

Title: Recommendations of the Task Force on Eliminating Racist Language from Governing Documents

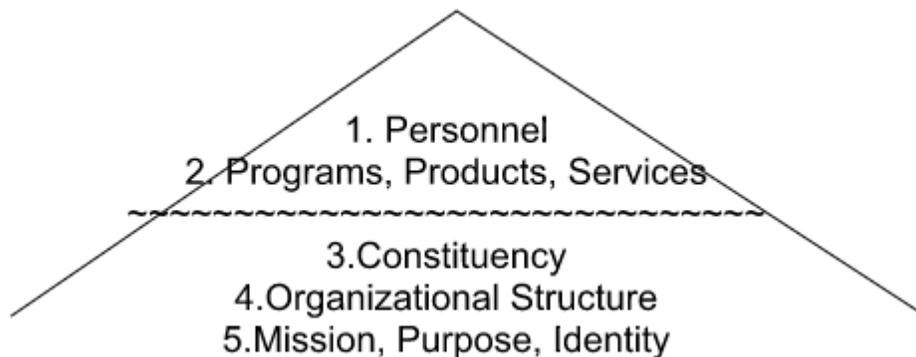
Origin: Racist Language Audit Task Force - Submitted April 18, 2016

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The primary task of this task force as stated in GA 1328 was “to identify any instance of racist language in the governing documents of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada¹ and to recommend to the 2014 General Board the removal of any such language.” The other primary purpose of the resolution (although not of this task force) was “that the 2013 General Assembly encourage pro-reconciliation/anti-racism teams of general ministries, institutions of higher education, regions, and congregations to review the governing documents of their respective ministries if such action has not already been completed.”

Institutional Racism: a framework

By means of background, it is important to remember the section of the Disciples of Christ two-day anti-racism training that focuses on institutional racism. It reminds us that “The purpose of an institution is to serve and to be accountable, both to its immediate constituency and to the larger community.” The training notes the following levels of institutional life:



Racism can manifest in each of those levels (hiring practices and treatment of staff, access to programs or who they are geared to, focusing on one constituency over another, the ways decisions get made that perpetuate white privilege or white supremacy, and finally the founding documents that shape the other four aspects of organizational life). As the training reminds us, “Institutions often turn their

¹ The Design, the Merger Agreements, and the Special Rules and Standing Rules of the General Assembly

purpose around, and act as if people (particularly people of color) exist to serve the institution, rather than the institution existing to serve people.” Part of the purpose of anti-racism in the Disciples of Christ is to make sure our institution is serving all of its people and enhancing our work of building together the Beloved Community. The anti-racism training we bring also argues that those foundational documents are least likely to be reflected on through an anti-racism analysis and so shapes us in unspoken and unconscious ways, perpetuating systemic racism that permeates upward into our procedures, who we listen to in shaping our priorities, whose cultural lens shapes our services, and how we navigate staffing issues.² Therefore, while some of this document may seem removed from the practical issues of addressing systemic racism and white supremacy,³ these foundational documents need to be addressed in order to positively affect the other levels of institutional life in the church.

Most importantly, it is important to remember that *our choices as a church are not between being racist and being non-racist*. On their face, our foundational documents do not by and large include explicit and obvious racism. *Our choices are between being racist and being anti-racist*. Insofar as our documents are not explicit in their commitment to anti-racism, they uphold racism (race prejudice + misuse of power by systems and institutions). Insofar as our documents center whiteness or treat whiteness as normative and treat communities of color as additional to the rest of the church, they uphold racism. Insofar as our documents are not explicit in their accountability to anti-racist communities of color, they uphold racism. As a church committed to serving all of God’s children, this is the project our task force set out to address.

Overall observations and recommendations from the task force

Before providing a few limited recommendations on the named documents (as well as the Hispanic ministries agreement, NAPAD agreement and New Ordering of Ministry to create a more holistic approach), the task force would like to offer the following observations and recommendations to the General Board:

- While it is necessary to look at foundational documents, it is also necessary to look at behavioral documents (procedural, order of operations, personnel documents, process for standing, etc) along the same lines:

² A small illustration: While the task force did not look at our denomination’s mission statement, even a beloved statement like “from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth” centers Disciples and potentially the United States and Canada, for example, which is antithetical to how we understand ourselves in our global ministries and hopefully in our domestic ministries. Left unexamined, this type of foundational statement can affect the way we engage both local and global ministry work, with us as subjects and others as objects, rather than recognizing God’s work in the space between each of us and others, with God’s transformative work changing us as well as those in whom we enter into relationship as Disciples of Christ. This statement is echoed in our Design and throughout the denomination.

³ Anti-racism essayist Tim Wise defines systemic racism and white supremacy in the following way: “As a system, racism is an institutional arrangement, maintained by policies, practices and procedures — both formal and informal — in which some persons typically have more or less opportunity than others, and in which such persons receive better or worse treatment than others, because of their respective racial identities. Additionally, institutional racism involves denying persons opportunities, rewards, or various benefits on the basis of race, to which those individuals are otherwise entitled. In short, racism is a system of inequality, based on race.... White supremacy is the operationalized form of racism in the United States and throughout the Western world. Racism is like the generic product name, while white supremacy is the leading brand, with far and away the greatest market share.” <http://www.timwise.org/f-a-q-s/>

- how are they practicing anti-racism values?
- how are they accountable to communities of color in concrete ways?
- how are they de-centering whiteness, etc?
- Where much of the work of the church is implemented is in things like personnel codes, standing, congregational placement, etc. we call on the church in its general unit and regional expressions to go through an anti-racism audit of their documents. Several anti-racism teams are trained in this, and Reconciliation Ministries can serve a role in connecting organizations to anti-racism auditors.
- Part of our task force's most important learning is that different racial-ethnic communities may have different needs, different languages and different ways of understanding the denominational structure in which they participate. There might not be consensus within or among communities of color regarding a specific language that conveys anti-racism, and therefore evaluating these documents will require more expansive conversation with broad intersections of our denomination's communities of color. Anti-racism analysis of these documents requires the ability to recognize diversity of perspectives and to work to make these documents honor that diversity, which simultaneously avoids the error of implying one normative white perspective.
- This report is not about the intent of the documents' writers, whom we value and appreciate. It is about working to make our church ever more responsive to God's call for a Beloved Community, which requires accountability and concrete action related to anti-oppression. This means intentionally, regularly evaluating how both our practices and our governing documents could be more pro-reconciling and more anti-oppressive as we grow closer to the Beloved Community collectively.

The questions that task force members brought to evaluating the governing documents of the church were as follows (based on the second level, or “application” training we received from Disciples anti-racism trainers Chris Hobgood, Martha Herrin and Marcus Leathers)⁴:

- 1) Individually, who benefits from this as it is written?
- 2) Individually, who is hurt by this as it is written?
- 3) How does this current structure keep all of us from being whole /who God intended us to be
- 4) How does the current structure benefit the culture of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)? (and what is that culture, and how was it formed?)
- 5) Whose culture is destroyed, distorted, discounted and discredited?
- 6) How does this misshaping of the cultural identity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) keep us from being a movement for wholeness?
- 7) How does the institution, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), benefit from the current structure?
- 8) To whom is this current structure not accountable?
- 9) How does this current structure diminish the church carrying out her mission?

Recommendations for the Design:

It is surprising that the 2013 revision of the Design is not explicit about our intention to become an anti-

⁴ For people who have been through the introductory two-day anti-racism, training, note that the first three questions address individual expressions of racism, questions 4-6 address cultural racism and 7-9 address institutional racism.

racist church. Some recommendations:

- The **intention of working for reconciliation across racial and ethnic lines should be included** as one of the rights and responsibilities of congregations in **Paragraph 12**. Facilitation of this goal should be included as a Regional responsibility in **Paragraphs 22-25**. For example, Regions should be encouraged to maintain a PR/AR Team and provide training as part of on-going clergy ethics training as well as to congregations who seek it.
- In Item 14, there has been much discussion within the church about the financial burden of General Assembly that unintentionally excludes people with limited means, including immigrant communities, communities of color, and other people facing financial struggle. **We recommend that an anti-racism lens be brought to how the democratic process of General Assembly is affected by lack of participation from poor communities and clergy including communities and clergy of color.** (This might ultimately show up in the Design as “recognizing our commitment to incorporating the gifts, voice and vote of our diverse church, our voting process shall be....” and then include the inclusive strategy that results from this conversation.)
- Paragraph 31 might include a line “Regions are encouraged to use current Disciples search processes and safeguards so that all qualified ministers might be considered **and so that the whole church’s commitment to being a pro-reconciling/anti-racism body can be fully honored in every region.**” (This recommendation stems from the belief that anti-racism training is not just to increase the likelihood of a person of color being given fair opportunity but that the culture of anti-racism will become more intentionally part of the life of the region through the search process and beyond.)
- **Attention to racial/ethnic representation could be added** in to requirements of age, gender, and clergy/lay diversity. For example in **Paragraphs 38b, 48d, 80**.
- Paragraph 41 might consider explicitly naming racial inclusion in tandem with ecumenical and church unity as priorities of the General Board. (This is already in practice the case and has been for a couple of decades both within Reconciliation and Council on Christian Unity.)
- Paragraph 48e: This is not a firm recommendation but an observation that within many anti-racism circles, there is some critique of Robert’s Rules of Order as a means of maintaining the status quo and perpetuating white privilege. We are not aware of any bodies the size of the General Assembly successfully utilizing other decision-making models, and all models run the risk of being co-opted for the purposes of preserving white privilege, but we want to acknowledge the weakness of this model in the hopes that it might be discussed more fully by the General Board as it discerns its own models for decision-making.
- Paragraph 51a might make explicit mention of commitment to all racial and ethnic communities within the church.
- In re: Paragraph 69, some of the leadership of Obra Hispana prefer the language “specialized ministry” as opposed to “racial/ethnic ministry.” We encourage the General Board to have more conversation with a wide intersection of communities of color within the church around this language and also to consider who else might get included either explicitly or implicitly with the language of “specialized ministry,” including some of the non-race-specific ministries of the church like GLAD, DPF, DJAN and so forth. This is also a paragraph where the question of accountability to communities of color arises; who is responsible for making sure that these ministries are integrated into the life of the church?
- **Paragraph 71** deals with the calling of general ministry staff. We recommend including an expectation that if any such persons have not had PR/AR training, **that such training be provided** within a year of the start of employment.
- **Paragraph 79** deals with 'structural reform.' We recommend that any decision about such

reform should take into account the implications for our ethnic clergy and congregations.

Observations regarding Policies and Criteria:

- For most clergy, ordained or commissioned, there is some parallel Regional document that is more specifically pertinent to what happens to those persons. We recommend **Regions engage in an audit** of their own documents on policies and criteria, looking for ways in which their policies might need to be made more inclusive.
- In order to be a fully inclusive church, we recommend **provision of translation services** for those clergy for whom the English language may be challenging. This seems especially important in experiences dealing with Committees on Ministry and questions of ordination or maintenance of standing, both at the regional and general expressions.

Recommendations regarding Standing Rules for the General Board

The Disciples of Christ, if its racial/ethnic makeup is similar to its sister denomination the United Church of Christ or the Presbyterian Church (USA), is approximately 85-90% White. (See Pew Research chart from 2014 on final page of this report.) Our proud frontier tradition has come at a cost to our ability to be truly the Beloved Community. In order to shape a future different than our present (in a nation that will be more than half people of color by the year 2042 and is already more than half people of color in the state of California), **we would like to propose greater diversity in our general board leadership than the 30% currently required in the 2009 GA resolution, including the request that regions be intentional about racial/ethnic representation in who they appoint to the General Board. We recommend that number be discussed by the General Board and racial/ethnic ministry boards with a proposal to come at the 2017 General Assembly.**

If the General Nominating Committee nominates a candidate from a racial/ethnic ministry to the General Board, the executive of that racial/ethnic ministry should be notified and his/her concerns should be taken into account. If that person is not active in the racial/ethnic ministry, s/he should be strongly encouraged to develop a relationship with that ministry during his/her tenure. (We also informally suggest that the executive should share with board members from racial/ethnic groups their own ministry's hopes and challenges so that those members can adequately advocate for communities of color.)

We recommend that racial/ethnic diversity on general board committees also be an explicit commitment, including the administrative committee, and that racial diversity be a requirement on all search committees, with input from racial/ethnic executives.

We recommend that the General Board propose a date by which simultaneous translation would become a standard part of Board meetings to remove the barrier to participation that is experienced by many gifted Disciples leaders for whom English is not their primary language, recognizing that a budget will need to be built towards that goal.

Finally, we would like to recommend that the Administrative Committee, which reviews practices related to human resources for OGMP, participate in an anti-racism audit of the OGMP's human resources process and that the OGMP do the same for the human resources processes it reviews.

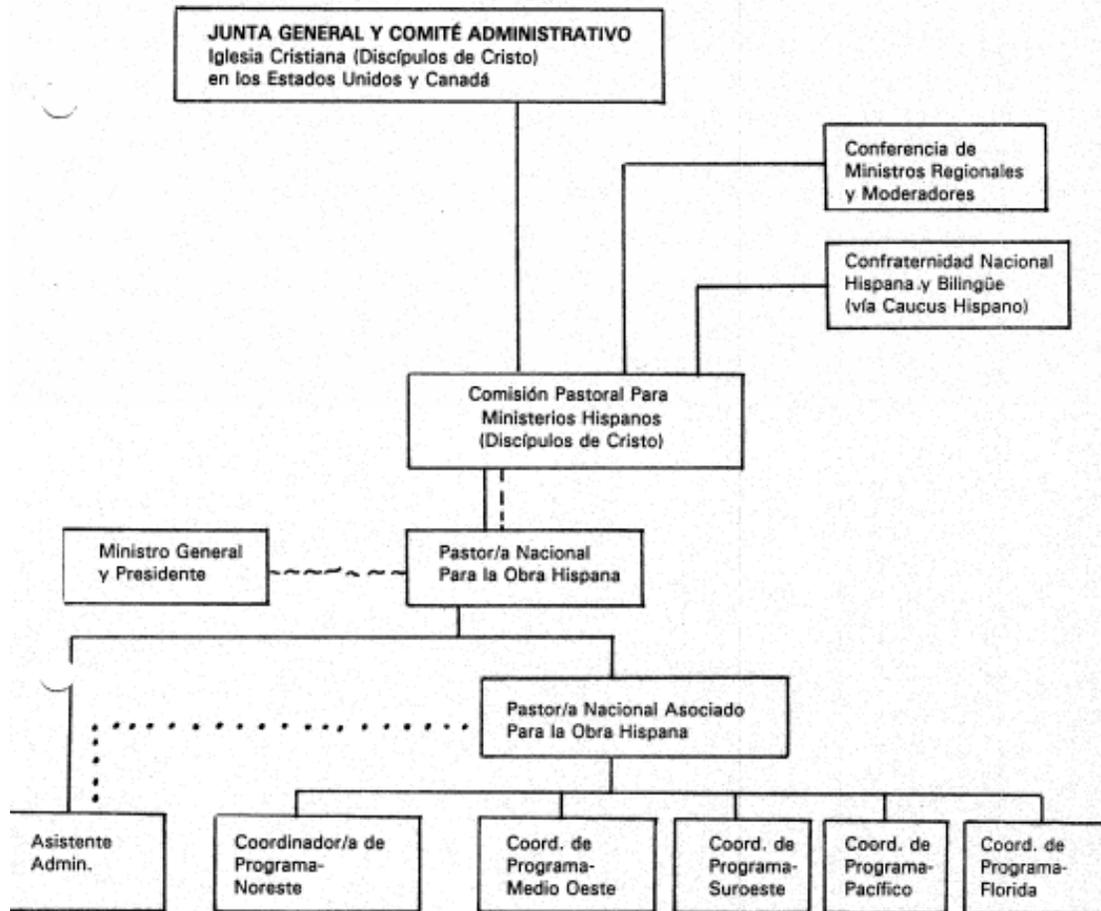
Recommendations related to accountability documents related to racial/ethnic ministries

MERGER AGREEMENT

The task force read the 1960 and 1969 documents regarding the merger of the predominantly African American National Christian Missionary Convention and the predominantly White United Christian Missionary Society. We also received the 2003 documents regarding the re-evaluation of staffing and decision making between National Convocation and Disciples Homeland Ministries in 2003. These documents were explicit in their expectations regarding Black leadership both in staffing and in positions on policy making boards throughout the “national brotherhood agencies.”

HISPANIC AGREEMENT

As far as the Hispanic Agreement with the general church is concerned, the two guiding documents we had available to us were a history of Hispanic churches within the Disciples of Christ written by David Vargas and published by Chalice Press in 1981 and a Spanish language document called Proyecto written in 1992 by the newly formed Convencion. This second document laid out Hispanic Ministries’ understanding of their mission and their commitment to remaining in relationship with the General Assembly of the Christian Church with autonomy for the Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries. It included a chart laying out a formal structure of communication:



Símbolos

— Relación directa/permanente de supervisión y cumplimiento de deberes.

- - - En consulta/coordinación con...

----- Relación permanente para el establecimiento de la política misión de la Oficina Pastoral Central, nombramiento y despido de personal, aprobación de programas y directrices de trabajo y evaluación.

..... Relación directa/temporera de supervisión y cumplimiento de deberes, especialmente durante la ausencia de la relación directa/permanente.

NAPAD

The NAPAD document we used was the 2009 resolution from Mission Alignment Coordinating Council which moved NAPAD from a program of Disciples Home Missions to its office being located in the Office of General Minister and President. This move has enhanced the whole church's ability to live out its mission.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING RACIAL-ETHNIC MINISTRY DOCUMENTS

The lack of consistency in relational documents between racial/ethnic ministries and the wider church emerges in part from each ministry having its own path into relationship. However, there would be real value in creating easier to access, easier to analyze agreements with a shared anti-racism analysis brought to those ministries (and over time to all ministries, so that all expressions of the church would have language of partnership and accountability and processes to implement that partnership and accountability across race).

We recommend that the General Board take advantage of a proposed joint National Convocation / NAPAD Convocation / Convencion in 2018 to learn more about the cultures, gifts, needs and administrative structures of all three racial/ethnic ministries so as to partner more effectively with the ministries and develop processes of accountability that work with the particularities of each ministry but create an explicit covenant of accountability with each.

We also recommend that the integration of all racial and ethnic groups be an explicit aspect of the Mission First gatherings that shape the next phase of our denomination's life, and that based on these conversations the General Board reflect on how to create a Mission First structure that is explicitly accountable to communities of color in its implementation.

A final recommendations that falls outside the purview of these specific documents

One more general thought about the General Assembly that is not covered in the Design: Do we have somewhere else a policy that governs the choice of Assembly venues? That is, do we take into account such things as minority hiring or affirmative action policies of cities, states, convention centers, etc.? If so, it would be excellent to share this information widely so others can utilize that policy. If not, we recommend that the General Board develop such a policy so that we as a church might live out our values.

CONCLUSION

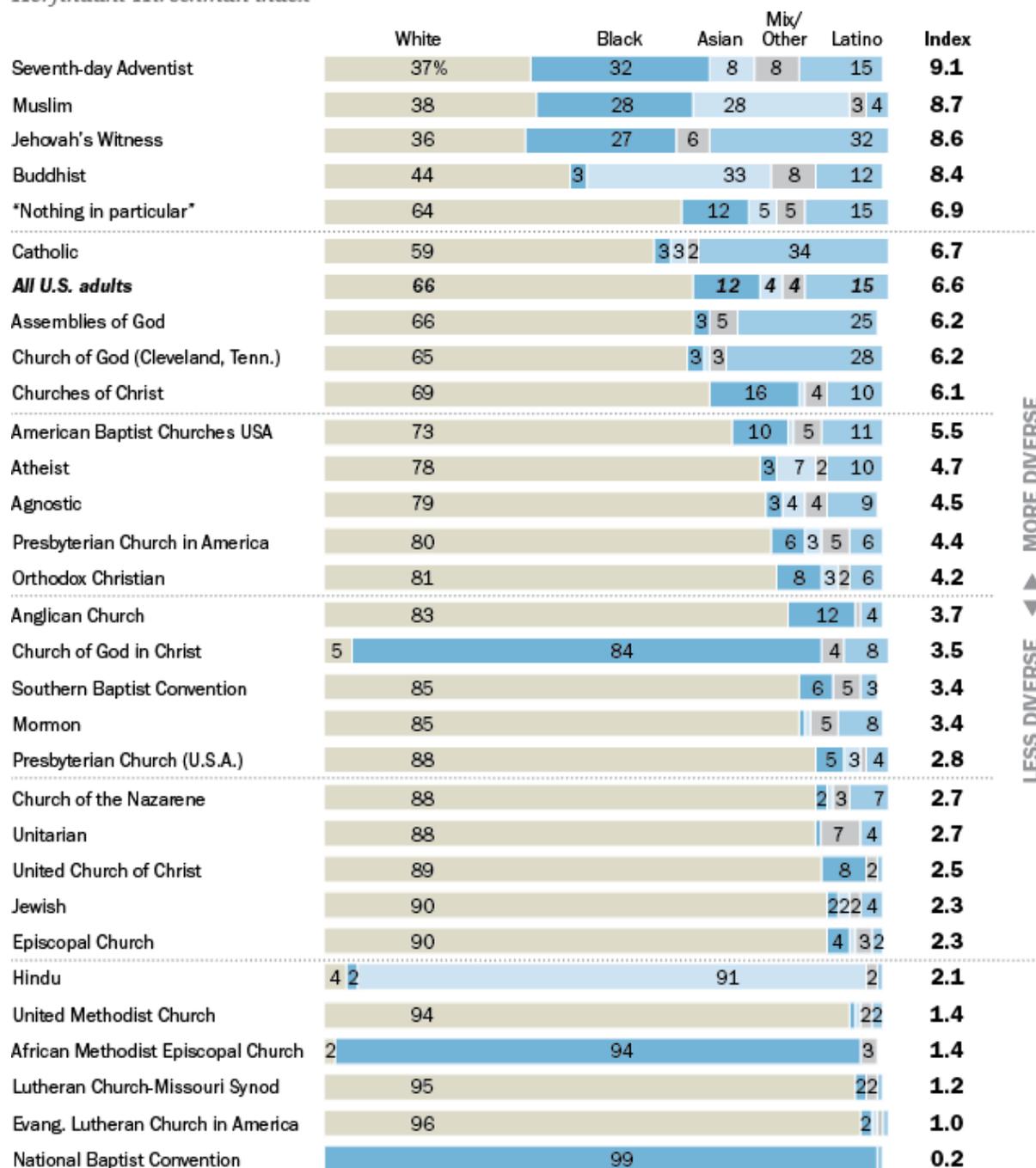
As stated earlier, the greatest challenge faced by this Task Force was that the systemic racism in our guiding documents is rarely explicit. It exists where Whiteness is normative, where there is no explicit accountability to communities of color, and where assumptions are made about an implicit "Disciples culture" that does not reflect the diversity of cultures that make up the Disciples. This cannot be addressed by changing language. It involves the much more significant task of engaging in cultural humility and in being bold about the church being accountable to communities of color (AND communities of color within the Disciples being equally explicit in their commitment to cultivating an anti-racism culture, recognizing the ways internalized oppression plays itself out within our communities).

Ultimately, this task is worthwhile because without it, we face an insurmountable barrier to our ability to build God's realm here on earth. This work, although painful and fraught with the potential for misunderstanding and emotional injury, is essential to dismantling the racism that has placed walls between us and helping us build the Beloved Community side-by-side.

Thank you to the General Board and our General Minister and President for giving us the opportunity to play a role in helping the church we love so much grow a little closer to God's plan for us.

How Racially Diverse Are U.S. Religious Groups?

% of each religious group in each racial/ethnic category, and each group's diversity score on the Herfindahl-Hirschman index



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study.

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Blacks, whites, Asians and others/mixed include only those who are not Latino. Latinos include people of all races.