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*God created human beings in God's own image. Genesis 1:25*

*One of the scribes ... asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. Mark 12:28-31*

### Preface

This paper has been developed over the last 18 months. Because the work of anti-racism is never settled, this document is intended as a living, adaptable source of guidance rather than a final word on all aspects of our anti-racism efforts. In First Church, the work of the distant and recent past has not always been easy or linear. Our missteps have wounded some within the body of the church, particularly those who identify as people of color. We know these painful experiences affect current and future efforts to address issues of race. We seek to forgive one another for our mistakes and move forward with utmost humility and compassion, seeking always to do better.

### Background

Racism is often referred to as America's original sin. Since the arrival of Europeans on this continent, racism and white supremacy have been a primary organizing principle, beginning with the conquest and genocide of Native Americans and continuing through the internment of Japanese Americans and laws to prevent the immigration of people from Japan, China and other Asian countries, as well as the exploitation of Mexican-Americans and others with roots in Latin America. This same racism allowed for and justified hundreds of years of enslavement of people from Africa, which has become the defining feature of the country's racial legacy. Throughout this history, Christianity has been used to justify this domination and dehumanization of God's people.

***Racism describes prejudicial attitudes combined with the power to dominate and control the systems and institutions capable of carrying out discriminatory practices. In other words, racism results from access to the power to enforce prejudices so as to advantage one racial group and disadvantage another. Power + Prejudice = Racism***

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The church was founded in 1865 by abolitionists. It was the first racially integrated church in the District of Columbia (if only nominally) and helped found Howard University two years later in support of education and uplift to freed enslaved African Americans. Our first defining crisis occurred almost immediately – it started brewing in 1867 and culminated in 1869, when the church’s first pastor -- a segregationist who was not a founder of the church -- and more than half the congregation departed following a conflict over whether black and white people should indeed worship together. That left us with an even stronger commitment. During Jeremiah Rankin’s pastorate, 1869 to 1884, African American members numbered 30-50, and Frederick Douglass and other prominent blacks were regular visitors. The centennial history of the church does not cover any more of the church’s internal history on race and racism until 1960, the start of the 8-year pastorate of David Colwell, an ardent and active pro-civil rights pastor.

*Rooted in our faith beliefs and demands, First Church has sought throughout much of its history to advance racial equality and justice.*

Much of our focus on racism has emerged from the historic and on-going anti-black sentiment in the United States and our community. Yet, we have also sought to stand in solidarity with other oppressed people of color. For instance, in the late 1980s, we provided free office space to Committee of the Mothers of the Disappeared in El Salvador, whose director — herself a political refugee from El Salvador—was provided safe haven in the form of shelter and protection in another church. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, First Church reached out to build relationships with local Muslim faith communities. The church has held symposia to explore surging Islamophobia in the US and its connection to historic racism and xenophobic trends. In 2003, we formally declared ourselves a Multiracial-Multicultural church, making a commitment to go beyond welcoming the stranger to understanding ourselves as one with the stranger; to move beyond creating a more diverse community to recognizing ourselves as one with the whole community of God. Most recently, First Church declared itself a Sanctuary Church. Our Sanctuary Statement is intentionally broad in its language, affirming our solidarity with “immigrants and other vulnerable and marginalized people everywhere.” It is urgent that we focus on this work precisely

*This church’s history of having generally been on what is now seen as the right side of this issue often masks the need for us to do more to be intentionally and actively anti-racist in 2017 and beyond in order to ensure the church, in both its internal workings and external outreach, lives up to its professed ideals.*

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because of our legacy of effort in this realm and because our country is growing increasingly diverse, raising old and new issues of racial prejudice.

We must continue to challenge and call ourselves to individual and community accountability as we, with our country, grapple with the tragic effects of 400 years of racism. The brutal, formal institution of slavery that predated the country's founding was brought to a technical end in 1865 by a civil war; black codes were passed by Southern states in 1865 and 1866 restricting African Americans' freedom and creating a type of neo-slavery; and in the late 1800s and early 1900s Jim Crow laws enforced segregation. Before and during the enslavement of African Americans, Native Americans were killed and pushed from their lands and Hispanic territory was invaded and appropriated. The country's immigration policy was heavily biased in favor of Northern Europeans and strictly limited numbers of so-called "inferior races" in the 1920s. In a time of war, the country incarcerated American citizens of Japanese descent solely due to their ethnicity.

The civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s changed many public access and voting laws; opportunities for housing, education and employment increased beginning in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century; and Barack Obama was elected as the country's first black President in 2008. This was followed, however, by an increase in overt racism, white nationalism and expedited efforts to attack the laws, processes and systems that had begun to lay the groundwork for greater equality for all. The election of Donald Trump as president has exacerbated this backlash. His election has made more visible the animus against people of color, especially those who are assumed to be recent immigrants. His rhetoric draws on and amplifies a long history of foreign policy<sup>1</sup> and trade agreements<sup>2</sup> that have destabilized the politics and economies of countries

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<sup>1</sup> Of particular relevance here is the U.S. support for right-wing paramilitaries during the Salvadoran Civil War in the 1980s. One continuing legacy of that civil war is that El Salvador has one of the highest murder rates in the world; see the UN Office on Drugs and Crime homicide statistics, <http://www.unodc.org/gsh/en/data.html>. This murder rate is a major cause of undocumented border crossings by Salvadorans—especially children—into the US.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Mexico experienced a net loss of approximately 2 million agricultural jobs in the years after NAFTA was enacted. In those same years, annual Mexican immigration to the US increased markedly, from 370,000 in 1991 to a peak of 770,000 in 2000. See Mark Weisbrot, et al., "Did NAFTA Help Mexico? An Assessment After 20 Years," Center for Economic and Policy Research (2014), pp. 13, 14.

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throughout the world, particularly in Latin American, the Middle Eastern, and Africa, ironically creating the need and desire for people to immigrate here.

In identifying anti-racism work as a priority, First Church is acting in a manner consistent with its historic commitments. These include our identity as both a Just Peace and Open and Affirming congregation committed to reducing violence and militarism and to affirming the dignity of all people, including those from the LGBTQI community.

### **Our Assumptions about Racism**

1. Racism is inconsistent with our beliefs as people of faith and, as professed followers of Jesus, the work to eradicate it is not optional, but necessary. We are taught that all people are created in the image of our infinitely complex God, meaning that not only is each person precious, “wonderfully and fearfully made” as a reflection of his/her Maker (Psalm 139:14), but that in order to understand the fullness of God we must understand all of God’s people. By getting to know the other, we come to know better the Great Other who created and sustains us, whose own deep profundity is reflected in human diversity. Moreover, our teacher Jesus showed us through his example that a life lived according to the will of God requires one to reach out to those from other ethnic and racial communities with love and desire for their healing, while critiquing and seeking to dismantle the social, political, and economic systems of oppression that dehumanize them, as he did with the Samaritans of his day. The apostle Paul affirmed Jesus’s example in building the early Christian community – reminding us that in Christ Jesus we are all one (Galatians 3:28) and that true believers do not show favoritism toward certain people or groups (James 2:1-4). The work of freeing ourselves and others from the enslavement of racism and racist structures befits our God of liberation; we trust that the seemingly impossible work of liberation from systems of domination is possible so long as we follow the will of God in faith and with hope. We anticipate the deep joy this work of liberation brings.<sup>3</sup>

2. We live in a society in which racism is an organizing principle built into virtually every political, social, cultural, religious and economic structure and making it impossible for us to avoid its influence and effects.

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.ucc.org/justice\\_racism\\_racism-declared-sin](http://www.ucc.org/justice_racism_racism-declared-sin)

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3. The very founding of this church at the end of slavery highlights specific traumatic and formative ways in which racism and white privilege have impacted African-American people in the US, and have structured relations between black people and white people in this country for centuries. Given this and the continuing particularities of these relations both within our congregation and in our broader society, we especially seek to interrogate and impact these realities through our work. Yet, we acknowledge the varied ways in which racism impacts the lives of all people of color, the ways that people of color relate to those who share their racial identity as well as people of color of other races, and, finally, relationships between white people and people of color. Our work to confront racism and white privilege springs from this full understanding, even as we devote a particular focus to issues between black and white Americans. Ultimately, our struggle is to liberate all people of color and white people from the various manifestations of racism and white privilege.

4. When we speak of racism, we are not making judgments about the intentions or hearts of people involved. Rather, we are referencing an often invisible system of advantages and preferences attributed to white people to the detriment of people of color. These actions often take place unconsciously, invisible and reinforced by our political and economic structures. Further, the nature of white privilege also creates benefit and loss structures among people of color, based on a variety of factors that identify them as closer to or further from the white ideal.

5. Racism is not limited to individual discriminatory acts or behaviors. Racism implies the use of power to define, structure and control bodies and spaces. It is a major factor in regard to our nation's most pressing concerns, including criminal justice, public education and poverty.<sup>4</sup>

6. Racism is harmful to both white people and people of color. It has material, psychological, spiritual and sociological consequences for people of color while creating an undue sense of superiority within white people. Racism separates us from one another and creates deep spiritual wounds.

7. We recognize that people of color experience race differently based on a variety of other intersecting identity factors, including their particular racial identity, class, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability and even their skin color. Given this, our approach to confronting racism and white privilege within our church walls and outside them must account for these realities, without diluting our attention, however, on the continuing serious and difficult issues of racism.

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<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.ucc.org/justice\\_racism\\_intersections](http://www.ucc.org/justice_racism_intersections)

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## **How racism impacts us.**

Racism impacts us on several levels. This project seeks to address these concerns on three levels:

1. Interior – Our sense of self, our spirituality and understanding of God, and our personal relationships with others, familiar and unfamiliar, are all distorted by racism. How might brokenness, bigotry or the sin of racism be evident within us? What is the wholeness, freedom, reconciliation, and transformation we seek and are offered? What does it mean to be created in the image of God alongside others who are also the very image of God?

2. Internal -- At this level, we consider the way in which racism can be found in the practices, policies and structures of First Church. How might we change those practices, policies and structures to make them anti-racist and to make the church a just, safe space for people of color? We will engage questions of how we address these issues as we grow and change as a church.

3. External – Our work on racism extends beyond us as individuals and our church, but to our community. How will we impact and stand as witnesses against racism in our city, nation and world?

## **What we seek to accomplish from a focus on this issue.**

Here are four impacts our church can have as a predominantly white church focused on issues of anti-racism and white supremacy in 2017 and beyond:

1. **Break through the system of structured relations into which we are all socialized and which makes racial bias unconscious.**

The 2003 UCC resolution calling the UCC to be an anti-racist church has laid it out for us: *Racism is rooted in a belief of the superiority of whiteness and bestows benefits, unearned rights, rewards, opportunities, advantages, access, and privilege on Europeans and European descendants.*

We know this intellectually, but how deeply do we understand and feel it? How much does this knowledge truly affect how we are in the world? Dr. Robin Diangelo, a white person who writes and teaches about what it means to be white in a society that proclaims race meaningless, writes: *The two most effective beliefs that prevent us (whites) from seeing racism as a system are (1) that racists are bad people and (2) that racism is conscious dislike. If we are well-intended and do not consciously dislike*

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*people of color, we cannot be racist. ... However, when [we] understand racism as a system of structured relationships into which we are all socialized, [we] understand that intentions are irrelevant. Negative message about people of color circulate all around us. While having friends of color is better than not having them, it doesn't change the overall system or prevent racism from surfacing in our relationships. The societal default is white superiority and we are fed a steady diet of it 24/7. To not actively seek to interrupt racism is to internalize and accept it.*

### **2. Make the church a safe space for all people of color.**

White people's lives, the spaces where they live, and all of their experiences and current conditions are steeped in unearned privilege that is afforded them by their skin color. People of color don't have this same privilege. Further, there's a cash value to white privilege. For example, a recent study concludes that the average black family would need 228 years to build the wealth of a white family<sup>5</sup>. This is largely the result of governmental and business policies that have granted advantages to whites at the expense of blacks.<sup>6</sup>

This inequity cannot be relegated to days past. It continues today in myriad ways, including hiring practices, school funding and decision making and in the operation of the criminal justice system, social services system and other governmental entities that control resources, establish policies and determine the outcomes of disproportionate numbers of people of color.

If we assume white privilege is pervasive elsewhere, we must acknowledge its presence at First Church as well. As such, we must be intentional in identifying and destroying it. First Church's people of color affinity group is a safe space, and we must make sure that every setting within the church is safe and that people are able to participate in and

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<sup>5</sup> Institute for Policy Studies, August 8 2016, *Report: Ever-Growing Gap*

<sup>6</sup> Aside from slavery, examples include the Homestead Act, which provided land to white settlers and taught them to farm; the federal GI Bill, which disproportionately provided white war veterans with support to attend college; and federal housing loans, which helped white Americans build wealth in their homes and fueled the growth of suburbs. The result is that white families developed generations of wealth, while African Americans operated with limited access to opportunity. As the Institute for Policy Studies and the Corporation for Economic Development noted in the August 8, 2016 issue of *The Nation*, "it took 400 years of slavery, segregation, and institutionalized discrimination in the labor and housing markets to build the wealth gap that we see today." Although institutionalized discrimination manifests differently for other racial minorities, they, too, are impacted in far-reaching ways.

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assume leadership roles in all aspects of church life without regard to their racial identity. The result will be a church that is stronger because it truly draws on the unique skills, training, education and experiences of its entire body. As we work to eradicate white privilege and racism, we also tear down the walls that exist – sometimes invisibly - between people of all races, and between us and the fullness of God's creation.

**3. Create opportunities for white people to heal from racism and to open themselves up to full relationships with people of color in ways that allow people to experience each other's full humanity.**

The work of anti-racism is not only for the benefit of people of color. White people have as much -- if not more – to gain from these efforts. Some theorists have suggested that racism causes harm to the souls of white people as they take advantage of unearned privilege. Others have noted that white supremacy makes it difficult for white people to fully engage with people of color because they assume (often unconsciously) that people of color, their practices and beliefs are inherently inferior to their own.

We acknowledge that the work of anti-racism is difficult. It forces white people to confront the very cores of their being. It insists on discomfort. It sometimes propels people to repentance. We know that the way of the cross, following Jesus in doing what is right and life-giving, is challenging and sacrificial. Our commitment is to walk through this difficult process together as a community of people on a faith journey, trusting that this work will be redemptive and fulfilling, bringing us closer to God.

Many white people who have gone through white-privilege training note that they now see white privilege in places where they had taken things for granted. They find it painful, angering and, at times, overwhelming.

White privilege also has created an expectation among many people that they can learn about race only from people of color, which forces people of color into the uncomfortable, unfair and often unsafe position of serving as teacher. It is critically important that white people see themselves not as the standard, but as people who also have a race and that there is much they can learn about race by deeply considering their own experiences and by intentionally engaging with other white people. There is a role for conversations between white people and people of color together, but these conversations are effective only if each person brings his or her own awareness to the conversation.

**4. Act in the world to make society less racist and more just.**

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The 2003 UCC resolution includes the charge to do the interior *and* exterior work to dismantle racism in church *and* society:

*The reactions of people of color to racism are internalized through destructive patterns of feelings and behaviors impacting their physical, emotional and mental health and their spiritual and familial relationships.*

*Through institutionalized racism, laws, customs, traditions, and practices systematically foster inequalities.*

*The United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance affirmed that racism has historically through imperialism and colonization created an unequal world order and power balance with present global implications impacting governments, systems, and institutions.*

*The United States [found] itself in increased racial unrest during [the] period after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. New studies show that hate crimes and blatant acts of racial violence doubled in number during the last half of 2002....*

Since the UCC approved that resolution in 2003, racist and extremist acts have seemed to increase, despite (or because of) the 2008 election of President Obama. They have become even more pronounced since the most recent presidential campaign and the election of Donald Trump. The number of hate groups active in the U.S. grew to an all-time high of 1,018 in 2011, and has remained in that range (917 in 2016, including a big jump in anti-Muslim groups).<sup>7</sup> We have seen a rise in racist speech and language -- white supremacists have become more outspoken and visible with their violence. Throughout the summer of 2017, this was demonstrated not far from DC, as members of the Ku Klux Klan, professed Neo-Nazis, and white supremacists mobilized in multiple rallies in Charlottesville, VA.

Minority economic viability is decreasing and the gap in earnings is increasing. By 2043—the year in which it is projected that people of color will make up a majority of the U.S. population— the wealth divide between white families and Latino and black families will have doubled, on average, from about \$500,000 in 2013 to over \$1 million.<sup>8</sup> African Americans have yet to recover from the bust in the housing market to the same degree as whites, and public schools are becoming more segregated. Studies find that police estimate black children to be up to four years older than they are and are less

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<sup>7</sup> [Splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2017/year-hate-and-extremism](http://Splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2017/year-hate-and-extremism)

<sup>8</sup> Institute for Policy Studies

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likely to treat them like children as they would if they were white.<sup>9</sup> The rate of black people killed by police in the US is 2.5 times the rate of white people killed by police.<sup>10</sup> Our criminal justice continues to disparately impact people of color, particularly African Americans, and the current Presidential administration seeks a return to even more punitive penalties for drug crimes.

The Trump administration is restricting travel from certain Muslim countries, and it is harshly enforcing rules against undocumented immigrants, many of whom have been in the U.S. for decades. Voting rights are in peril, as states throughout the country implement restrictive voter identification laws, decrease access to early voting and gerrymander districts to limit the impact of black ballots.

Very simply, there is still much work to do, in 2017 and in the foreseeable future. Our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary provided us with an opportunity to reflect with pride and honesty on our founding and provided us with ethical grounding that will inform our future. Who do we want to be on our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary?

Although First Church's founders were abolitionists, many of them – like abolitionists more broadly -- stopped short of calling for racial equality. And while the congregation recommitted to working on racial justice after the early departure of its segregationist first pastor, First Church did not hire its first black full time professional staff member until 1969; he stayed just one year, and it wasn't until the 1980s that the staff was racially diverse again.

What does it mean to be a prophetic voice in 2017? Rather than pat ourselves on the back in 2017 for our 150 years of good intentions, we are called to push ourselves to discern, articulate, and act on what we need to do during the next 50 to 100 years to end racism in the church, community, and country. How wonderful if the First Church of 2065 were to look back and say of us, "they got it right."

### **Here are some recommendations for moving forward:**

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/03/black-boys-older.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> Per the database of counted police killings on [theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive](http://theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive), in 2015 7.69 blacks per million were killed, vs 2.95 whites per million. In 2016 the rate was 6.66 blacks per million vs 2.9 whites per million.

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1. Provide resources for the use of church members and friends to use as they are able:
  - o Publicize valuable news stories, interviews and podcasts that come to our attention.
  - o Establish a lending library of resources on racism and white privilege, accessible enough so that church members and friends would find it feasible to read on their own.
  - o Host a series of films that explore issues of race and encourage conversation among church members and friends.
  - o Develop a glossary of terms related to race and privilege to help ensure that we are all having the same conversation. This glossary should be available in written form and on the church website.
2. Sponsor conversations for the community beyond First Church:
  - o Respond nimbly to provide valuable opportunities that arise organically from events, such as the July 8, 2016 community conversation.
3. Advertise the church's priority on anti-racism.
  - o Celebrate racial diversity as a routine feature of the artwork displayed at First Church.
  - o Display prominently a message about the church's commitment (maybe a *BlackLivesMatter* banner<sup>11</sup>, maybe memorial signs about the history of the 10<sup>th</sup> and G site and the original workers whose labor built the church).
4. Prioritize the recognition of holidays and commemorations that are important to people of color and our shared history together, such as Black History Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month, Juneteenth and Asian-American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.
5. Plan and implement a series of conversations on race among church members and friends. These are difficult, but have proven to be impactful and transformative for other UCC faith communities. Support the continued work of

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<sup>11</sup> The Racial Justice Advocates for the Central Atlantic Conference designed a tee shirt for synod in 2017 to read "Black lives matter not because all lives matter; rather, no lives matter unless and until Black lives matter – understanding and, more important, internalizing this is what it means to live into the Beloved Community, to be truly members one of another."

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the People of Color Affinity Group on whatever trajectory that group decides. In addition, implement three sorts of simultaneous conversations, two focused on racial identities (one focused on white racial identity, one focused on people of color identities) and the third on interracial dialogue:

- o One or more groups for people of color to explore internalized racist oppression and how it has shaped individual and collective lives. Crossroads Anti-racism Organizing & Training, which has been providing consulting services for 30 years to dismantle racism, helps explain the urgent need for this group: Internalized racist oppression is a complex, multi-generational socialization process in which people of color accept, believe, and live out negative societal definitions. Part of the work of this group is to look deeply at behaviors and beliefs to identify their toxicity and work toward new, life-giving behaviors.
  - o Continue to support discussion groups that focus on white privilege, such as the one undertaken in summer 2017. This group provides a place where white people can explore their sense of whiteness and acknowledge the ways in which they benefit from white privilege. Crossroads provides insight here, as well: Internalized racist superiority is, like internalized racist oppression, a complex, multi-generational socialization process that teaches white people to believe, accept, and live out superior societal definitions of self. The resulting behaviors define and normalize the race construct and its outcome: white supremacy. When whites actively grapple with internalized racist superiority together, they might better identify (recognize and feel) the power of racism and its shaping of identity. The UCC curriculum released in late 2016 has recently been augmented with guides for using the curriculum, and is useful here.
  - o Initiate a third, interracial discussion group. We are exploring various modes in an effort to discern the best way to do this (e.g., how to compose the group, the size of the group, frequency of meetings, etc.).
6. Review First Church's organizational policies to identify and address unconscious systematic racism.
- o Personnel and lay leadership -- One way to address racism and white privilege within our church is to be intentional about our hiring decisions and when selecting people for lay leadership. This is particularly relevant to First Church as we move toward selecting a new settled pastor to join

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the congregation in 2018. A resolution approved at the June 2016 meeting of the Central Atlantic Conference calls for congregations of the Conference to heed this call [to a policy of affirmative action in the pastoral search and call process] not only by eliminating explicit and implicit policies and procedures that exclude candidates to such positions on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and gender identity and expression, but also – and perhaps more importantly – by implementing policies and procedures, including statements in their church profiles, that welcome and include the widest diversity of candidates as possible. This effort would most appropriately be organized by the Personnel Committee, with oversight by the Church Council.

- o Operations – By foregrounding a focus on anti-racism, particularly institutional racism, all commissions and committees should be intentional in confronting/challenging their usual way of doing things and making decisions, in partnership with appropriate staff. For example, the Christian Education Commission and the Minister of Faith Formation should review practices around recruiting Sunday School teachers and curricula to ensure that they reflect the church's commitment to be anti-racist. The Facilities Commission and Building Manager should review their policies around building usage and discounts to reflect this commitment, in collaboration with the Social Action and Awareness Commission and the Minister of Justice Formation. The Worship Commission, working with the Senior Minister and Music Director, should continue to address the church liturgy so as to intentionally and organically include the worship practices of minority groups. Finally, the church's proposed budget should be analyzed with an eye toward racism before it is finalized.

In making this commitment to focus on learning about, combating and eradicating white privilege on the interior, internal and external levels, First Church is coming full circle to its founding. We are affirming that the way that things are today is not the way that they must be and that we, as people of faith and as members of this society, have an important role to play in changing them. This work will at times be difficult, but in the process, we will learn about ourselves, each other, and God. This is work that will transform us and our church closer to the people and the beloved community God calls us to be, and help us to leave a legacy that will inspire pride in generations to come.