

Unfinished Business

UB 1 Query: Standing with People of Color

Whereas sometimes the Church of the Brethren has taken prophetic stands on racial justice, as when in 1782 and 1797 it held that members could not own slaves;

Whereas sometimes we have been less than prophetic, as when the church has allowed discrimination against People of Color in rituals¹ or allowed People of Color to be forced out of membership such as Mattie Cunningham Dolby;

Whereas violence against People of Color has been increasing in our neighborhoods, cities, and around the world;

Whereas the number of "Hate Groups" has grown to over 800 just in the United States, mostly against People of Color (Statista 2021);

Whereas US Immigration laws have often openly discriminated on the basis of race and have worked to limit or ban refugees seeking peace from the violence from their home countries;

Whereas Jesus taught us that our neighbor is a stranger in need, Luke 10:29-37;

And whereas Paul saw each person as a part of the body, Ephesians 4:1-16;

Therefore, how can the Church of the Brethren stand with People of Color to offer sanctuary from violence and dismantle systems of oppression and racial inequity in our congregations, neighborhoods, and throughout the nation?

Adopted by Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Board August 17, 2021 and passed on to Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Conference.

Todd Reish, District Board Chair

PJ Arndts, District Clerk

Adopted by the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Conference October 9, 2021 and passed on to the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference.

Nick Beam, District Moderator

PJ Arndts, District Clerk

Action of the 2022 Annual Conference: District representative Todd Reish explained the origin of the query in the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District. Standing Committee delegate Debbie Eisenbise from the Pacific Northwest District pre-

¹ Holy Kiss Ritual - Actions of Annual Conference, 1835, 1845, and 1875

sented Standing Committee's recommendation. Annual Conference adopted Standing Committee's recommendation that the query "Standing with People of Color" be accepted with thanks to the church and district for this important reminder. The concerns were answered with this response, which incorporates one amendment:

We recognize the struggles faced by many of our sisters and brothers of color and believe the church should be agents of change. We encourage congregations, districts, agencies, and other denominational entities to continue to follow the teachings of Jesus by living out the great commandment of loving our neighbor as ourselves. We understand the great diversity that the word neighbor implies. So, we encourage congregations to study the teachings of Jesus and how they apply to our relationships with all people of color, to express solidarity with all people of color, offer sanctuary from all forms of violence, and identify and dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions, and then begin to live out those findings by being Jesus in the neighborhood.

Annual Conference adopted Standing Committee's recommendation that this response now becomes an official statement of Annual Conference.

Annual Conference adopted Standing Committee's recommendation that this response to the query on "Standing with People of Color" be implemented through a two-year study/action process. This will include Southern Ohio-Kentucky District and On Earth Peace collaborating to develop various materials for congregational, district, and denominational use. Standing Committee members will support and encourage the use of these materials and participation in the process and report back to Annual Conference in 2023 and 2024.

2023 Interim Report of the Committee

Between September 2022 and February 2023, the newly formed Standing With People of Color Committee met eleven times. This committee is composed of members of the Southern Ohio and Kentucky District collaborating with staff from On Earth Peace and Mission and Ministry Board. The committee spent most meetings in the fall of 2022 focused on clarifying objectives and outcomes hoped-for from the two-year study-action process in their care.

Our work during this time included:

- Taking time to build our relationships and understand the task and mandate.
- Reaching out to districts to inquire about racial justice activity in their districts and congregations.
- Compiling an initial list of resources related to discipleship, faith and racism.
- Inviting racial justice advocates in the denomination to connect with us to share stories of their current activities.

- Several areas of agreement emerged as our committee formed: 1
- Any work we do on this issue as Brethren must flow from the biblical call 2
to faithfulness and our discipleship to Jesus. 3
 - This study/action process aligns with the the Church of the Brethren Com- 4
pelling Vision, which states: “Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we 5
will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace 6
of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement. To 7
move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and equipping disci- 8
ples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.” 9
 - The Church of the Brethren has passed numerous Annual Conference state- 10
ments which speak with conviction on the topic of racism. Nevertheless, 11
the predominantly white mainstream of the church seems to continue to 12
be reluctant to actively address racism inside or outside of the church. 13
 - Despite the faithful engagement and exhortation of many individuals and 14
denominational committees across the years, the Church of the Brethren 15
denomination has invested itself inconsistently in interracial and intercultural 16
understanding and work for racial justice and equity. 17
 - There is a new spiritual and practical reckoning possible, since the murders 18
of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others led to a nation- 19
wide outcry. 20
 - We see the possibility for this study/action project to reach beyond the state- 21
ments of the past. We have begun to describe those possibilities using three 22
objectives. 23

OBJECTIVES 24

The committee has developed consensus around three main objectives - Con- 27
nection, Education, and Action - which we plan to share with the larger church 28
for feedback and final development during spring 2023. 29

Objective #1 - CONNECTION 30

People in the Church of the Brethren tradition who are interested in and/or 32
working for racial justice build sufficient connections to become a relational 33
network. 34

A relational network of racial justice advocates could continue collaborating 36
long after this process is over. Even if nothing else bears fruit in the process, connect- 37
ing and empowering racial justice advocates at all levels of the church to 38
work together intentionally would create a new center for ongoing efforts. 39

Objective #2 – EDUCATION 40

Study the teachings of Jesus and how they apply to our relationships, structures, 42
and systems, to express solidarity with all people of color. This objective has 43
three subgoals which build on each other. 44

Education Subgoal #1 - Shared language:

Church of the Brethren members will be exposed to five core concepts about racial injustice related to Christian discipleship, providing a common framework for analysis and action. Since many people in the Church of the Brethren may never directly participate in any event or workshop related to this study/action process, this goal asks us to saturate the Church of the Brethren with key concepts and understanding. Through this goal, only possible with partnership from agencies and districts, we hope to create meaningful conversations and lay the groundwork for a future of more effective ministry and greater relevance to our communities and world.

Education Subgoal #2 - Resources:

Provide a sample of contextually relevant resources about racial justice ready for use or adaptation in congregations and districts. Our denomination includes rural and urban congregations, white congregations, congregations of color, mixed congregations, and congregations from a variety of ethnicities. It also includes people who are just starting to think about race and racism, and people who have been learning and working on these issues for some time. We intend to be able to suggest resources which could be helpful for many of these settings.

Education Subgoal #3 - District/congregational engagement:

Identify and support teams to provide contextually relevant education about racial justice. The most relevant educational work will happen at the congregational and district levels, led by leaders from those same contexts and cultures. We seek to connect with congregational and district leaders who are active on these issues, or who wish to be, who can help provide educational opportunities in their own congregation and/or district. This goal will only be possible if teams identify themselves in each district or in congregations. Doing this as a relational network (Objective #1) will strengthen and amplify all our efforts.

Objective #3 – ACTION

Address specific problems of racial injustice. Identify, amplify, and encourage the formation of action clusters or organizing initiatives on issues of racial justice/injustice. The focus is on naming specific practices, policies, or conditions and building efforts to change them. Initiatives will be at the denominational, regional, district, and local level.

This objective calls for experiments in challenging racism, either within the denomination and its institutions, or in our communities and neighborhoods. It asks us to connect our abhorrence of racism with an equal passion to challenge and change the contexts where we live, work, and worship. Education about racism without follow up, or being opposed morally but lacking faithful engagement, leaves inequity in place. Without this commitment to action we run the risk of repeating the proclamations of the past without resolving to rise in our generation to do what we can.

CONCLUSION

These objectives can only be achieved if they garner enthusiastic involvement
and contributions of ideas, energy, and talent from many corners of the church.
We look forward to working together with the church to build a path forward.

*O God, in love you have created all people of every race. We are truly grateful
for the love you have shown us in Jesus Christ. Open our hearts to admit and
repent of racist attitudes, behaviors, and speech which demean others. In the
effort to dismantle racism, we struggle not merely against flesh and blood but
against powers and principalities. Work within our institutions where they keep
racism alive by continuing practices that distance, demean, or damage. Help
us speak up whenever we hear the lie that some members of our family are in-
ferior and others superior. By the power of your Spirit and the grace of Jesus
the Christ, bind us—every race and every nation—together as your family. Amen*

Submitted,
Matt Guynn with committee

Committee Members

Josh Brockway (Mission and Ministry Board)
Devin Dixon-Rosario (On Earth Peace)
Terrilynn Griffith (SO/KY)
Matt Guynn (On Earth Peace; convenor)
Robert Jackson (SO/KY)
Lucas Keller (SO/KY)
Bruce Rosenberger (SO/KY)
Christy Schaub (SO/KY)
Jennifer Quijano West (Standing Committee)
LaDonna Sanders Nkosi (Mission and Ministry Board)