



SECOND
Baptist Church
DOWNTOWN

Convictions and Beliefs on Systemic Racism

Convictions

Second Baptist Church in Downtown Little Rock (2BC) is a community of people who have experienced the immeasurable and transformative love of God, the illimitable forgiveness and patience of God, and the life-giving peace and truth of God. As we have received these gifts from God for ourselves, we also feel compelled to share them with our neighbors, especially in this difficult season.

2BC has a long history of work and advocacy towards racial justice and inclusion. This history, motivated by God's love for all creation, compels us to act and speak when the times reveal injustice and oppression.

Today, we stand in solidarity with the cries of anguish and pain from Black people, cries that can be heard down through the centuries. We believe racism is absolutely antithetical to the Christian faith and an abomination to God, who created all people in wondrous diversity, with each person bearing the image of God. We believe racism destroys the peace for which God longs for all creation. Racism demeans that which God exalts and exalts that which God demeans.

Therefore, we are striving to avoid "colorblindness," which turns a blind eye towards the unique experience of Black people, as well as the manifold ways all people of color continue to be oppressed in this country. Colorblindness lacks the acute awareness necessary to address the specifically racialized disparities that plague our nation. In fact, colorblindness perpetuates them by ignoring the particularities of history that shaped this moment in time.

We have learned that racism isn't just vile behavior from bad actors, but an evil script that asks all people to play dehumanizing roles. It distorts everything involved. Racism is not merely interpersonal, but systemic, social, and political. Therefore, while our church is committed to eradicating racist notions that live in the depths of individual hearts, souls, and minds, we are also committed to addressing it at the systemic, social, and public levels.

We understand white supremacy, the root of racial injustice, to be the foundational injustice and original sin of our country. White supremacy is the ideology of racial hierarchy born out of historical European domination that drives the system of white superiority, power, and control in our country. This ideology is often unconscious and impacts class and social status for whites and people of color. It is the sin into which we were all born. Today, sharp discrepancies in health care, criminal justice, education, and many

other fields bear witness to the fundamental evil of racism. Name your injustice and racism has played a vital role in shaping it. If we can achieve racial justice, so many other social ills will be addressed in the process.

We have approached racial injustice with a spirit of humility, seeking to learn from our Black neighbors and standing in solidarity with them. We have also engaged this work with a spirit of repentance, recognizing our sins of silence, sins of active and passive complicity, sins of systemic sanction, and manifold microaggressions. We repent of these sins. Furthermore, we recognize that repentance isn't just remorse, but renewal; not just contrition, but correction. Therefore, we recommit ourselves to making right and just what has for too long been wrong and unjust. We also believe that repentance is the duty, not just of individuals, but of communities and states, in particular when the sins were committed by those same communities and states.

The prophet Micah proclaims that what God really requires of us is to "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God" (6.8). Justice isn't a sidepiece or appendage to the Christian journey, but an inextricable centerpiece of it. In our view, justice means fairness, equity, and healing. It makes communities whole ("shalom") for all who inhabit them, with a primary concern for those who are vulnerable and marginalized. Justice doesn't just punish bad behavior, it corrects and heals it, while also addressing systems that perpetuate it.

One of the ways we feel called to do justice is through advocacy. To advocate, as the word indicates, means to "add voice" to those who are hurting. Doing so summons us to stand in the great prophetic tradition of the Scriptures and the Christian church. We cannot and are not suggesting that we can make the changes called for below on our own, but are adding our voice and support, calling for changes to be made by policy makers and those with the power and means to do so. These statements are compelled by the love of Christ to stand in solidarity with those in pain and "give voice" with them. And while we do not have all the answers to the issues mentioned below, we do see them as wounds in need of healing.

We are calling ourselves and all people of good will, not to do the bare and carefully calculated minimum that keeps the peace, but the loving and liberating maximum that actually makes peace. We are calling ourselves, other faith leaders and faith communities, our elected leaders, economic and corporate leaders, our law enforcement officials, our criminal justice officials, our local and state legislators, and all people who care about peace and justice to higher and holier ground, where each and all life is treasured and can flourish.



Beliefs

The guiding convictions, faith-based virtues, and gospel mandates mentioned above compel us to offer the following beliefs and resolutions.

Ecclesial Reforms

As a historically and predominantly white church, we recognize the complicity of white churches in the creation and perpetuation of unjust systems. We recognize how the Scriptures were twisted and the faith itself distorted to justify racism in all its forms. And while the church of Jesus Christ should have confronted this grave injustice, we too often perpetuated and supported it.

2BC confesses the sins of our own history in this regard, repents of them, and seeks to work towards redemption, healing, and wholeness for ourselves and for our community. We also intend to couple our remorse and confession with these resolutions:

- Whereas racism is an ongoing reality, we pledge to have a consistent posture of ongoing learning, repentance, and correction. For too long, whiteness- and not the Kingdom of God- has been the default and orienting culture of the white church.
- Whereas racism is antithetical to the way of Jesus and the primal injustice of our time, we pledge to make anti-racism an explicit aspect of our discipleship as a congregation.
- Whereas we are called to speak the truth in love, we will seek to address racism in all its forms in our policies, practices, teaching and proclamation (including the pulpit). Because racism is systemic in our day, we will speak to systemic and public injustice as well as personal sins.
- Whereas Christianity in our country has largely centered the white experience, we will seek to listen to the voice of people of color. We will read books written by people of color. We will learn from theologians and public thinkers of color. We will be students of the Black church.
- Whereas racism has shaped our history in so many ways, we will seek to learn and to tell the true history of our church, city, county, and nation. We encourage other churches to do the same.

Civic Reforms

Whereas confederate monuments were erected to reinforce racial hierarchies rather than educate the masses and whereas they perpetuate mythology rather than history, we are resolved to support the removal of confederate statues from public property.

Whereas the Arkansas state flag has one star dedicated to the confederacy, situated above the other stars, we are resolved to support the changing of the meaning of that star (as suggested in HB 1736 in 2019) or reimagining the flag altogether.

Whereas our state needs a populace that is culturally and historically competent, we are resolved to support the establishment of mandatory African American history in school curricula statewide.

[Justice System Reforms](#)

Today, mass incarceration is functioning in much the same way that slavery did at the beginning of the Civil War. It is destroying the Black community, is focused on punishment rather than restoration, and leaves little room for redemption. Incarceration rates have risen some 700% since 1970, and while the US contains 5% of the world's population, we contain 25% of its incarcerated people. There are more African American men in prison today than were enslaved at the beginning of the Civil War. This must change.

- Because we believe that the Gospel of Jesus releases captives rather than perpetuates their captivity, we believe that the criminal justice system needs a massive repurposing. The question, "How can something be punished?" is much different than the question, "How can something be healed?" The Way of Jesus demands we ask the second question and be about the way of healing.
- While "law and order" is something of a political trope in our day, those who espouse it should be the most ardent advocates of ensuring that the laws are moral and the order is just. To espouse "law and order" while being dismissive about the morality of the laws and the rightness of the order creates an atmosphere of oppression, which is all the more insidious because it is covert and legally sanctioned. As Christ followers, we acknowledge a higher law and order altogether, and we are committed to making the laws more moral and "the order" more just. We are resolved to do so in the following ways:
 - Because Arkansas is one of a few states without hate crime legislation, we are resolved to see a hate crime bill passed in our state. This hate crime bill should include LGBT brothers and sisters. We applaud state leaders who have pledged support for such a bill.
 - Seeing that the death penalty contradicts the way of Jesus which calls us to life and not death and seeing that it is practiced arbitrarily, with a demonstrable racial bias against African Americans in terms of both perpetrators and victims, we call for the end of the death penalty in the state of Arkansas and at the Federal level.
 - Because public defenders' offices are extremely underfunded, especially when compared to public prosecutors, we will advocate for an increase in funding for public defenders. The legal notion of "equal justice under the law" carries little weight when the quality of your defense is tied to the depths of your pockets.

- Because the goal is to correct behavior and not just to punish, we want to seek practices that decrease recidivism rates. The ultimate goal of our criminal justice system should be restorative, not merely punitive. These practices might include job/trade training, counseling services, addiction services, and re-entry support.
- Because imprisonment can be used as a way of marginalizing votes and voters, voting rights should be restored to ex-Felons upon the completion of their sentence.
- Because no one should make a profit off of someone else's incarceration and because the goal is to disincentivize incarceration rather than incentivize it, we call for an end to for-profit prisons. For-profit prisons commodify the justice process and turn people into customers. This contradicts the highest aims and most noble virtues of our justice system.

[Community Safety and Policing Reforms](#)

Whereas police are intended to be forces of peace and not violence, we are resolved to see that the police are peace officers within a community rather than authoritarians over the community. We desire for the policing mantra, "To serve and protect" to hold true on every street and in every community. This demands *a responsibility from* the police commensurate with the *authority held by* the police. It also demands a responsibility from all citizens to recognize all of our responsibility in the way we ensure the safety of our communities. Because we have slashed mental health services, criminalized addictive processes, underfunded public schools, and left communities of generational poverty on their own, the results have spilled onto our streets and have fallen to the police. These social problems demand creative reforms from ALL of us, not just police.

We see officers of goodwill who, at great sacrifice to themselves, serve their communities with valor and dignity, save lives, and seek to protect and serve ALL people in their communities. We see officers and entire departments who have already begun implementing and/or practicing these reforms, which in no way denigrate or dishonor those officers who are already practicing just policing. What these recommendations *are* intended to do is build trust between just police departments and communities of color. Lack of trust and perpetual suspicion, rooted in historical realities which have had a disproportionate and destructive effect on communities of color, can only be healed with just, accountable, peaceful, transparent, and community-oriented policing. Everyone, including both communities of color and police officers, is impaired when trust is absent.

Whereas trust is paramount to just policing, towards that end we resolve to hold these positions and/or advocate for these changes.

- We applaud the actions of law enforcement officials who have instituted mandatory intervention policies, so that the integrity of the department is the responsibility of the entire department and encourage other departments to consider the same.

- We recognize our city leadership in prohibiting the practice of no-knock warrants, which have proven deadly, costly, and immoral.
- We applaud the actions of city leaders in ending the practice of chokeholds and strangleholds and we encourage other departments to do the same.
- We call for the implementation of regular, ongoing, and standardized training in cultural competence and de-escalation tactics.
- As a matter of trust and transparency, we encourage all departments to equip every officer with body cameras.
- We encourage the resourcing of communities and police departments with mental health professionals, social workers, and addictive process professionals so that the solutions match the real needs. We must fund mental health, social work, and addictive process experts. Problems we refuse to address in our city, state, and federal budgets all too often end up on our streets, where confronted by the police. Mental health and addiction problems should be met with mental health and addiction solutions and with the people with thorough training and vocational expertise in meeting them. The presence of resource officers within schools should be evaluated through this same prism of mental health services.
- We applaud the city of Little Rock for creating both a Citizen Review Board and an Independent Review Committee. We encourage these practices in every community to review the practices and policies of each department and each officer within the department. These reviews should include the identification and prohibition of any racial profiling biases within the department.
- We encourage police departments to review their “use of force” protocols annually, to ensure the most just and peaceful practices, and the use of force only when absolutely necessary, with the highest aim always being the preservation of life.

[Social Reforms](#)

Societies and their citizens exist in a synergistic relationship. Societies shape people even as people shape societies. Therefore, we are calling for BOTH a personal renewal of our souls and a revisioning of our society. From our spirit of sorrow and repentance, we pledge our support and assistance in creating a public life woven from the threads of justice, equity, and love.

- Whereas the biblical notion of repentance- as illustrated in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19.1-9)- involves correction and not just contrition, restitution instead of merely remorse, we ask our state legislators to begin working with the Black Legislative Caucus to study and recommend a course for reparations for the state of Arkansas.
- We encourage our state leaders to return school districts- including the Little Rock School District- to the local control of duly elected school boards. Furthermore, we encourage legislators to find ways to equalize resources for all traditional public schools so that ALL students have access to high quality education.

- With the utmost intention, we recommend that state, county, and city leaders diversify cabinets and boards because representation matters.
- In an effort to avoid voter suppression and ensure participatory elections, we ask election officials and county clerks to enable and encourage mail-in ballots, especially when citizens find themselves amidst a deadly pandemic. We also ask for easier access to polls in communities of color and adequate voter education and information.
- We encourage health care agencies and departments of health to address the health care disparities faced by people of color and seek ways to correct them. Some examples of this work might include establishing health clinics in communities of color, providing transportation to clinics or hospitals, increasing Covid-19 testing in the same communities, and generally making healthcare more accessible for all.

These recommendations are hardly exhaustive and we will seek to update them over the course of time as we continue to learn, listen, pray, and study through these matters. When we do fail, we will confess and make it right, but when we fail, we intend to do so in the direction of justice.

While we will applaud any step towards justice and any political, ecclesial, or civic leader who takes such steps, we want to be clear that this is no time for incremental baby steps. This is a time for large strides towards equity. We do not long for a justice that merely trickles down. Like the prophet Amos, we pray for justice to flow like mighty waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. We intend to be about that work as a congregation, and we ask our leaders, at every level of our society, to join us as we intend to join leaders of color and other people of goodwill who have long been engaged with this work. This will be our primary prism for evaluating the work of our elected leaders and holding them accountable, and this will be the prism by which we hold ourselves accountable also.

To that end, these resolutions are offered in conjunction with the announcement of a 2BC Advocacy Task Force who will continue this work through educating the people of 2BC, bearing public witness towards justice and against injustice, and furthering this missional charge to 2BC. We are resolved to find our place in this work, not just make vaporous statements. And while we cannot do everything, not even everything in this statement, we hope to build partnerships and alliances that empower us to move together in the direction of wholeness, beauty, and truth. This work will outlive us, but we have no intentions of outliving it.

We are standing with both feet on the Way of Jesus, with visions of beloved community before us, and the wisdom of our ancestors behind us, clear-eyed and strong willed. We have counted the cost of this work, but we have also observed the price of not doing it. We see that price illustrated in daily newspaper headlines, ongoing unrest and agony, and centuries-old oppression. And so, we raise our voices today in opposition to racism in its personal, systemic, economic, religious, and political forms, while also raising our voices- and our lives- in the name of justice, peace, and love.