

Overture on Confessing Covenantal and Generational Sins during the Civil Rights period

Whereas, the 43rd General Assembly considered a personal resolution Civil Rights remembrance and deferred action on it until the 44th General Assembly meeting in Mobile, Alabama; and

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

Whereas, a “continuing church” inherits not only the faith of the predecessor organization, but also the larger history of the Church from which its descends, whether that history is honorable or dishonorable; and

Whereas, the members of the PCA are increasingly aware that during the Civil Rights period, many of our denominational leaders and churches not only failed to support, but also actively worked against racial reconciliation in both church and society through sins of commission and omission, including: barring African Americans from worship services; misusing and twisting the Bible to support racial segregation; participating in and defending white supremacist organizations; and failing to speak out against state-supported segregation and to support efforts to secure access to basic human and civil rights; and

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

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

Whereas, our denomination’s unwillingness to speak truthfully about our failure to seek justice and to love mercy during the Civil Rights period significantly hinders present-day efforts for reconciliation with our African American brothers and sisters and their participation in the PCA; and

Whereas, the General Assembly recognizes that the sins of racism and racial injustice—not only toward African Americans, but also toward other racial minorities—are not simply past sins, but continue to be sins with which our churches and congregants wrestle; and

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

Be it therefore resolved, that the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America does recognize and confess our church's covenantal and generational involvement in and complicity with racial injustice inside and outside of our churches during the Civil Rights period; and

Be it further resolved, that this General Assembly also confesses our continued sins of racism and failure to love brothers and sisters from minority cultures in accordance with what the Gospel requires; and

Be it further resolved, that this General Assembly recommits itself to bear fruit in keeping with our repentance, seeking appropriate courses of action and reconciliation humbly, sincerely, and expeditiously, for the glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel; and

Be it finally resolved, that the General Assembly urges the congregations and presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America to study this action as well as the PCA position paper on the Gospel and Race, to confess their own particular sins and failures regarding racial injustice as may be appropriate, and to seek to bring forth fruits of repentance for the Gospel's sake within their own local communities.