

Dear Colonial Church Family,

This letter is intended to clarify Colonial's plans for racial healing and reconciliation which is an integral part of our mission as a church—to be the light of Christ in our hurting and fractured culture. The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2:14-16, reminds us that Christ has entrusted His Church with both the message and ministry of reconciliation.

In these days following the death of George Floyd, the call to pursue racial healing has become even more important but exponentially more difficult. Issues regarding race have become blatantly politicized; peaceful protests are often overshadowed by rioting; and the hope of racial reconciliation feels more remote than ever for many Americans. Even so, we recognize that anti-black prejudice remains in the hearts and behavior of many, and we acknowledge that the Church (for the most part) remains largely segregated. Thus, we remain committed to pursue racial healing through the redemptive power and grace of the Gospel, aware of the costly and challenging road before us.

Since Colonial was birthed in 1953, the LORD has led many in our congregation to actively foster relationships between our predominately white church and the black community. In 1968 our former Senior Pastor, Dr. Ted Nissen, marched in solidarity alongside Paseo Baptist Senior Pastor, Dr. Charles Briscoe, following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Pastor Ted also helped lead the "Unified in Prayer Ministry" that included numerous pastors of various racial and cultural backgrounds who would pray together and host worship services in each other's congregations. In the 1980's, Pastor Bob Lehleitner moved into the urban core and helped create "The All-Stars Community Outreach for Christ" in partnership with Rev. Willie Bennett. For close to two decades, Pastor Bob led hundreds of Colonial families to serve beside our black brothers and sisters for the glory of Christ. Over the past decade, Pastor Mark Potter has led our church in ministering to/with African American families in the Holmes Gardens complex as well as homeless families in the Center School district. More recently, Dr. Greg Ealey was called to serve as Colonial's first African American pastor, and his presence at Colonial has encouraged many leaders who have been praying for racial healing throughout the city.

Even given the foundation of racial healing and reconciliation that has been laid, there is more to be done. Racial discrimination and segregation remain in our urban and suburban neighborhoods and even within the Church. The hour on Sunday remains the most segregated hour in America, and we acknowledge that this segregation is inconsistent with the prayer of our Lord in John 17 when He prayed for His Church to be one.

By God's grace and providence, a grassroots group within Colonial formed organically just over two years ago to study how Jesus might call His church to eliminate racial discrimination and segregation by living into His vision for Christian Oneness. That group refers to itself as Colonial's "Bootstraps Team for Racial Healing". Bootstraps' primary goal is to foster authentic, empathetic and redeemed relationships between whites and blacks as well as other minorities so that the Body of Christ might truly reflect Kingdom Oneness (John 17; Revelation 7:9). The group's intent is in alignment with Colonial's values: Pray First, Safe Harbor, Better Together, Love Generously, Student Strong, and Truth Matters. The Bootstraps Team's charter and initial action recommendations were ratified unanimously by Colonial's Session in August 2019.

The Bootstraps Team and Colonial's Session believe there are many paths to racial healing; however, the first and foremost path is to lead people (regardless of race) into a repentant and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus made reconciliation with God possible on the cross, and He modeled for all his disciples what a ministry of reconciliation should look like as we engage the world with the Gospel. In Luke 4:18 Jesus describes the reconciling work of the Church in His name: proclaiming the good news to the poor, releasing the captives, giving sight to the blind and setting at liberty those who are oppressed. Inherent in the ministry of reconciliation is God's desire to set all people free from the oppression of racism and to create Oneness in His Church.

As we seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment to address the racial tension within ourselves and our community through the power of the Gospel, The Bootstraps Team has recommended three key pathways:

1. **RELATIONSHIPS & LEARNING:** We are currently using a nation-wide, Christian church-based program called "Be the Bridge" ("BTB") to facilitate relationships, learning, diversity and mutual engagement in small group settings. BTB involves educating our congregation in the understanding of African American history and the sins of racism, as well as listening to our black brothers' and sisters' real-life experiences and perspectives. The BTB group provides an open forum for questioning, discussing beliefs and perspectives, but always within the framework of a Biblical worldview.

2. SERVING: Serving our community with loving generosity can help transcend and heal racial/cultural woundedness in Jesus' name. The Bless our City Offering, Lead to Read, Harvesters Food Distribution, Center Impact, and our Colonial Food Pantry are only a few examples of how we are working to live out the Gospel ministry of reconciliation in Christian service.
3. PARTNERING: We desire to create meaningful partnerships with African American/minority churches in our community. Our recent Bless Our City offering allowed us to engage in a significant way with 17 minority churches, and we hope to expand these relationships in the future. We currently have brothers and sisters from two African American congregations who are joining us in our BTB groups. We are also honored to host a Korean congregation at SKC and a Brazilian congregation at OP (in non-Covid times).

Our commitment to Oneness in Christ, as expressed in John 17:21, aligns with our sister churches in the EPC and other gospel-centered organizations. However, our desire for racial healing does NOT align our church with any secular organization, movement, methodology or belief. As such, our commitment to the Oneness of Christ's church is not political. While our study of the historical and spiritual roots of racism may involve discussing evolving philosophical constructs (e.g. Critical Race Theory), these philosophical constructs cannot and will not alter our collective focus on and devotion to a foundational Christian/Biblical worldview. We acknowledge the complexity of voices and opinions that are currently speaking into the racial tension in our country, but it is our intent that Colonial's methodology, while learning all we can from outside sources, will remain rooted and committed to the eternal truth, precepts, and practices of the Gospel.

Some of our church members have asked about whether the church has a position regarding the worldwide popular emphasis on "black lives matter". As a church, we affirm that black lives DO matter. Scripture teaches that no life is greater or lesser in value based upon the color of skin or any other factor. We oppose any behaviors, attitudes, or policies that would diminish a person's value based upon the color of their skin. Nevertheless, the "Black Lives Matter" ("BLM") organization's mission and philosophical assumptions contradict and oppose our understanding of Biblical guidance and authority.

As we press on toward the Biblical mandate of Oneness, it is our hope that through the radical grace and power of Jesus, the walls that have segregated God's church in America will soon crumble. It is a long, challenging journey, but it is a journey that is not optional for God's Church. We must anticipate that this journey toward Oneness will require more listening than talking ... more action than words ... and more sacrifice than comfort. We also recognize that along the way we may misstep or need to make a course correction. We acknowledge our own sins and the many ways we could go astray. Therefore, we ask that Colonial's membership and attendees commit to praying for the leadership at Colonial as we seek to honor God in our pursuit of Oneness. May the Light of Christ shine through His Church in the midst of our hurting culture so that the lost are found, the broken made whole, the fatherless find hope, and our city is blessed.

Unified in Christ,

Colonial Session Members: Clerk Jim Cannon, Rosie Bettis, Richard English, Jim Farris, Phil Hartwell, Brian Mack, Tim Madderom, Dave Moyes, Kevin Nunnally, Ryan Pruett, Randy Shaneyfelt, Kevin Tews, Beth Yeldell, Pastor Jim West, Pastor Tami Lundgren, Pastor Todd Weiland, Pastor Bob Lehleitner, Pastor Mark Potter, and Pastor Greg Ealey

Bootstraps Team: Chair Bill Brodine, Rosie Bettis, Thomas Bettis, Sue Brandt, LeAnn Cunningham, Jim Dodd, Pastor Greg Ealey, Nancy Lee Engel, Thomas Engel, Mack Harnden, Kristel Haynes, Jim Howard, Randall Leonard, Jodi Mathews, Kent Mathews, Marvin Motley, Pastor Mark Potter, Audrey Shaneyfelt