



**The United Church  
of Canada  
General Council**

# **GC36 That All May Be One 1997A451 - Policy Statement On Anti-Racism (1997A451)**

True Document Date: August 29, 1997

The United Church of Canada has recently declared its commitment to working towards the elimination of racism. The way in which we begin to put this commitment into action is the subject of this policy statement.

We include biblical quotations because our actions are rooted in our faith. We use these quotations to support the discussion. The biblical passages included in this document are from the *Good News Bible*, adapted for gender-neutral language.

Language changes from decade to decade, even year to year, as our society becomes more educated about issues and as individuals and groups become able to name themselves and the issues that are integral to their lives.

Some of the terms, such as *discrimination*, *harassment*, *prejudice*, and *privilege*, apply to other issues, such as gender, sexual orientation, class, ability and age. However, in this report our definitions apply specifically to racism, so that in our anti-racism work within the church, we have a common vocabulary and understanding of terms. We used a variety of resources to create these definitions. They are working definitions for we realise that the definitions are constantly evolving. We suggest that you review the section entitled *The language of anti-racism – Glossary of Terms* at the back of this document to assist you through the document.

Many belief systems and cultures offer symbols that are important to this work. In some Aboriginal belief systems, the rock symbolises strength and longevity. We hope that these readings are rocks of strength against the oppression of racism. Another Aboriginal symbol is the deer, which symbolises humility, sharing and caring. Like the deer, with humility, sharing and caring, we offer this document.

# Statement of beliefs

We believe we are all equal before God.

We believe racism is a sin and violates God's desire for humanity.

We believe racism is present in our society and in our church, and throughout time has manifested itself in many forms in varying degrees.

We believe that racism will never end, that it is an obstacle we face in our efforts to follow God.

We believe that the struggle against racism is a continuous effort. Therefore our anti-racism policy statement is only a first step. It provides the basis for the creation of a church where all are welcome, where all feel welcome, and where diversity is as natural as breathing.

We believe change is possible. We believe in forgiveness, reconciliation and transformation and the potential to learn from stories and experiences.

We believe we are called to work against racism and for a society in which the words of the Gospel are realised among us.

We believe in a vision of society in which these words of the Gospel are realised.

Is through faith that all of you are God's people in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptised into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ. So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free persons, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)

## Background

### Why was the Implementation Group formed

The past several years have witnessed a resurgence of activity towards the transforming The United Church of Canada into an anti-racist organisation. There have been many conferences and initiatives across the country on the involvement of people of racial and ethnocultural

minorities in the church.

In 1992, the 34th General Council acknowledged the need for anti-racist initiatives and called for anti-racism resource material for worship and education. It encouraged congregations to meet and talk with people of different racial backgrounds.

In response, the Division of Mission in Canada formed an Anti-Racism Task Group to carry out specific tasks. The Task Group conducted a national grass-roots consultation. Its report reinforced and supplemented the recommendations of the 34th General Council, and led to the formation of the Anti-Racism Implementation Group.

The mandate was to

- Develop an anti-racism policy statement for presentation to the 37th General Council
- Develop a strategy and practical tools to equip congregations in combating racism
- Work together with inter-divisional staff to assess, monitor and report anti-racism work across the church

The Implementation Group addressed the need for a General Council policy statement. A second committee, the interdivisional Education Working Group, accountable both to DMC through the Implementation Group and to Ethnic Ministries Council, was established to develop practical tools. These two working groups have produced a policy statement and education resources (So That All May Be One and That All May Be One) to equip the congregations and courts of the church in combating racism. An interdivisional Core Staff Team has also been initiated.

## **Why should our church be anti-racist?**

God calls us to new life in Christ, including the struggle against racism. Transformation of our church to an anti-racist organisation is consistent with our obligation and desire to uphold human rights, with our history as a welcoming church, and our country's rich diversity. As an institution within society, the church has a responsibility to contribute leadership and advocacy towards overcoming racism.

As a community of believers we are called to live out God's love in the world, to advocate for and with the oppressed, to model moral leadership and to seek for justice for all people.

Our church and our country have struggled to welcome diversity. We live in and reflect a world that has engaged in racist acts throughout time: from overt slavery to subtle non-recognition of the histories and contributions made by people of racial and ethnocultural minorities. In the past Canada legislated systemic racism; such practices were accepted as the norm. We restricted economic and social mobility, immigration, access to higher education and the right to vote on the basis of race.

During times of stress, Canadians are prone to suspend international and domestic civil rights for the racially or ethnically defined "outsider" – whether Canadian born or new arrival (for example, World War II internments, French/English conflict, the treatment of economic migrants). Today we are acutely aware of the practice and impact of both systemic and democratic racism. The 1967 Immigration Act was changed to allow immigration on the basis of ability to successfully settle in Canada, rather than on the basis of race or country of origin. There remains a bias towards the wealthy, healthy and educated within the system which can have racist impact in its application.

In all of these cases, people of conscience actively fought against racist acts. They wanted all of God's people to be treated equitably, as one human race. However, there still remains work to be done.

### **A story**

I came to Canada as an ordained priest with undergraduate degrees from a university in my home country and from one of Britain's top universities. For five years I studied for a ThM and PhD and worked as an assistant priest.

A bishop sent me to a priest who was looking for an assistant. This priest was the first priest I had worked with when I came to Canada. He and his wife seemed genuinely pleased to see me and ready to rekindle our friendship.

After lunch, they took me to the church for an interview. I was invited back to preach the following Sunday. Things seemed promising.

For two weeks, I did not hear from them.

When I called the priest to inquire about my application, he broke the news. "As a dear brother of mine, I cannot hide anything from you," he said. "You were not considered for the position because the biggest givers in my church are very

conservative. There was a feeling that the church might suffer financially if they hired you."

I could not believe my ears. The financial backers of the church were too conservative to be ministered to by a non-white! It was at that point that I began to suspect that God is probably white, too.

## **Haven't we always been anti-racist?**

The historical response of The United Church of Canada to the diversities of Canada and to racism has been mixed. The church's early involvement with indigenous and immigrant peoples was primarily evangelistic and charitable, providing congregational ministry and social services. In doing this, it worked to assimilate them.

The church was active in aiding Japanese Canadians interned during World War II, and by the war's end, called for an end to discrimination in citizenship legislation. However, Canadian churches were almost silent on the issue of Jewish refugees until 1946, when they acknowledged the evil of the Holocaust and called on their members to help those victimised and to combat anti-Semitism.

The past fifty years have brought a growing realisation of the equality of all peoples as evidenced by an increasing number of resolutions, policies, and staff responsibilities directed specifically to anti-racism. For example, it has been church policy to work collaboratively with all faith groups.

In the 1970's, General Council affirmed its support of Aboriginal peoples in their efforts to obtain justice through recognition of Aboriginal titles and rights. In 1986 it issued an apology to Native peoples for past wrongs, and began to try to live out the apology in action. The All Native Circle Conference (ANCC) was formed to support Native self-government in the church. In 1998, the Moderator issued an apology for "the pain and suffering that our church's involvement in the Indian Residential School System caused..." for Aboriginal and First Nations peoples.

In 1992, General Council declared that people of ethnic and racial minorities should participate and be treated equally in the church. The Ethnic Ministries Council was created to equip all congregations to participate fully in the life and mission of the church. Among other programs, the Ethnic Ministries Council co-operates with the Division of Mission in Canada in

supporting the work of anti-racism and education working groups.

### **A story**

I experienced five years in an Indian residential school. It was a period of incarceration which affected my self-confidence and my sense of self-worth in negative ways. I am marked by the experience of the suffering of young children without adequate care and the physical abuse of older children who would not conform.

Many times I would stare out the school's window looking at the glowing homes in the nearby town and wonder what it must be like to live in a family. The removal of children to residential schools from the family hastened the impact of cultural genocide.

### **A story**

The impact of residential schools on me was hatred for people in authority; intense abuse of alcohol and drugs, confusion of what the churches stand for, loss of education and career, and the loss of culture and community.

## **Have we done enough?**

Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you, for God will judge you in the same way you judge others, and will apply to you the same rules you apply to others. Why, then, do you look at the speck in another's eye and pay no attention to the log in your own eye? How dare you say to the other, "Please, let me take that speck out of your eye," when you have a log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First, take the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of another's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Have we done enough? The simple answer is, "No".

We have not done enough because racism still exists, whether blatant and visible, or buried, within structures and by politeness. Racism permeates our systems and institutions, including church. Even though by action we may not have been racist, by inaction we have helped sustain a social climate where racism can occur.

Internationally, racist sentiments, ethnocultural divisions and violent nationalism have escalated into ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, Burundi, Rwanda, Kosovo, Iraq and East Timor.

Here at home, the discussions on land claim settlements and resource rights, provincially and across the country, have created tensions and sparked racial violence. Recent human trafficking cases have ignited misplaced and racially motivated fears and hatred directed to visible minorities. Angry voices condemn our immigration policy and advocate suspension of international law and the Charter of Human Rights.

These international and domestic tensions illustrate the need for continued anti-racism efforts. The United Church of Canada has committed itself to this effort.

## **What remains to be done?**

The pain of racism is the pain of both the privileged and the unprivileged.

### **A story**

The subtle racist innuendoes are perhaps more controlling and damaging because they are less easy to identify. Jokes, the exclusions from community events or even the lack of active listening in conversations hurt and humiliate. What does it say when you speak a wise word, make an order in a restaurant, or go to pick up your car and your utterance is not understood until a white, usually but not always male, comes to your aid, and then suddenly the statement is perfectly clear!

It hurts when your child comes home and tells you a racial joke. It hurts on pioneer days when your child is told that his or her great grandparents could not have been pioneers because they were not white.

These social snubs do not happen just to people of racial and ethnocultural minorities. They happen to anyone who is a vocal person of conscience. A white elderly mentor took an anti-racist stand in the community she lives in. All of a sudden she was not invited to the little tea parties and get togethers. She was isolated from community events.

Racial privilege means being able to move, work, and travel without racial harassment; to live where you choose; to see your race reflected in media, faith, experience, story, history or culture; to know that when you need medical help, education, legal intervention, a bank loan,

support or employment, race will not count against you; to succeed without being called a credit to, or a representative of your race; to fail and know that your failure does not have racial overtones.

## **A story**

Last spring, on my way to refugee camps, I found myself in the most uncomfortable position of seeking admission to a country with an invalid document. I had confused current and expired passports and was travelling on the expired passport! My error had been detected not by airline personnel upon check in, but by me as we were about to land.

Amazingly, I was given the benefit of the doubt and not fined, held in detention, or immediately returned to my country of origin without being able to land. It was obliquely acknowledged that my name and appearance helped. I didn't challenge the presumption, but accepted my temporary visa with relief and gratitude. It was evident that my passport and even the lack thereof was stamped with white privilege.

We cannot be free from pain unless all are free from pain. We cannot be free from racial oppression unless all are free from racial oppression, including oppressors and oppressed. We cannot be whole unless all are whole.

As Christians we are called to love our neighbours – our enemies, our friends, ourselves – in the realization that all parts are vital to the whole, and that diversity is a gift from God.

Jesus' prayer in *John 17* captures the vision:

I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. I pray that they may all be one. Creator, may they be in us just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me. I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one, I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them even as you love me. (John 17:20-23)

Or, as the United Church's founders captured that vision in the church's crest: "That all may be one."



# The Theology of Anti-Racism

Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'" (Matthew 22:34-40)

## What does the Bible say?

The church is the community of believers, the body of Christ and the family whose members God created in God's own image.

...in God's image they were all created, male and female, God created them. And God blessed them...(Genesis 1:27b-28a)

By understanding itself as the family created by God, The United Church of Canada expects all its employees, volunteers, members and adherents to see themselves as the children of God who must love each other as God loves them.

And God showed love for us by sending a Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. (1 John 4:9)

The United Church family is endowed with racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity which it must cherish and celebrate. As in any human family, love of God and of each other, commitment and responsibility toward one another must dominate our lives.

We all have within us the capacity for love, forgiveness and transformation.

## What does the Lord require of us?

The commandment of Christ requires every member of the family and bearer of the divine image to:

- Love, cherish, and protect each individual;

- Celebrate the diversity of the church as a special gift from God that is meant to clarify our understanding of God as the Creator and ourselves as God's creatures, God's children and the body of Christ.

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.

For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. If the foot were to say, "because I am not a hand, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being part of the body. And if the ear were to say, "because I am not an eye, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as it should be. There would not be a body if it were all only one part! As it is, there are many parts but one body.

So then, the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you! Nor can the hand say to the feet, "Well, I don't need you!" On the contrary, we cannot do without the parts of the body that seem to be weaker and those parts that we think aren't worth very much are the ones which we treat with greater care; while the parts of the body which don't look very nice are treated with special modesty, which the more beautiful parts do not need. God has put the body together in such a way as to give greater honour to those parts that need it. And so there is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it: if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness. (1 Corinthians 12:12-26)

# **The Language of Anti-Racism – Glossary of Terms**

## **Aboriginal**

Aboriginal applies to the original inhabitants or indigenous peoples of Canada and their descendants. Aboriginal peoples include the Indian, Inuit and Metis people of Canada.

## **Anti-racism**

Anti-racism is a process that aims to identify, challenge and change the values, structures and behaviours that perpetuate racism. Among other things, it:

- Provides us with skills and knowledge to examine racism critically;
- Provides a mechanism for the enhancement of a positive image of self and others;
- Integrates diverse racial perspectives into structures, policies, and practices; and
- Allows people to reconcile with one another.

Anti-racism is the responsibility of all people.

## **Democratic racism**

Democratic racism has been described by Henry, Tator, Mattis and Rees (1995), as "an ideology that permits and sustains people's ability to maintain two apparently conflicting sets of values. One set consists of a commitment to a liberal, democratic society motivated by the egalitarian values of fairness, justice, an equality. Conflicting with these values are attitudes and behaviours that include negative feelings about people of colour and that result in differential treatment of them of discrimination against them. Democratic racism, in its simplest form, is an ideology that reduces the conflict between maintaining a commitment to both egalitarian and non-egalitarian values."

## **Diversity**

Diversity exists when all communities partake equitably in decision-making structures and processes that determine their lives, and can effectively give voice to their issues.

## **Ethnic Cleansing**

Ethnic cleansing is an overt act of violent racism which aims at eradicating not just people, but their whole culture – history, art, customs, and achievements.

# **Ethnicity**

All persons have ethnicity in that they belong to and share a particular racial, cultural and/or linguistic heritage and other than Aboriginal peoples, have an original homeland or have ancestors whom came from another homeland(s).

## **Ethnocultural**

Ethnocultural refers to a particular cultural heritage or background. There are a variety of ethnocultural groups among people of African, Asian, European and indigenous North, Central and South American backgrounds in Canada. Some may experience discrimination because of ethnocultural affiliation (ethnicity, religion, nationality, language).

## **First Nation**

The First Nations are those Aboriginal peoples, or nations, who negotiated and signed treaties with the Crown's representatives in Canada – as Nation to Nation.

## **Inclusive**

Although many anti-racism texts define the word "inclusive," we choose not to use it and list it here only to explain its exclusion.

"Inclusive" assumes that one individual or group is in a position to decide whether to "include." Marginalization and tokenism often result. Instead, we envision a church where people are not "excluded" or merely "included," but where structure, policy and practice are rooted in diversity.

## **Integration**

Integration is a process that enables groups or individuals to interact and participate fully in their community's political, economic, social and cultural life.

# Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is the practice of recognising and celebrating cultural identity and diversity. Multiculturalism has been a nominal official policy of Canadian government since October 8, 1971. However, in practice, the focus has been on diet, dialect, dress, and dance.

## Race

Race is a socially defined group which sees itself or is seen by others as being different from other groups in its common descent or in external features such as skin colour, hair texture, or facial characteristics.

## Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination is action based on prejudice and denies equal treatment, civil liberties and opportunity to individuals and groups, based on race. It can be overt or covert, individual or systemic, or by omission or commission.

## Racial Harassment

Racial harassment is comment or conduct in relation to race that makes others feel unwelcome and intimidated, creates hostility, and poisons the environment. It is often expressed in the form of racial slurs and jokes.

## Racial Minority

A racial minority is a group of people whose racial origins are other than the majority, which, currently, in Canada, is Caucasian.

## Racial Prejudice

Racial prejudice is an unfounded state of mind that casts one group in an inferior light, despite the absence of scientifically proven evidence.

# Racial Privilege

Racial privilege is the condition that exists in any society where, because of their racial identity, members of a race derive advantages and benefits over others. This preferential treatment, often invisible to people benefiting from it, can be identified in all facets of our lives.

For example, white people are widely represented in print media and on television; they are never asked to speak on behalf of their racial group; and they can easily buy cards, pictures, posters, dolls, toys, and magazines featuring people of their own race.

## Racism

Racism is a racial prejudice manifested when one group excludes, isolates, oppresses, manipulates or exploits another. It can be overt or covert, individual or systemic, intentional or unintentional. The measure of racism is the effect on the oppressed, not the intent of the oppressor. Racism confers privilege on and sustains the dominant group and perpetuates the injustice. Racism exists everywhere in our society, in all our institutions and in our church.

### Systemic or institutional racism

The tendency for a system/institution to reproduce racial hierarchies by means of its very structure; racism evident – that is, apparent in distributions of power if not in specific acts of racial discrimination – throughout an entire system or institution. It is the form of racism most invisible to a dominant group perhaps because most intimately connected to dominance. Systemic racism is most visible in its effects on members of oppressed groups, but is more dangerous in the privileges it secures to the dominant culture. Symptoms of systemic racism manifest themselves both in the objective conditions of life, such as a lower quality of housing in non-white neighbourhoods and in more subjective or consciousness-centred symptoms such as internalised oppression.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the 37th General Council, approve the following statement on anti-racism

# The United Church of Canada

## Participate fully

1. Encourages the full participation of Aboriginal and First Nations peoples and people of racial and ethnocultural minority within The United Church of Canada at every level of the church, particularly decision-making bodies, by
  1. Reviewing and reforming decision-making processes within the church to facilitate equitable participation of all people
  2. Encouraging the effective participation of Aboriginal and First Nations peoples and people of Racial and ethnocultural minorities in decision-making processes, and in leadership and mentoring Roles within the church
  3. Ensuring that various types of resources (i.e. human, media and financial) are in place to support Aboriginal and First Nations peoples and peoples of racial and ethnocultural minorities as they assume these positions
  4. Applying just and equitable hiring and employment policies and practices
  5. Making an active effort to recruit and hire Aboriginal and First Nations persons and persons of racial and ethnocultural minorities for various positions within the church, especially in communications, education, and professional development
  6. Encouraging and supporting Aboriginal and First Nations peoples and people of racial and ethnocultural minorities to undertake theological studies

## Organize for diversity

2. Supports anti-racism work and promotes positive relationships among the diverse racial and ethnocultural groups within The United Church of Canada, by
  1. Including anti-racism activities and focus (co-ordination, resources, advocacy and support functions) within staff portfolios at all levels of the church
  2. Through the interdivisional core staff team, encouraging, monitoring, reporting and fostering self-assessment of anti-racism work across the church
  3. Developing, compiling and making available education resources on anti-racism,
  4. Encouraging the use of curriculum materials that are set in diverse racial and ethnocultural contexts

5. Including diverse Aboriginal, racial and ethnocultural content and approaches to learning in church curricula
6. Encouraging the review of worship and Christian education resources, and other visual and written materials at all levels of the church from an anti-racism perspective (See the anti-racism education resource, "That All May Be One", compiled by the Education Working Group)
7. Providing training and continuing education in anti-racism for students, staff at theological colleges, volunteers, Ministry Personnel, local regional and national staff and summer camp staff
8. Enhancing our worship and ministry by using sources and interpretations from racial and ethnocultural minority experiences, theologies and analyses
9. Enriching our worship and ministry through the use of diverse racial and ethnocultural music, song, images of God, stories and practices
10. Including preaching exchanges and joint worship services among groups of different races, ethnicity, language and culture
11. Encouraging Ministry Personnel, staff and other participants in the church to bring people together from the church and the surrounding community to enhance mutual understanding across race, ethnicity and culture
12. Encouraging the establishment of local, regional and national networks to share experiences and successes

## **Act justly**

3. Will endeavour to act justly within its own structures, courts, policies and practice, by
  1. Applying an anti-racist lens in practising ethical and just financial stewardship
  2. Reviewing the candidacy, settlement and post-settlement processes for Ministry Personnel to ensure that they are supportive and non-discriminatory
  3. Developing and publicizing the availability of policies and procedures to address complaints and conflicts with respect to racism
  4. Helping people to become aware of and support others in accessing church and public services/processes when rights are violated by acts of racism
  5. Helping those who have committed acts of racism to recognise the sin of racism and to be transformed
  6. Working to create or maintain just relations with persons of racial and ethnocultural minority



7. Working to create or maintain just relations with Aboriginal and First Nations peoples

## Speak to the world

4. Supports anti-racism work within broader society, by
  1. Monitoring, evaluating and advocating with respect to human rights and equity legislation, regulations, policy and practice
  2. Monitoring, evaluating and advocating portrayals of Aboriginal and First Nations peoples and people of racial and ethnocultural minority in the media
  3. Monitoring and responding to racist coverage of local and global events, and editorials and commentaries covered or not covered by the media, ensuring the media either through the presentation of facts or through innuendo does not inflame, provoke, or support racist sentiments
  4. Providing the anti-racist voice for those who cannot respond for fear of retribution
  5. Urging all levels of the church to speak out against human rights violations, in particular instances of racial injustice
  6. Participating in wider society initiatives that address anti-racism, human rights and social justice issues
  7. Participating in wider society initiatives that promote mutual understanding among groups of different race, ethnicity and culture

Document Type: [Social Policy](#)

General Council: [GC43 or earlier](#)

Originating Body: [Other](#)