

Statement on Racial Justice

Dear St. Thomas Family,

In each gospel, Jesus Christ calls us to “love our neighbor as ourselves.” We confess and lament together that we have not done that fully. We have loved ourselves more than our neighbors. As we witness the demonstrations and protests over the past several weeks in our community and around the world, the session of St. Thomas seeks to lead the congregation in solidarity for equal rights for all of God’s beloved children.

We recognize that we are a congregation that is predominantly white, but we are not solely that. We are a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-generational congregation. Therefore, we seek to better love and understand our neighbors through our diversity, because we are all made in the image of God.

Our mission statement is “To welcome all, serve our neighbor, and grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.” It is this mission that will guide us as we move forward in this journey. To that end, we plan to enact the following steps to address racial equality in our congregation and in our community.

Welcome All:

- We will form several book studies this summer to discuss and learn about our own privilege, biases, and systemic racism.
- We will form an intentional task force within our congregation to look at and change the systems in our church that may be biased, unjust, or unwelcoming.
- We will continue to look for ways to make our worship more welcoming, inclusive, and just.

Serve our Neighbor:

- We will strengthen current partnerships and seek out and partner with additional organizations in our community that work and minister with communities of color in our Greater Houston Community. We will give our time, talents, and treasures to these partnerships.

Grow in Relationship with Jesus Christ:

- We will do this by listening to Christ in those around us. This will include listening and educating ourselves on the causes, policies, and effects of racism that keep us from further exhibiting the Kingdom of God to the world.
- Our ministers will seek to use the pulpit to connect the gospel lessons each week to help us discover how to be better disciples that confront and dismantle the biases in our own lives.

As the leaders of this congregation, we take up the responsibility to journey alongside each member of our community in this endeavor. We know that the long struggle for equal rights will not end overnight. We also know that along our journey there will be mistakes, awkward questions, and moments of tension. Yet, we believe that God has called the church to the ministry of reconciliation, justice, and love.

It is our hope that our work will help us, as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, bend the moral arc of the universe towards justice. It is our prayer that you will come alongside us in this journey as we seek still a more excellent way for all of God’s beloved children.

Yours in Christ,

The Ministers & 2020 Session of St. Thomas Presbyterian Church

Dear St. Thomas Family,

On June 24th the ministers and session released a statement on racial justice. At that time, we formed an intentional task force within our congregation to look at ways to change the systems in our church that may be biased, unjust or unwelcoming. Currently that task force has seven members: Jonathan Britt, Kaitlyn Chaballa, Sheri DeGrace, Linda Doolittle, Jim Elmore, Nora Fitch, and Petie Meyer.

As 2020 comes to a close we recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done. We would, however, like to share what has been done in the short 6 months since releasing the statement.

- We formed several book studies from summer through the fall that dealt with Black issues. In these monthly book reviews, we have discussed and learned about privilege, biases and systemic racism.
- Jonathan has provided resource materials in the Weekly Word to help spread awareness and encourage all members of our congregation to get educated on these issues.
- We have provided videos for the "Time for Reflection" during session meetings, so all of the leaders in our church better understand our neighbors through our diversity.
- We are in the process of adding a section on Racial Justice in the St. Thomas library. The books have been purchased and will be available for check-out soon.
- Jonathan and Nora are continuing to look for new ways to connect the gospel lessons each week to help us discover how to be better disciples that confront and dismantle the biases in our own lives.
- In January we will begin a special book study on The Color of Compromise that will look at the church's role in racial injustice from colonial times through the present day. We hope this study will help our church community better understand the causes, policies, and effects of racism that keep us from further exhibiting the Kingdom of God to the world.

Our plan for the upcoming year is to look for ways to make our worship more welcoming, inclusive and just. We will also seek out and partner with additional organizations in our community that work and minister with communities of color in our Greater Houston Community. We will give our time, talents, and treasures to these partnerships in the upcoming year.

We will continue to make mistakes, ask awkward questions, and encounter moments of tension. But we believe God has called the church to the ministry of reconciliation, justice, and love. "The only way you really see change, is by helping create it" – Lena Waithe.

Yours in Christ,
Racial Justice Task Force