

A CHARTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
in the Anglican Church of Canada
A working document of General Synod



RACISM is the belief, reinforced by power and privilege, that one race is innately superior to other races.¹ Systemic racism occurs when the power and privilege of one racial group results in the exclusion, oppression or exploitation of other groups of different racial origin. Racism also manifests itself in individuals in the form of racial harassment when a person or persons belonging to a privileged group behaves in ways that intimidate, demean, or undermine the dignity of others on the basis of their race. A consequence for victims is that racism becomes internalized as deeply engrained feelings of self-hatred and low self-esteem.

AS MEMBERS OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA, we strive continuously to be faithful to our life in Jesus Christ that we embraced at our baptism. We are learning that one of our strengths as a church lies in our diversity and in our commitment to eliminate systemic and individual racism, whether intended or not. We are called to be a church where people will have the assurance that they will be treated with dignity and respect, and where they will find a community that is determined to be free of racism.

BECAUSE WE BELIEVE that...

God created the world and saw that it was good, and created human beings in God's own image.

Jesus in his life and teaching actively sought to be in loving, right relationship with others, embracing those who were pushed out by society, while challenging the structures of his day that separated one group from another.

God's Holy Spirit breathes and gives life to all humanity, and moves within God's people to overcome separation and sin.

In baptism we are given a new life of grace, a life of mutuality and community; and are incorporated into the Body of Christ, one body with many parts. In accepting the new life in Christ, we affirm that divisions of race have been put aside and that all come before God as equals.

¹ The concept of "race" is a social construct. But racism, which evolves from the construct, does exist and is real. It is our belief and assumption that there is only one race: the human race.

In our baptismal covenant, we promise to “persevere in resisting evil”, and whenever we sin, “to repent and return to the Lord”, and thereby commit ourselves to make a new beginning when we discover that we have offended God or injured others.

Our struggle for racial justice requires new attitudes, new understandings and new relationships, and these must be reflected in the policies, structures, and practices of the church, as well as in the laws and institutions of society.

WE THEREFORE COMMIT OURSELVES

1. to eliminate racism and all forms of discrimination by identifying and removing the barriers based on race, and transforming the structures of power and privilege that favour White people and prevent others from full participation in the life and work of the Anglican Church of Canada.
2. to ensure that the policies, procedures and practices of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada reflect the principle of equity for all.
3. to educate ourselves and receive training in anti-racism practices and find ways of modeling these to the wider church and society
4. to increase awareness of and appreciation for the diversity of race, colour, and culture within the Anglican Church of Canada and in Canadian society
5. to support and participate in the world-wide struggle for racial justice in church and society, as advocates and activists
6. to monitor our progress by listening to the evaluative comments of people oppressed by systemic and individual racism
7. to endeavour to ensure that human and financial resources are allocated to enable these commitments to be fulfilled.

HISTORY and CONTEXT

From the onset of colonialism, racism has been manifest throughout Canadian history and continues into the present. The assumption of racial difference and inequality was the basis of much of Canada’s social legislation. For example, as a result of the Indian Act, First Nations people were confined to their reserves and their lands, and made susceptible to exploitation and take over. Immigration policies restricted Black, Asian and Jewish immigrants. Canadians of Japanese and Ukrainian descent were rounded up and interned during World War Two. Labour legislation dictated who could and couldn't work for whom, and who could do what kind of work. At moments in Canada’s history, certain groups of people were denied access to professions, higher education, vote, or secure citizenship because of their racial origin. Racism was explicit in the theory of Social Darwinism, which was commonly taught and accepted until the 1960’s; racism was implicit in science, art and literature; and racism shaped our demography, history and national self-image.

The consequences of such racist beliefs are with us in the present. Systems of power and privilege still favour White Canadians more than others. In times of public fear or perceived scarcity, restrictions on economic and social mobility, or immigration on the basis of race, are still commonly accepted. Practices of immigration and certification of professionals still screen out people along racial lines. Some Indigenous peoples are still dispossessed. Other peoples still live with the cumulative effects of centuries of discrimination and exploitation.

Racism has been and continues to be no less present in the Anglican Church of Canada. Aboriginal and other non-White congregations in our urban centres are more likely to be resisted or marginalized than to be welcomed and supported to become full and equal partners in a multicultural parish. Church governance systems of decision-making and power do not reflect the diversity of Anglicans in our synods and parishes. The struggle to build a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is teaching Anglicans how our church has been complicit in Canada's history of racism and how we have to change.

As an institution, we are committed to advocate for and comply with human rights and other legislation aimed at eliminating racism among people and in organizations, within Canada and globally. As people of faith, our prayer is to see God's Spirit moving in our church, public institutions, and society, finding expression in a growing desire to eliminate racist structures and behaviours.

APPENDIX A: WORKING DEFINITIONS:

- *Prejudice is a partiality that prevents objective consideration of an issue or situation.*
- *Discrimination is unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice.*
- *Racial prejudice and discrimination is the partiality and unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of race.*
- *Racism is the belief, reinforced by power and privilege, that one race is innately superior to other races.*
- *Systemic racism occurs when one racial group misuses its power, privilege or discriminatory attitudes to exclude, oppress or exploit another racial group.*
- *White privilege refers to the benefit or advantage given to or enjoyed by White persons beyond the common advantage given to all others.*

This Charter was approved by the Council of General Synod in March 2007 and is intended to complement a more detailed policy for employees and members of General Synod, its committees, councils, and boards.