

First Presbyterian Church of Verona

Statement in Response to Racial Injustice and Current Events

Dear Members of First Presbyterian Church of Verona:

The following statement was adopted by Session Council on July 11, 2020 as a response to the ongoing national debates and demonstrations, as well as an impassioned plea to the Session from the Rev. Dr. Julia S Dawson, attached below the statement for your reference.

From Micah 6:8 “...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

As you are all aware, there have been heinous acts of violence committed against the Black Community. This is not a time for silence, for silence only benefits the system that has been oppressing Black voices, Black lives, and does no justice for those suffering. The murder of George Floyd disturbed many because it was horrific to witness such blatant violence as kneeling on the neck of a human being but, America has been kneeling on the necks of the Black Community long before this incident and has continued to do so in the weeks following.

We each have our own personal, moral, and spiritual obligation to educate ourselves and take a deep look inward at the areas of our lives where we are helping to perpetuate racism in all its forms. It is not enough to be non-racist, we must be actively anti-racist. Anti-racism is, simply defined by ACLRC (Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre) as, “an active and consistent process of change to eliminate individual, institutional, and systemic racism.” Those of us who are in a place of racial privilege must strive to combat the inequalities that BIPOC (Black and Indigenous People of Color) face daily. Session member Debbie Michelsen states it perfectly: “By examining our individual prejudices, and acknowledging and correcting racism in our communities, positive efforts can be made to foster a fairer and more equal world. Then, and only then, can peace, liberty, and justice exist for everyone: yes, so that every member of the human family can flourish.”

Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk of the PCUSA states, the church is “called to dismantle structures that put people in poverty and pain,” to not only “share the gospel, but share ourselves.” As Christians, we look to a man who stood for love, acceptance, compassion, and justice for all of humanity. Jesus teaches us to seek out the one sheep in need; he does not suggest we sit idly by with the contented ninety-nine. In the preliminary principles of The Presbyterian Church, (U.S. A.), we hear these words, “Christ calls the church into being, Christ gives to his church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances. We are to work in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment.” As people of Faith, our tree is only as healthy as its sickest branch. We must be willing to tend to the sickness so we may, now, after all this time, create a world where all of its inhabitants may prosper in God’s name.

Elder Debbie Michelsen has expressed her sentiments on this indescribable matter.

“We are all members of one human family: Each one of us has dignity and value. If anyone is treated less than equally it diminishes all of us, our lives, and the values that we hold dear. The suffering caused by racism must end in order to create just, democratic, and strong communities where everyone can live, worship, work, play, learn, volunteer, and achieve his/her fullest potential. Each of us has a responsibility, yes-a duty, and moral obligation to challenge the status quo and create a community where everyone lives with freedom and opportunity. Without justice, there is no freedom.

With the power of God, we pledge to examine our own negative attitudes and change them as necessary whenever and wherever we encounter them."

Members of our congregation, our Presbytery of Newark, and our denomination- the PCUSA, have spoken out offering their own words on these matters. Below, you will find links to read their full statements.

On our website, <http://veronapreschurch.org> , on the Community tab there are links to some of these statements as well.

<https://www.pcusa.org/racial-justice-resources/>

<https://us13.campaign-archive.com/?u=3db09d8837d0e887b80a551f4&id=1e87f4a0f9>

<http://www.aclrc.com/forms-of-racism>

The Session Council of the FPCV:

Pastor Lynn Rubier Capron- Moderator

Margaret Whiting- Clerk

Elders: Ann Brillhart

Michael Duhaney

Cathy Franco

Donna Kiel

Ruby Klabenesh

Deborah Michelsen

Marilyn O'Neill

Nicole Shaw

The Rev. Dr. Julia Dawson's Original Letter to Session:

Dear Members of Session,

We are at a critical period in our history as citizens of The United States of America, and as believers and followers of Our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father, and The Holy Spirit. What we do now, may be of consequence in the decades to come. In the preliminary principles of The Presbyterian Church, (U.S. A.), we hear these words, "Christ calls the church into being, Christ gives to his church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances. We are to work in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment."

In the book of Ecclesiastes 3: "There is a season for everything. 3: 7: b A time for silence, a time for speaking." In the national events of the last weeks and months, as a retired minister of The Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.), I feel led by God to ask you the ruling body in First Presbyterian Church, Verona, to speak out to support the very life and faith of the church. We cannot undo past negligence, but we can act responsibly in this crucial present time that is the time for speaking.

It is absolutely necessary that you act NOW, and stand for what our Lord Jesus, taught us. We cannot consider ourselves members of the Christian Church if we stay silent. I strongly plead with you to send out a public statement from the ruling body of this church, that we are against violent acts of person against person, and that we support the peaceful resistance being acclaimed.

As members of the ruling body of First Presbyterian Church, Verona and a part of The Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.) "you have responsibility with the minister, to exercise leadership for the life of this particular church as well as the church at large." This includes "leading the congregation in ministries of personal and social healing and reconciliation in the communities in which the church lives and bears its witness." The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

I ask that you pray and consider this plea.

Faithfully yours,

Julia Dawson