

GCE Working Towards Becoming An Anti-Racist Denomination

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The United Church of Canada has started to work on becoming an anti-racist denomination. Why has the church made this commitment? What does this commitment mean? And how might the church go about doing this work?

Why become an anti-racist denomination?

Racism exists in many forms in both church and society. For decades, the United Church has condemned all forms of racism, named racism as sin, and worked to eliminate systemic racial discrimination. People in the United Church have developed [anti-racism](#) policies and education programs, worked towards reconciliation and [Indigenous justice](#), adopted the [Calls to the Church](#), and created [intercultural policies](#) and initiatives. In spite of this steadfast and faithful work by committed people over generations, the reality of racism in the church is ever-present.

At the United Church's General Council meeting in 2018, in the final two hours of the afternoon session, many of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour participants lined up at microphones to [share their painful stories of racial exclusion](#) within the church. Ministry personnel who are racialized as Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour spend more time searching to find appointments or calls when compared to their White colleagues; many are also sharply critiqued for their diverse accents. In a national United Church survey on intercultural ministries in 2019, several racialized and Indigenous people shared their stories about their experiences of racial discrimination, including tokenism and a lack of safety within the church.

There are many more specific examples of lived experiences that can be shared. Additional reasons for why we need do to this work are detailed in written United Church statements,

policies, and documents. What is clear now is that much more needs to be done to dismantle systemic racism within the church. The June 2020 proposal, "Towards an Anti-Racist Denomination"—which was written for the General Council at the height of global protests for racial justice and in the midst of deepened awareness for the Black Lives Matter movement— names this dynamic clearly:

Public statements are not enough. Words are not enough. This is a moment for The United Church of Canada to wrestle with its White privilege, its role in systematizing anti-Black racism within its own policies, procedures, and practices, and its role within the wider Canadian context. There is a need to make becoming an anti-racist denomination and dealing with anti-Black racism within our denomination a missional priority at all levels of the denomination.

As people of faith, our call to act justly is named as part of our anti-racism policy, and this call is a part of our Christian faith and discipleship journey. The theological and scriptural basis for anti-racism work is well-documented in the United Church's policies, including our anti-racism policy, "[That All May Be One](#)": "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 justice for all people."

A World Council of Churches [statement on discipleship](#) also reminds us of the importance of dismantling racial discrimination: "We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion." As a church, we also have a role in speaking to the world, and in being prophetic. This prophetic witness follows in the ways of Jesus, who not only spoke of uncomfortable realities in his time, but also challenged power structures and took tangible action for justice. We engage in anti-racism work to follow Jesus' example of dismantling unjust power and creating better places of belonging for all.

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