

One in Christ for the Sake of All

Representatives of the churches and organizations of Christian Churches Together in the United States assembled in Memphis, February 14–17, 2012, to respond to one question:

How might the Holy Spirit use the witness of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his Letter from the Birmingham Jail to help the church live the Gospel more fully and proclaim it more faithfully?

In our time together, our hearts and our minds have been engaged by Jesus' announcement that:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

Companions of Dr. King have shared with us their first-hand experience in the Civil Rights movement and of their continuing work. We reconnected with the story of the students on the Freedom Ride. We journeyed to Slave Haven Museum and confronted the national memory of the slave trade, the millions Africans who lost their lives or their freedom in the forced journey from Africa to the New World. We visited the Lorraine Motel and the National Civil Rights Museum, coming face to face again with the things that necessitated the Civil Rights movement and the Poor People's Campaign. We recognized our call to the "fierce urgency of now" that Dr. King named.

We declare unequivocally that racism, extreme wealth disparity, injustice and poverty, and violence are inextricably linked together. Dr. King said that "the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered" when "profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people." We call upon the church to say and act unambiguously for people. An anti-racist church advocates for equity, pursues justice and embodies non-violence. We know this. We have experienced the reality of God's in-breaking kingdom in our relationships with each other. Gathered by the Spirit, as children of Our Father, in the name of Christ Jesus, we have known both truth and trust in the presence of each other. From the perspective of an outsider looking in on our gathering, we may seem like unlikely partners — Christians of African, European, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific, Native American, Middle Eastern descent meeting in friendship; Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Catholics, Orthodox, Historic African American, and Historic Protestants exchanging ideas and living in

mutual hope. We belong together. We have heard God's "Yes" to our relationships and we say "Amen to the glory of God."

Our gathering as Christian Churches Together is a joyful fellowship for which we give thanks and pray is pleasing to God, for in gathering together we experience Christ tearing down the walls that otherwise divide us.

With Dr. King, we affirm: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

From our unity in Christ, we say to everyone in the United States that there is room for people from any land or language in this country. The color of one's skin is a gift from God; to welcome the other is an act of our common humanity. The relationships that one has and the possibilities that one is extended are how we each realize what God promises for all. There are many ways in which our society limits the kinds of relationships people have and the possibilities for advancement people are given. We who met together in Memphis call upon the church to resist these socially imposed limits by engaging in new relationships with those who seem different and creating possibilities for people in poverty to acquire equity and experience economic security.

Our common humanity and our witness to the Christ of all peoples summons our churches to act for the wellbeing of all, to advocate for equity for the poor, to pursue justice, and to practice the love and nonviolence that Jesus teaches. Therefore we commend to our churches and organizations that they:

1. Examine their participation in the structures and personal choices that ignore the reality of poverty and perpetuate the effects of racism.
2. Embrace one or more of the initiatives from the CCT Statement on Poverty as a church wide priority which seek the elimination of poverty in this nation.
3. Partner with another church who is representative of being an "unlikely partner" in our anti-poverty work, so that our common witness may be to the God who reconciles us in Christ.
4. Proclaim publicly, in their own ways and in alliances of joint action, that the new forms of racist and unChristian behavior toward the immigrant, the impoverished and the non-Christian are abhorrent to God and a denial of the grace which God in Christ Jesus offers to everyone.
5. Seek ways to collaborate in their anti-racism and cross-cultural ministries and to share their resources and experiences in this work with each other and, as appropriate, with multi-religious partners.
6. Be mutually accountable to each other by regular reporting of their actions on these recommendations through a forum identified by Christian Churches Together.
7. Finally, working in collaboration through Christian Churches Together, develop an appropriate public witness and presence in Birmingham on April 16, 2013 to

commemorate the 50th anniversary of The Letter from the Birmingham Jail and publicly report what the church is doing to overcome the sin of racism and to ensure economic “justice for all.”