

In order to move our work along I have a request. Please draft 2 lists of not less than 3 items nor more than 10 each. One consisting of actions which an individual can take toward racial reconciliation, or your church, or our presbytery. Then compile a list of not less than 3 nor more than 10 obstacles or barriers which are actual or perceived to the end of reconciliation by you, your church or our presbytery.

The following consists of the responses that were sent:

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1. Enter into a relationship with a pastor of another race.
  - a. Join a ministerial association to meet someone. Go. Don't just join. Participate.
  - b. You and your wife have dinner out with him and his wife.
  - c. Meet him for lunch or breakfast every now and then. Discuss substantive issues.
  - d. Swap pulpits once or so a year; get to know his people a little.
  - e. Let your women's groups do something together. Our two women's groups did a cook book together. Called it Salt and Pepper.
  - f. Invite him to a presbytery meeting to see what goes on. Go to one of his association meetings if he returns the invitation.
  - g. Go fishing together or something like that. (I did that with Jarvis Ward, not Joe.)
  - h. Participate in interracial community services - Thanksgiving, etc.
  - i. Get involved in community services together. Example: Crisis pregnancy centers, soup kitchens, women's shelters, etc.
  
2. Obstacles or barriers. For me, as a white guy, this is tougher. The main obstacle I see is worship styles. And quite frankly, I don't know what can be done about that IF anything SHOULD be done about it. I just don't know. Music is at the top of that concern. Maybe it shouldn't be, but it is.

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1: Vision- a clear vision toward diversity, inclusiveness. Without this, you can't get there. If you want to get there, you have to have this. It doesn't just happen organically. People have to know they are wanted before they avail themselves to the risk of being called an outsider.

2: Leadership. Seek real diversity in leadership. Somewhere, diverse leadership has to be a part of any effort to reach a diverse people group or to welcome people into your midst.

3: Music. One of the greatest gifts of God is music. Yet, one of the greatest misfortunes in humanity is the impact that Satan has in music. Why is this? Because this gift of God, music, has been under appreciated as a gift that is manifested in all people groups.

Now, consider these three things. Here is where Blacks and Whites are the farthest away from each other. And now you know why 90% of churches are monogynous. All three of these items require one to deny themselves and their comforts for the sake of someone else. Without the

Holy Spirit and in great humility these things are impossible.

Finally, the surest way to show that one does not want this is to ignore these three things. The message will be LOUD and CLEAR. You can smile with a smile as wide as heaven and open your arms as wide as an ocean but your message will be the same. "We love you, but we don't want you hear."

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I'm not convinced that a resolution either recognizing past racial wrongs or apologizing in any way for those wrongs, is a step forward in racial reconciliation. Rather, I believe that if PCA is to attract more blacks, we must first make it known to them who we are from a Christian viewpoint and where we stand on the Word of God. And, I suggest that can best be done more effectively by our actions than any written word (i.e., a resolution). I suggest that our presbytery consider:

1. The establishment of 1 or more full scholarships at RTS for black students called to a Gospel ministry. Perhaps individual churches should also be encouraged to underwrite the cost of such a scholarship.
2. Periodically publishing in newspapers across mid-Mississippi a statement of our faith stressing, for example, inerrancy of Scripture and the Sovereignty of God.
3. Supporting the ministry of Redeemer in visible ways.
4. Being at the forefront of organizing the construction of Habitat homes.
5. Encouraging our churches to offer after school tutoring on church premises to both black and white kids.
6. Taking such other acts of outreach that those in the black communities might ask, "Just who are these Presbyterians?"

The primary obstacle to these endeavors would be in first gaining the attention and trust of the black Christians who don't see any difference between us and, say, Episcopalians. Again, actions are better than words.

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1. Actions which an individual can take toward reconciliation, or your church, or our presbytery.
  - Owning up to the reality of privilege and oppression. How can we love others well if we are apathetic to real issues that others are facing? Apathy has a very negative effect on racial reconciliation.
  - Be willing to apologize for past sins and/or sins of our fathers if it's needed. Do not let pride keep us from the possibility of unity. Humility and repentance are two highly

- exalted characteristics in the Biblical narrative.
  - Promote pastoral relations within your community made up of pastors from black and white congregations. Meet regularly to discuss opportunities to join your congregations together for joint services. These will open doors to opportunities for conversations about a multi-ethnic vision for the church.
  - Sacrifice preferences for the greater good of diversity.
  - Teach people to see each others as Christ sees us, as “in Christ” or “not in Christ”, rather than black or white.
  - Look for diversity in leadership at the church you serve.
  - Do not grow weary in doing good. It’s hard at times and there will be rejection, but for the glory of God and the good of the nations, press on.
2. A list of not less than 3 nor more than 10 obstacles or barriers which are actual or perceived to the end of reconciliation by you, your church, or our presbytery.
- Lack of concern or awareness
  - Pride
  - Apathy
  - Comfort in homogeny. Diversity makes us uncomfortable and the church is the one place we want to feel ‘safe’. However, diversity, not homogeny is at the heart of the gospel.
  - Making preferences, principle.
  - No vision of a multi-ethnic church to put forward

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## ACTIONS

- 1 Search my own heart before God guided by the Scriptures with regard to race and diversity reflected in my attitudes, sensitivity and meaningful relationships.
- 2 Actively seek out individuals both brothers in Christ and otherwise from whom i can learn and with whom i can fellowship.
- 3 Invest financially and relationally in expanding PCA and reformed African American seminary students.
- 4 Broaden reading which expands understanding of cultural dissimilarities and similarities between and among African Americans and others Christian and secular.
- 5 Seek worship, discipleship and social opportunities with African American brothers and sisters.
- 6 Where chronologically relevant review actions and inactions of your church during pertinent periods of recent history with regard to race relations and welcoming worship.

7 Attend or initiate regular scheduled gatherings of African Americans to discuss issues related to race, Bible studies, ect. in community or discipleship groups.

## OBSTACLES

- 1 Sin
- 2 Indifference
- 3 Pride
- 4 Fear
- 5 Cultural unfamiliarity or distaste
- 6 Lack of curiosity
- 7 Mistrust
- 8 Misunderstanding      lack of understanding
- 9 mutual reluctance
- 10 Reconciling: Doctrine, Scripture, Politics, culture, and Church—Body of Christ.

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## I. POSITIVE ACTIONS

### A. Individuals

1. Prayerfully consider ones own attitudes re race.
  - a. Complicity in past
  - b. Need for repentance
  - c. Fruit met for repentance
2. Assess and consider the thoughts and positions of AA brothers.
3. Consideration of previous positions and statements from GA re this issue.
4. Consider the implications and applications of the principal of the spirituality of the church as to the church's involvement in civil affairs.
  - a. Wisely consider where " line drawing " occurs in the desire to effect repentance in the public sphere such as Confederate flag issue, removal of monuments etc..
5. If not already being done, proactively seek to develop wholistic relationships with AA.

- a. Ministerial associations
  - b. Individual ministers
  - c. AA individuals and families.
- B. Sessions
1. Have dialogue re this issue; consider Presbytery's exhortations re RR.
  2. Consider development of an AA "sister church" relationship.
  3. Attend seminars or conferences.
  4. Examine need for expressions of repentance for past sins.
  5. Consciously evaluate Church's openness to AA.
- C. Presbytery
1. Sponsor seminar on RR.
  2. Develop and publish for our sessions and churches a 'pastoral letter' re this issue with biblical and confessional underpinnings along with practical ways they can implement principals.

## II. OBSTACLES and or HINDRANCES

- A. Individuals
1. Persistent unbiblical views re racial issues such as the inferiority of the black race, segregation.
  2. Cultural issues
  3. General relationship AA community has with what many consider to be politically liberal issues i.e. general support of Democratic Party.
  4. Being labeled racist when one disagrees with AA views or those sympathetic to AAs.
- B. Sessions
1. Cultural differences re worship.
  2. Ambivalence re whether the Church should or should not be involved as the Church in civil or governmental issues.
  3. How it is a Church should be considered guilty of past sins when it didn't even exist at the time.
- C. Presbytery
1. Reluctance to interfere with the local church.
  2. Difficulty in producing pastoral 'documents' for its churches to consider.

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### Individuals:

1. Intentionalize SHOWING our members what personal loving racial interaction looks like, by hosting members of all races (IE: For the Simpson household, that would entail not just having

Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, etc. in our home, but doing so with other members of Highlands also in attendance - preferably those whose walk with Christ is a serious one, but whose own perspectives toward meaningful racial interaction may not be as open as God would have it)

2. Intentionalize TEACHING our members what personal loving racial interaction is, by applying scriptural precept in various lesson venues (IE: Small groups, Sunday School, Pulpit, Facebook postings, blogs, etc. I believe we invite hearts to change as we pray from the pulpit as well. We are praying to God, but we have hearers, witnesses, to our collective and individual heart-felt and Spirit-enabled adoration, repentance, praise, and supplication.)

3. Intentionalize CHALLENGING those Brothers and Sisters who dismiss the importance of following our Lord in this area of our walk.

Churches:

1. Intentionalize HIRING of multi-cultural staff across the spectrum (I was deeply moved by Elbert's description of bringing his Black charges to a predominantly White PCA church, and seeing a - unintentional but no less impactful - divide in roles of various races)

2. Intentionalize CROSS-POLLINATION of church events - like that between Highlands and Redeemer. Excellent, tiny seeds have been planted. Have they taken root? As the eternal optimist, I would like to think so. But they need watering, caring, pruning (at times), etc. to genuinely grow and bear fruit for the kingdom before both Worldly and Redeemed witnesses alike.

Presbytery & PCA:

1. CODIFY the forward-thinking methods above (coupled with others' excellent suggestions already received).

2. As difficult as it may be, we need to IDENTIFY and PROSECUTE those bodies who refuse to identify the need to take our Lord's perspective as regards His children, of all races. (If our endeavors are right, and are not an insignificant waste of time, either we stand for what we believe is important, or shutter our doors.)

LIST OF OBSTACLES WHICH IMPEDE SUCH ACTIONS:

1. IMO, no matter what we (as a committee, presbytery, or denomination) suggest, how many Presbytery meetings or GA meetings we conduct wherein we discuss these important matters, and no matter how many resolutions we pass with good intent, NOTHING will move the needle like achievement of the three basic elements of the Individuals category above. This will not work as a "top down" policy. We can't dictate or legislate our way in this matter. I know that sounds terribly UN-Presbyterian of me, but, there it is.

2. In our first meeting, I suggested that there appears a greater RELUCTANCE of the Black community to accept the PCA as a viable doctrinal alternative, than resistance to accept them in a predominantly White body. Kelle's, Elbert's, and Al's comments in subsequent meetings have

affirmed that opinion. This is NOT an indictment of their ingrained feelings - I am incapable of doing so from my racial perspective. I am just stating that work must be done on BOTH sides of the racial divide. To ignore this fact is to disable any real impact this process may have on the future of the individuals, churches, presbyteries, or denomination over time.

3. Cultural differences exist. The thing is, that is OK with me. I believe if God wanted every man to look/act/think exactly alike, He could have done so. So, why did he make some short and stout and others tall and lean? Why did He make some prefer smaller contexts and others larger groupings? Why did He make some prefer a TE that is more demonstrative and others prefer a TE that is more calm and circumspect in his delivery? Why did He make some prefer a lively, celebratory worship style and others prefer a more awe-reflective, contemplative worship style? I believe it is because He LOVES diversity. He made birds that prefer seeds, birds that prefer bugs, birds that prefer to hunt fresh meat, and birds that prefer rotting carcasses. I find it interesting that we celebrate the changing of the seasons, or the blooming of both roses and azaleas, but are chagrined that some prefer to worship in a particular manner, and others to worship in another manner, and those manners often are guided, if not driven, by cultural mores and habits. That cannot be undone simply by ignoring it or dismissing it. But, we MUST encourage one another to overcome these obstacles and see one another as equally viable in his/her manifestation of the Spirit's prompting to worship in a particular way.

Example: If I prefer the teaching style of a former pastor, and am not as encouraged (in a season) by a new pastor's style, do I simply move membership? Is the style of the delivery of the word what is important, or is my commitment to the body to which I have committed myself, my allegiance, my support more important? If our church hires a new worship leader whose style is more contemporary, while I prefer a calmer music direction, do I just move my membership, and ignore decades of commitment to His children at the present body? If I stay, rather than move, am I not subordinating my personal preferences to my Brothers and Sisters? SELFLESSNESS requires that I put my personal preferences aside and embrace Indelible Grace for the good of the body.

Example: If I prefer a particular loaf at the Table, and all that breaking that bread signifies, but I have Brothers and Sisters who cannot take my loaf due to gluten allergies, would it not be insensitive to the max to insist that my preferences be met and a different bread be offered to them (thereby drawing attention to their health matters and singling this small minority out as somehow different - and not on this level one of "us")? SELFLESSNESS requires that I put my personal preferences aside and embrace gluten-free bread for the good of the body.

Essentially, we face the obstacle of INGRAINED SELFISHNESS.

There are dozens of other thoughts regarding all these issues, but the preceding is a distillation of my opinion of matters we are discussing. Thank you for considering them in spite of their flaws and the depth of flawed thinking lurking deep with me that they betray. I continue to lean on you men to help me to serve Christ better by growing in the area of embracing Godly racial interaction.