



August 31, 2020

Dear Member of the First Pres Family of Faith:

On behalf of the Session, we write to thank you for your partnership in sharing the love of Jesus Christ and to offer a word about our spiritual effort to overcome racism with care and commitment. When the events of early summer thrust a spotlight toward the impact of structural racism on the Black community, the Session felt compelled as an act of spiritual solidarity to establish an Anti-Racism and Equity Task Force and to raise banners affirming Black Lives Matter. In the weeks that followed, large numbers of people in our church family - of all ages - participated in gatherings to listen, learn, and reflect upon the impact of racism exposed in these days. As the summer progressed, the statement we affirm has been characterized in many different and public ways – some of which are not in accord with our spiritual intent. Thus, we offer this word in our own voice:

- **Today we believe God is calling each of us to “Be A Bridge” in Lake County.**
  - We work in love to bridge the chasm racism creates and we affirm Black Lives Matter as one way to confess that the Black community has borne a disproportionate burden of discrimination due to race.
  - As a historic church bearing the Christian faith for 150 years, we believe God is calling us to be a bridge of hope for Lake County through many unique challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
  - We also believe God is calling us to be a bridge to participate in carrying the love of Christ with new forms of Christian community and witness that affirm the leadership of emerging generations who are awakening spiritually through these challenging times.
- **Our church banner and our affirmation of the statement, Black Lives Matter, is not an endorsement of the Black Lives Matter organization.** We do not provide support as a congregation, financially or otherwise, to any chapter of that organization. Our affirmation that Black Lives Matter is a witness of Christian faith today. It joins a nationwide affirmation of the Presbyterian Church (USA). We believe all people are created in the image of God. Racism, particularly the unique and lasting discrimination endured by the Black community, violates that image. Until Black lives matter, in a way that shares mutual value with all lives, we all suffer and the image of God is marred among us. Ours is a spiritual statement, not the endorsement of an organization.
- **We proclaim Black Lives Matter as a non-violent expression of faith. We in no way condone the use of violence or looting as protest.** Such actions undermine the significance of the moment and the goodwill required to work for racial reconciliation and healing. We follow a Savior who endured violence and was unjustly killed upon a cross. Therefore, our continuing gospel work is non-violent, offered to bring peace with justice in the name of Jesus Christ.

Finally, affirming that Black Lives Matter is very much in line with who we are as Christians. Presbyterians have historically understood that Christian faith engages our community and our society. But the gospel of Jesus Christ is never in the service of any one political party or leaning, instead it challenges all of us to have righteous relationships with one another. We believe that justice for the oppressed is not and should not be a partisan value. Justice is a gospel value, one that all who claim Jesus as Lord should hold. We may have different ideas of how to live into the value, but as Christians we are beholden to it. So as you speak with neighbors about our statement, please discuss and correct mischaracterizations that miss the voice of our own intent. We encourage you to join our leaders in affirming the love that we as Christians share when we say, Black Lives Matter.

Faithfully on behalf of the Session,

*Brian R. Paulson*

The Rev. Dr. Brian R. Paulson, Pastor  
Moderator of Session

*Gail A. Starr*

Ruling Elder Gail Starr  
Clerk of Session

