

1 OVERTURE from The Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley
2 “Confession of the Sin of Racism, and Commitment to Christian Unity”

3 **Whereas**, the 43rd General Assembly considered a personal resolution on Civil Rights
4 Remembrance and deferred action on it until the 44th General Assembly in Mobile, Alabama;
5 and

6 **Whereas**, in the 1973 “Message to All the Churches,” the founding generation of the
7 Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) expressly declared our denomination to be the
8 “continuing church” of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), saying, “We have
9 called ourselves ‘Continuing’ Presbyterians because we seek to continue the faith of the
10 founding fathers of that Church”; and

11 **Whereas**, as a “continuing church,” we rightly own the good Gospel legacy of the movement of
12 Bible-believing, Reformed Christians who brought us into being, and recognize our indebtedness
13 to them, while we also acknowledge the sins and failures of our movement and denomination,
14 including in those areas that have ongoing and significant negative ramifications for the unity,
15 ministry and witness of the church today; and

16 **Whereas**, as Calvinists who wholeheartedly believe in the Bible’s teaching on sin and grace, we
17 are unsurprised by serious sin in even our greatest human heroes (“If we say we have no sin, we
18 deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,” 1 John 1:8), we are also unafraid of confessing it
19 (because of God’s great mercy to us, in Christ, Ephesians 2:4-5) and thus we own and
20 acknowledge both the good and the bad in the Bible-believing movement that brought us into
21 being, and in our own denomination’s history, and with both gratitude and sorrow remember
22 different parts of that history and legacy; and

23 **Whereas**, we rejoice and give thanks that our founding fathers officially, explicitly, and tangibly
24 rejected racism and segregation as motives for or aims of the formation of the PCA, further, we
25 recognize that our founding fathers did not intend the PCA to be racist or to tolerate racism as
26 they understood it, and indeed many of them during the Civil Rights era increasingly longed for,
27 prayed for, wrote for, preached for and worked for a Gospel solution to unbiblical segregation
28 and discrimination in church and society; and

29 **Whereas**, we grieve and lament that we have become increasingly aware that during the Civil
30 Rights era, many of those who became our founding denominational leaders, churches and
31 members failed to live up to their and our own Confession’s Biblical doctrine of man, that all
32 mankind is created by God “after His own image” (Genesis 1:27, Acts 17:24-28, WCF 4.2) by
33 not only refusing to support, but also, both congregationally and individually, actively working
34 against racial equality (the unqualified acknowledgment in belief and practice that African
35 Americans are fully human and made in the image of God, that no ethnicity is inherently
36 superior to another, and that the Bible provides no grounds for the enforced segregation of
37 ethnicities) in both church and society, through sins of omission and commission including:
38 barring African Americans from worship services; misusing and twisting the Bible to support
39 racial segregation; participating in and defending white supremacist organizations; failing to
40 speak out against state-supported segregation, not supporting efforts to secure African Americans
41 access to basic human and civil rights, and neglecting to show solidarity with and support for
42 African American brothers and sisters in Christ, as they endured various kinds of discrimination
43 and duress in the Civil Rights era; and

44 **Whereas**, the 30th General Assembly adopted a resolution on racial reconciliation that
45 confessed “covenantal, generational, heinous sins” connected with unbiblical forms of servitude,
46 but did not deal specifically with the heinous sins committed during the much more recent Civil
47 Rights era, which betrayed the visible unity of all believers in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22), the
48 command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31), and the image of God in all people
49 (Genesis 1:27); and

50 **Whereas**, the 32nd General Assembly adopted a pastoral letter on “the Gospel and Race,” but in
51 doing so, adopted a statement that did not directly acknowledge our sins against African
52 Americans that many of our founding leaders, churches and members displayed during the Civil
53 Rights era; and

54 **Whereas**, an unwillingness to acknowledge, confess and repudiate these sins, and to speak
55 openly and contritely of them, significantly hinders our present-day witness and unity, our efforts
56 for solidarity and reconciliation with our African American brothers and sisters and their

57 participation in the PCA; as well as our Gospel outreach to men and women of every tribe,
58 tongue, people and nation; and

59 **Whereas,** The Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley recognizes that the sins of racism and racial
60 injustice—not only toward African Americans, but also toward other racial minorities—are not
61 simply past sins, but continue to be sins with which our churches and congregants wrestle; and

62 **Whereas,** scripture enjoins the necessity of unity in the body of Christ such that when a brother
63 is thought to have something against another brother, reconciliation between them supersedes
64 even worship (Matthew 5:23,24); and

65 **Whereas,** God has once more given the PCA a gracious opportunity to show the beauty, grace,
66 and power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through confession and through the fruits of repentance:
67 such as, clarity that racism is a sin requiring formative and corrective discipline; growing into
68 cultural intelligence regarding minority ethnicities; establishing interracial friendships and
69 partnerships inside and outside our denomination; renewing our church’s commitment to develop
70 minority leadership at the congregational, presbytery, and denominational levels; and
71 encouraging a denomination-wide vision for and commitment to a more racially and ethnically
72 diverse church; and

73 **Whereas,** we greatly rejoice that, in spite of ourselves, the Lord has graciously blessed the PCA
74 with an increasing racial and ethnic diversity, including a larger proportion of minorities (among
75 them Asians, Latinos and African Americans), than many traditionally majority white North
76 American denominations (and more than we might have expected, given our history), the Lord
77 has granted the PCA an increasing number of African American teaching and ruling elders, the
78 Lord has raised up Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) campus ministries at historic Black
79 colleges and universities (HBC/Us) and many multi-ethnic church plants in the PCA (including
80 our own Jackson State University RUF and Redeemer Church, Jackson), the Lord has this year
81 brought in the largest number and percentage of African American students in the incoming class
82 in the history of Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, the Lord is bringing about a
83 resurgence of the doctrines of grace in parts of the African American church, and there are more
84 presbytery overtures calling for repentance for racism and racial reconciliation submitted to the
85 44th General Assembly than for any other issue in the history of the PCA (thus showing an

86 overwhelming, denomination-wide concern and resolve to speak faithfully to this issue) – all of
87 this is the Lord’s doing, not ours, but it is marvelous in our eyes!

88 **Be it therefore resolved,** in the light of the continuing nature of the Presbyterian Church in
89 America, that The Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley recognizes and confesses, and joins with
90 many sister presbyteries in asking the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in
91 America to recognize and confess, our denomination’s history of involvement and complicity in
92 racial injustice, congregationally and/or individually, inside and outside of our churches during
93 the Civil Rights era; and

94 **Be it further resolved,** that The Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley also confesses, and asks
95 the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in American to confess, our continued
96 sins of racism and failure to love brothers and sisters from ethnic minorities in accordance with
97 what the Gospel requires; and

98 **Be it further resolved,** that The Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley recommits itself to bear
99 fruit in keeping with our repentance, seeking appropriate courses of action and reconciliation
100 humbly, sincerely, and expeditiously, for the glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel, and
101 asks the 44th GA of the PCA to do the same; and

102 **Be it further resolved,** that the attached “Pastoral Letter” from The Presbytery of the
103 Mississippi Valley to its constituent churches be offered as an example of how a presbytery
104 might provide shepherding leadership for its churches toward racial reconciliation; and

105 **Be it further resolved,** that the attached “Bibliography and Resources” concerning race and
106 unity be offered to our presbyteries and churches for their use in studying, evaluating and
107 implementing their own efforts toward the goal of reconciliation with all racial minorities; and

108 **Be it finally resolved,** that The Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley humbly asks the General
109 Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America to urge all the congregations and presbyteries
110 of the Presbyterian Church in America to study this action as well as the PCA position paper on
111 the Gospel and Race, to confess their own particular sins and failures regarding racial injustice as

112 may be appropriate, and to seek to bring forth fruits of repentance for the Gospel's sake within
113 their own local communities.