sea, including stealing half of the land of our southern neighbor Mexico in the 1840's. A little earlier (1816) we created our state of 'Indiana' by violent coercion, with land from the Miami, Potawatomi, Lenape (Delaware), and Shawnee Nations.

Centuries of white supremacist policies and practices (systemic racism) have benefitted those of us who are white, and excluded and oppressed people of color in so many aspects of life: education, housing, employment, health care, public accommodations, law enforcement (including police violence), mass incarceration, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

While condemning individual racism over the years, we have not adequately acknowledged or confessed our participation in, and benefit from, systemic racism.

Current events reflecting ongoing systemic racist policies, including deaths of persons of color at the hands of the police, and the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on people of color, have heightened our awareness of the serious work that we all need to do together. We share the sorrow and the sense of outrage of those who have experienced the loss of loved ones due to racism over the years, and especially recently. We affirm the value, dignity, and worth of each person, made in the image of God.

With the help of God's spirit of truth, justice, and love, and each other's help, **Shalom Mennonite Church** seeks to:

- 1) Acknowledge and confess our complicity with individual and systemic racism in the United States
- 2) Commit ourselves to life-long education about the history and continuing impact of racism on our planet Earth, in our nation, and in our local communities
- 3) Advocate actively for equality and justice for all, in all aspects of life, including, but not limited to, education at all levels, housing, employment, health care, child welfare, legal representation, law enforcement, the courts, voting rights, political participation, and retirement opportunities
- 4) With humility, respect, and gentleness, actively engage with others to expand our own understanding of the ongoing challenges of racism, by listening, talking, and doing actions which lead us toward becoming an **active, persistent anti-racist church**
- 5) Promote reconciliation and healing of racial wounds through personal openness and vulnerability to others, and active interest in learning about, and from, the experience of others
- 6) Get involved in real **change** which promotes a dismantling of systemic racism, undoing of collective institutional racism, and for white people to give up power and privileges

Outreach Commission, for Shalom Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, IN

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Zenebe Abebe

Marilynn Teel

Frank Kandel

Brad Yoder, Chair