

**Proposal for the Establishment of an Anti-Racism Commission of the ABCUSA
to the BGM Executive Committee, May 2021
Prepared by the ABCUSA Anti-Racism Task-Force**

I. Summary of the work of the Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF)

The Anti-Racism Task Force has begun the very difficult and challenging work of shifting the narrative within the ABCUSA regarding racism and anti-racism. Through monthly newsletter articles, we have invited the denomination to join in this work. We are defining anti-racism, identifying the historic roots of racism, and making visible real world and tested opportunities for dismantling the system as it stands. We seek to rebuild anew with an anti-racist worldview.

*The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox (Isaiah 11:6-7 NIV).*

The Anti-Racism Task Force engages continuously with the vision of a reordered world through the lens of Jesus. The ARTF is supported by three subgroups and several working groups.

- A. The subgroups focus on specific aspects of anti-racism work: individual, congregational, and institutional. The work of the subgroups is on-going and seeks to deepen the transformation of the denomination.
 1. **The Individual Subgroup:** Individual work is some of the most challenging work because it requires the individual to be vulnerable and open to change. This is where anti-racism begins. To end racism we must work individually and collectively to dismantle racist policies at the structural and institutional levels. The individual subgroup is working through "How To Be An Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi. We are also identifying resources to share with the denomination.
 2. **The Congregational Subgroup** distributed a video clip and survey through the Office of the General Secretary starting May 17 through May 31. They are seeking to gauge where we are as congregations within the ABCUSA and then discern how to efficaciously move forward with this work engaging as many people as possible.
 3. **The Institutional Subgroup** has had deep conversations with several Region Executives with the hope of uncovering the practices, policies, and habits that can be utilized by all parts of the ABC-USA as an organization in order to become an anti-racist denomination.
- B. The working groups will shape and curate a symposium and collect and record resources for utilization to the entire ABCUSA denomination. The symposium is tentatively set to take place in Fall 2021. The goals of the symposium are to:
 1. Define anti-racism.
 2. Ground anti-racism in Scripture, highlighting all humanity as one race created by one God.

3. Highlight the denomination's role and responsibility, at every level, in advancing racial justice.
4. Educate on today's inequalities and existing wealth gap.
5. Offer advocacy opportunities for the denomination to close inequality gaps.
6. Include moments to repent for our denomination's missteps
7. Provide helpful, usable resources.

We anticipate listening sessions at the Biennial Mission Summit will continue to shape the symposium's program. We are in the process of identifying appropriate speakers and facilitators to lead in each of these topics. This work is all rooted in our existing ABC policy statement on racial justice, and we seek to highlight that and move from statement into praxis.

We realize that providing symposiums and multifaceted resources are essential, and yet the great benefit to these initiatives is the revelation that anti-racism work must be on-going.

The ABCUSA is the most diverse denomination in the United States. We have a role and a responsibility to continue the work of anti-racism if we are to live into what we believe when we make that claim. We seek to become the most anti-racist denomination in the world. The Anti-Racism Task Force requests the commitment and support of the ABCUSA Board of General Ministries to make this prophetic vision a reality.

II. Rationale for the Extension of the Anti-Racism Task Force—The Establishment of a Commission

The work of anti-racism is redemptive, transformative, and conciliatory. It is sacred work. As a people of prayer, purpose, and passion, creating a community of faith where people of every race, nationality, and culture gather as one in worship, service and work, we take up this mantle as co-creators of God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

The initial meeting of the Anti-Racism Task Force was held on November 10, 2020 and yielded an unprecedented commitment and dedication to this work by Task Force members. Through prayer, discernment, and honest reflection we have begun to identify and surface the historical and present experiences and stories of peoples affected by racism. Racial hatred, bias, systemic racism, white supremacy, and inequitable opportunity are deeply rooted in our systems of education, health care, economics, government, and faith traditions, permeating all aspects of individual, community, and corporate life. As a denomination, we must be willing to respond appropriately.

In 2019, research studies indicated a 100 percent increase in hate crimes and blatant acts of racial violence (www.justice.gov). These incidents continue to rise and signal the need for anti-racism work within the church and in our world. It is not enough for us to conclude our response to suffering, oppression, and dehumanization solely with prayer. Prayer is an initial act of faith that moves us to action. It moves us to work. Accordingly, the work of anti-racism is the active

dismantling of systems, privileges, and everyday practices that reinforce and normalize the contemporary dimensions of white dominance (Crenshaw, 2020).

In Mark 12:30-32, Jesus gives us two great commands that empower us in this world. Jesus teaches us to: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We lean toward the teachings of Jesus in this love mandate and see it as a compass for our individual and denominational future movement.

III. Proposed Goals and Activities

Working from a paradigm reflective of the historical relationships of racial and ethnic groups and racial oppression within the denomination and the world and from the power and faith in God through Jesus the Christ, we propose the following initial goals and activities for the commission in collaboration with ABCUSA:

- A. Develop a common framework and language for the work of Anti-Racism - See Section II: Rationale for a working definition of anti-racism; Anti-racism work intentionally keeps black and brown lives up front.
 - 1. Explore our uses of and the intention and impact of terms such as intercultural, multicultural, multi-racial, intergenerational, etc., recognizing that “multicultural” has often resulted in excluding and/or marginalizing black voices.
 - 2. Articulate implicit and explicit beliefs about race, biology, and cultures, and educate and foster a biblical understanding of one human race while celebrating the unique gifts of our cultures and our identities.
 - 3. Develop an agreed-upon understanding of what an anti-racist denomination, organization or “table” will look like versus our current understanding of concepts such as diversity, representation, and inclusion.
- B. Address issues and questions that are core to the work of anti-racism in the ABC, such as:
 - 1. Reviewing how our history hindered and helped us in our work to become anti-racist (For example, existing racial justice policy and the formation of caucuses).
 - 2. Identifying the need and opportunities for repentance, unlearning, and relearning.
 - 3. Identifying hindrances for all necessary ABC stakeholders to participate in this commission and strategies for overcoming these things toward authentic collaboration.
 - 4. Naming and collating a list of existing anti-racism work across our denomination and denominational partners and key leaders among us.
- C. Denominational Assessment and Transformation: Develop a strategy and plan for an anti-racist assessment of every aspect of the denomination, reclaiming our continuing call to be a leader in anti-racist work in all levels of the denomination and in society, including but not limited to:
 - 1. Search & call, hiring, including the ABCUSA General Secretary
 - 2. Economic practices (investments, salaries)

3. Governance (structure, policies, documents)
 4. Formal and informal structures, policies, procedures, systems, patterns, etc.
 5. Polity, missiology, and impact and implementation of core values
 6. Implement the plan with appropriate stakeholders.
- D. Explore and amplify topics of advocacy that can be expressions of ABC's commitment to anti-racist work, including:
1. Effective reparations, which are the only remedy that can bring us closer to equality in this country in our lifetimes. This also means having a deep and honest look not just at our nation's sins, but looking at ABC's history and then naming, repenting, and issuing reparations for and to those communities for whom we have benefited without fair and adequate restitution.
 2. Discernment around existing work that can be more deeply engaged, implemented, and/or financially supported and how to engage national voices to advocate for the outcomes of the discernment.
 3. Exploring new topics as they arise.
- E. Develop a capacity-building strategy for the work of anti-racism in the denomination that would minimally include:
1. Staffing Commitment, such as the creation of an Associate General Secretary for Anti-Racism work and dedicated staff support.
 2. Funding strategy for the continued work and support of the Anti-Racism Commission, related staff positions, and the work as a whole.

IV. Composition and Convening of the Commission and the Establishment Period

We envision this commission bringing together all stakeholders within the denomination into an agreed upon place and space of accountability. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, influential representatives from the Board of General Ministries, the Office of General Secretary, ABC Caucuses, ABHMS, AB Historical Society, IM, MMBB, Regional Executive Ministers Council, Ministers Council, Colleges/Universities and Seminaries, and others. Given the envisioned collaborative make-up of the commission, we also envision the commission will be regarded as a valued and necessary partner in key decision-making junctures of the denomination.

We recognize that particular skills, gifts, and perspectives will be crucial to the effectiveness and experience of the commission. We hope to clarify this, along with a process of membership recruitment and selection, during the early establishment phase of the commission. Frequency and platform of meetings and a draft budget also need to be further discussed.

The establishment phase must also an opportunity to intentionally continue the work of anti-racism. It is imperative that all stakeholders (transition team, new commission members, staff of OGS including General Secretary, and at least the Executive Team of BGM) engage and commit to a two-year plan of formal anti-racism training from an experienced, skilled, anti-racism professional(s). This two-year commitment will give the commission a solid foundation in its

actions and interactions with individuals and the larger denomination. If we truly wish to see change, this work is imperative.

Anti-racist work starts with each of us—each one of us accountable and committed to working together to fight against racism. The individual and interpersonal levels of interaction are easily available and need of critical awareness. Anti-racism means committing to identifying how racism manifests in social and cultural norms and how to address racism at the individual and structural levels. In other words, “You have to learn to unlearn some of the things that you understand about a radicalized society and your role in it.” (Sith-Maddox, 2021.)

V. Current Capacity for the Establishment of a Commission

The following individuals already involved in the Task Force and/or one of the subgroups have expressed an interest and willingness to help form the commission and/or participate on said commission.

Rev. Dr. Dan Brockway
Rev. Abner Cotto-Bonilla
Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing
Rev. Joan Friesen

Sandra Lee
Ethan Medley
Rev. Justin Thornburgh
Dr. Natalie C. Wimberly

Addendum:

Task Force Members:

Dr. Natalie C. Wimberly, Co-Chair
Rev. Justin Thornburgh, Co-Chair
Rev. Dr. Dan Brockway
Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing
Rev. Joan Friesen
Sandra Lee
Ethan Medley
Rev. Rodney J. Lynch
Rev. Dr. Don Ng

Individual Subgroup:

Sandra Lee, Chair
Dolores O. Bowles
Michael Friday
Rev. Dr. William (Bill) Godwin
Katharine Hsiao
Wim Mauldin
Rev. Dr. Marcia Patton
Diane Plourde
Rev. Michael Woolf

Willing to help as needed: Harold and Deborah Van Broekhoven

Congregational Subgroup:

Rev. Dr. Eugene Downing, Chair
Rev. Dan R. Chadwick
Rev. Dr. Corey Fields
Dr. Tahlib McMicheaux
Lynette Miller
Rev. Laurel Balyeat Morrison
Rev. Franklin M. Ruff
Janice Taylor
Nancy Willbanks

Institutional Subgroup:

Rev. Joan Friesen, Chair
Vernon A. Clement
Michael Feicht
Rev. Kymberly E. McNair
Rev. Karen Mendes
Dr. David Schirer
Rev. Elaine Thomas
Rev. Starlette Thomas

ABCUSA Staff Liaison: Rev. Dr. Marie Onwubuariri