Statement of Alignment on Anti-Racism

Grace Cathedral Congregation Council
January 2021

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Statement of Alignment on Anti-Racism
Grace Cathedral Congregation Council
January 2021

Reasons for this document:
1. Provides support to staff, clergy and trustees for standing firm in taking on challenging work in the realm of racial and social justice.
2. Empowers congregants’ engagement in social justice activities, in addition to living through or receiving the work of clergy and staff.
3. The work of racial justice is long and vast; clergy, staff, and trustees have capacity/bandwidth limitations; congregants, effectively engaged, can help expand the scope of the work. Articulating our alignment, as a body, is an important early step towards that end.

Summary Statement of Alignment on Anti-Racism
Grace Cathedral Congregation Council

Grace Cathedral has taken a strong stand in the realm of racial justice, and we as congregants stand alongside our clergy and cathedral leaders in this position.

1. We recognize the systemic racism & white privilege of our society and institutions, including at Grace.
2. God created every human being and loves each of us equally; our Lord directed us: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12:31) As individuals and in community we will actively engage in the work of racial justice, which includes social, environmental and economic justice and benefits all.
3. We applaud Grace’s commitment to doing the work that needs to be done as an institution to attend to our own racism. As congregants, we commit to continually educating ourselves to become anti-racist, as individuals and as a community.
4. We commit to taking action and will actively seek ways to lift up the work of existing and new justice and outreach ministries and groups within Grace, like the Social Justice Working Group, and find opportunities to collaborate. We will prioritize partnering with, and amplifying the voices of, faith-based justice organizations and organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
5. We believe our Creator calls us to give what we can of our time and resources, from a place of humble recompense and gratitude, to effect systemic change.
6. We commit to regularly communicating our activities and progress on these endeavors.
In faith and gratitude,

**Members of the Grace Cathedral Congregation Council**

Steph McNally  
Co-Chair

Sarah Benjamin  
Co-Chair

Lisa S. Wong  
Chair  
Social Justice Committee

Christine Benson

Moira C. Dowell

Alexandra Fraser

Wai-Kit Ho

Moe Jamil

Anneliese Mauch

Heather Millar

Jim B. Simpson

Tandy Solomon

Nicole Z. Stahl

Carlos Enrique Torres

Adopted by the Grace Cathedral Congregation Council and duly signed by its members.  
Date: January 5, 2021
Full Statement of Alignment on Anti-Racism
Grace Cathedral Congregation Council

We offer our gratitude for and full alignment with Grace Cathedral’s Statement on Anti-Racism.

In particular, we affirm these elements:

1. We see with increasingly clear eyes **society’s ingrained racism and white privilege.** We recognize that these very structures we live within, in this present moment, continue to perpetuate social, cultural and economic injustices. Oppression and inequality might have **begun with genocide and slavery, but they continue today with lynchings, mass incarceration, and economic structures that reinforce marginalization and inequality.**

2. **We at Grace condemn these evils as sins against humanity and against the God who created every human being and loves each of us with equal and passionate intensity.** Our condemnation takes the form of active engagement, as individuals and in community, in the work of racial justice. Furthermore, we believe that the work of racial justice encompasses social, environmental and economic justice work, to the benefit of all.

3. We applaud **Grace’s commitment to doing the work that needs to be done as an institution and a community to attend to our own racism.** As Grace the institution provides **anti-racism and cultural sensitivity training for all staff,** we as Congregants of Grace commit to learning about the actions and circumstances that have led to this moment — inside our Church and in the world — and to educating and training ourselves to be anti-racist, not only in our understanding, but also as a congregation and as Council.

4. We **commit to taking action** in the world beyond the Episcopal church’s longstanding and crucial social outreach ministries, while continually working to support and amplify the work of these existing ministries and groups within Grace, like the Social Justice Working Group, and **seek opportunities to collaborate.** In partnership with other, especially BIPOC-led (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color-led), and faith-based justice organizations, we **commit to joining the chorus of voices** throughout our denomination and working within movements to live into our dream of being “Beloved Community.”
5. The expression of action may take many forms, including advocacy from the pulpit and by the congregation, creating justice-focused art, participating in peaceful protests and nurturing a community of like-minded individuals committed to learning, and to supporting one another as we do this work. We will actively seek ways to lift up existing and new justice and outreach work being performed by clergy, trustees and lay leaders within Grace. We believe that our Creator calls us to give what we can of our time and resources, from a place of humble recompense and gratitude, to effect systemic change.

6. We commit to regularly communicating our activities and progress on these endeavors. This will also involve being in collective and collaborative conversation to set measurable goals and track progress. Where we fall short, we commit to learning from the experience and identifying structures we can put in place to meet future goals.

We recognize that — as we learn and grow, and as we ourselves and our institution are transformed together — we will encounter discomfort, we will make mistakes, we will sometimes seek understanding yet only find it with time. Nevertheless, living out our faith, we each hereby commit to a lifelong exploration and prayerful opening of our own hearts to transform the habits of racist culture that are ingrained in us, and to be a powerful force in our community and in the larger world to end systemic and institutional racism.

We will not rest until it is so. We are called as followers of Christ to work for justice. Let’s get to work.

In faith and gratitude,

Grace Cathedral Congregation Council
January 5, 2021
Key Grace Cathedral Statements and Episcopal Church References

1. Grace Cathedral’s Statement on Anti-Racism (Current to 1/20/2021)

Grace Cathedral’s Statement on Anti-Racism

The Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark-King | Saturday, June 13

In this painful and critical moment of our common life, Grace Cathedral stands committed to the deep and ongoing work of anti-racism.

Our baptismal covenant calls us to renounce the evil powers of this world and strive to uphold the dignity of every human being without exception.

It is clear to us that living into our baptismal covenant at this time means using our voices, our collective power, and our resources to demand racial justice and healing and to say, without hesitation, that Black Lives Matter. We recognize that both in the past and in the present our institution has perpetuated racism and that we must begin by naming and dismantling our individual prejudices as well as our collective complicity in institutional racism and white privilege.

We make these commitments:

To name the reality of systemic racism within Grace Cathedral and the wider Episcopal Church and to recognize the culture of white privilege.

To listen to the voices of people of color within the congregation, the staff and the wider church and world community and to act on what we hear.

To provide anti-racism training for all our staff and to build an anti-racist staff and congregation culture. We commit to taking strategic action in our hiring and advancement practices that makes Grace Cathedral a more equal and equitable employer.

To be guided by, and partner with, leaders of color in the local community in working to address racial injustice in the Bay Area.

To pray for the day when all God’s children will be free and know no barriers to the love that should unite us.

2. The Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark King’s Letter on Anti-Racism (Website posting, 6/4/2020)

“We know that our Grace community has, like us, watched in horror as the brutal evidence of our society’s ingrained racism and white privilege has been made evident once again. These are not new stories of murder and disdain for black lives; we are just seeing the latest manifestation of a culture that began with slavery and continues with lynchings and mass incarceration.

We at Grace condemn these evils as sins against humanity and against the God who created every human being and loves each of us with equal and passionate intensity.

With the Congregation Council, we have a number of ways in which we are responding, both internally and externally.

Malcolm and I, masked and socially distant, took a knee in a peaceful protest at City Hall on Monday morning. We have projected images of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbury on the cathedral, and tolled the bell to mark the 8 minutes and 46 seconds that George Floyd’s neck was under a police officer’s knee. We have called our congregation to read books that can help us understand the weight of the present moment. Malcolm will be writing an Op Ed that reflects our horror at these events.

On June 7, Anna Deavere Smith recorded a sermon for our 11 a.m. live stream Choral Eucharist, and our collection was given to a local not-for-profit addressing endemic injustice.

We are also committed to doing the work that we need to do as an institution and a community to attend to our own racism. We will be encouraging our members to join in small book study groups, inviting those of us who are white to examine our privilege and the reality of racism, and inviting those of us who are persons of color to choose books that offer hope for a changed world. We will also be providing anti-racism and cultural sensitivity training for all our staff.

We are called as followers of Christ to work for justice. Let’s get to work.”


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3. The Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark King’s Email to the Congregation on Anti-Racism (6/4/2020)

Dear Friends,

We know that our Grace community has, like us, watched in horror as the brutal evidence of our society’s ingrained racism and white privilege has been made evident once again. These are not new stories of murder and disdain for black lives; we are just seeing the latest manifestation of a culture that began with slavery and continues with lynchings and mass incarceration.

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With the Congregation Council, we have a number of ways in which we are responding, both internally and externally.

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This Sunday, Anna Deavere Smith will record a sermon for our 11 a.m. live stream Choral Eucharist, and our collection will be given to a local not-for-profit addressing endemic injustice.

We are also committed to doing the work that we need to do as an institution and a community to attend to our own racism. We will be encouraging our members to join in small book study groups, inviting those of us who are white to examine our privilege and the reality of racism, and inviting those of us who are persons of color to choose books that offer hope for a changed world. We will also be providing anti-racism and cultural sensitivity training for all our staff.

I have invited Regina Walton — congregation member and convenor of the San Francisco Deanery – to add some words from her perspective as an African-American woman at this time.

We are called as followers of Christ to work for justice. Let’s get to work.

Love,

Ellen
Female church leaders of color urge more anti-racism action in open letter

By Egan Millard
Posted Jul 6, 2020

As the United States celebrated Independence Day under the clouds of illness and injustice, three influential leaders in The Episcopal Church published an open letter to the church questioning exactly whose freedom the country and the church were celebrating, and pushing for extensive internal and external anti-racist action.

That action, the letter says, should “free ourselves institutionally and individually of that which stands between us and the dream of God: Whiteness itself.”

The letter, titled “Speaking of Freedom,” was written by the Rev. Kelly Brown Douglas, dean of Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary; the Rev. Stephanie Spellers, canon to the presiding bishop for evangelism, reconciliation and stewardship of creation; and the Rev. Winnie Varghese, a priest at Trinity Church Wall Street in New York.

The three priests, all women of color, used the church’s celebration of Independence Day as a feast day – including a collect that offers thanksgiving for the founders who “won liberty for themselves and for us, and lit the torch of freedom for nations then unborn” – as the basis for a discussion of how the church should respond when freedom is not granted to all.

The letter also references Frederick Douglass’ speech “What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?” in which the former slave criticized America’s – and American Christians’ – celebration of liberties that were withheld from Black people.

“We must ask what is the meaning of freedom in such a time as this, when the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately ravages Black, Brown and First Nations communities suffering the preexisting conditions of injustice and inequality?” the letter asks. “What is the meaning of freedom, when Black bodies continue to be brutalized by policing that has its roots in slave patrols? What is freedom when our Breonnas are not safe in their homes, our Ahmauds are not safe jogging, and our Erics, Elijahs and Georges cry out, 'I can't breathe’?”

The letter lays out a vision for a different kind of freedom for the church to embrace – one that is “more than a song we sing or a flag we wave.” The church, the letter asserts, must claim freedom “from America's original sin: White supremacy.” That freedom requires
truth-telling, transformative letting-go, being born from above and living into baptism, the
priests wrote. That vision, Spellers said, aligns with the **Becoming Beloved Community
initiative**, which has expressed the church’s long-term commitment to racial justice since
2017 and calls for truth-telling by churches, anti-racism formation, and advocacy to “repair
the breach.” The writers felt an urgent need to focus on such commitments at this pivotal
moment in history.

The U.S. faces intertwined crises that have commanded the world’s attention: More than
130,000 Americans **have died of COVID-19**, with Black and Latino Americans **being affected
at higher rates** than white Americans. At the same time, the Black Lives Matter movement
has shone a spotlight on systemic racism, as seen in everything from racial disparities in
health care to the killing of George Floyd, with **protests continuing around the world**.

In an interview with Episcopal News Service, Douglas called it a “**kairos moment**” – a
“moment of disruption and chaos, but a moment that is pregnant with possibilities and
pregnant with the movement of God.

“And you can miss the moment or you can seize it,” Douglas said.

The letter also presents Episcopalians with a stark choice: “Steeped as it is in White
supremacy, our denomination must model transformative letting-go and decide whether it
is going to be White (that is, allied with oppression) or be church.” Whiteness, the writers
say, is “not a benign construct” but the insidious driving force behind white supremacy.

The three priests, who have regular conversations about the problems facing the church
and society, said they felt compelled to speak up and offer their perspective as women of
color in a mostly white church. Although many Episcopalians feel overwhelmed and
powerless to act against racial injustice, there is also a current of change running through
the church now that feels different, they said.

“The combination of COVID and the uprisings that are happening kind of illustrate what
systemic racism is in a way that I don't know has been illustrated in my life, in a way that
the public can understand,” Varghese told ENS. “And I see movement all over the church.”

“I have felt a stirring to say a word – any word – to name the grief, to name the hope, and
also to speak strategically about, ‘What can we do as church? What must we do?’” Spellers
said.

The answer to that, the priests wrote, requires more forceful anti-racist actions by
Episcopalians and more widespread participation in the work of anti-racism. To that end,
Spellers said her office is conducting a survey of what each diocese is doing to dismantle
racism and how dioceses might be able to help each other.
“We haven’t just kind of sat by and received the benefits of oppression,” Spellers told ENS. “We have actively participated, blessed those systems, built the systems, maintained and protected the systems. The only way The Episcopal Church – and Episcopalians – has any credibility is if we do the external work on justice, and policing in particular, and our internal work on telling the truth about our church’s story and healing our own identification with white supremacy.”

The leaders closed their letter with a nod to Pauli Murray, an early civil rights activist, fiery feminist and the first African American woman ordained a priest in The Episcopal Church.

“We believe that we can become the nation and church that our first Black sister priest Pauli Murray called us to be, a “true community that is based upon equality, mutuality and reciprocity … that affirms the richness of individual diversity, as well as the common human ties that bind us together.”

“As Jesus urged, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself’ (Luke 10:27). It is then that we will be free.”

Read the entire letter here.

– Egan Millard is an assistant editor and reporter for Episcopal News Service. He can be reached at emillard@episcopalchurch.org.

Editor’s note: An earlier version of this story contained an incorrect date for the launch of the Becoming Beloved Community initiative. The General Convention resolution that called for it was passed in 2015, but the initiative itself began in 2017.


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On this day, July 4th, our country celebrates its Independence. Our Episcopal Church also marks this as a major Feast Day, a day to pray in thanksgiving for the founders who “won liberty for themselves and for us, and lit the torch of freedom for nations then unborn.”

Yet, we must ask what is the meaning of freedom in such a time as this, when the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately ravages Black, Brown and First Nations communities suffering the pre-existing conditions of injustice and inequality? What is the meaning of freedom, when Black bodies continue to be brutalized by policing that has its roots in slave patrols? What is freedom when our Breonnas are not safe in their homes, our Ahmauds are not safe jogging, and our Erics, Elijahs and Georges cry out, “I can't breathe”?

For the church, freedom must be more than a song we sing or a flag we wave. It must begin with the cross that calls us to claim freedom — and to free our church and nation — from America’s original sin: White supremacy. We long for the day that our church might be free to become what we have until now only aspired to be: a true church following a crucified and risen Lord and witnessing to God’s just future.

And so we write this day, three women, three Episcopal priests, two of African descent, one South Indian, reflecting on what freedom means. We are fueled by a shared hope that our Episcopal Church can indeed live into what it means to be church and thus lead the nation into what it means to be truly free.

** What Does Freedom Mean to Us? **
Freedom means transformative truth-telling. Truth-telling like this is not about self-serving admissions of guilt, to be followed by exoneration from an inhumane past. Transformative truth-telling takes responsibility for that past. This means naming the ways the church has been shaped by and continues to benefit from the complex realities of White supremacy — and then doing that which is necessary systemically, culturally and theologically to free the church from its sin.

Frederick Douglass spoke the truth about American Christianity in 1852, when he said in his “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” address:

“A worship that can be conducted by persons who refuse to give shelter to the houseless, to give bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and who enjoin obedience to a law forbidding these acts of mercy, is a curse, not a blessing to mankind. … The church of this country is not only indifferent to the wrongs of the slave, it actually takes sides with the oppressors.”

His words have shocking resonance today, particularly for Episcopalians. That is why, from sea to shining sea, we must tell the truth of our story as the church of wealthy slaveholders and traders. We must speak of Episcopalians who were personally responsible for the forced migration and extermination of Native peoples, and others who penned best-selling tracts laying out the biblical case for slavery. We must tell the truth about congregations that advertised lynchings in their Sunday bulletins. We must speak of church support for “sundown towns”, internment camps and Asian exclusion acts. We must bring to light the sinful sources of the inherited wealth of “privileged” congregations and dioceses, resources they continue to hoard while other congregations and dioceses that serve Indigenous people, descendants of slaves and immigrants struggle to survive.

Jesus said, “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). If we speak these unflinching truths, the church may find its way, and lead a nation that claims to trust in God.

Freedom means transformative letting-go. To let-go is to free ourselves institutionally and individually of that which stands between us and the dream of God: Whiteness itself.

Whiteness is not a benign construct. It is that which White supremacy protects. It is a culture and way of being that claims superiority and universality, even as it subjugates, appropriates, silences, deports, dehumanizes, and eliminates that which is not White.

Whiteness prevents us all from living the truth of who we are as sacred children of God. White Americans must name and let-go of the realities and privileges of Whiteness, even as
People of Color must refuse the tantalizing pull to secure the privileges of Whiteness for ourselves.

Steeped as it is in White supremacy, our denomination must model transformative letting-go and decide whether it is going to be White (that is, allied with oppression) or be church. Jesus made his choice. In his crucifixion, he let-go of anything that set him apart from the crucified classes of people of his day. He understood that it is only when the least of these are able to breathe freely, that the sacred humanity of all is restored.

Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Before there is a possibility of abundant life for all, that which binds us to sin must die and be sloughed off like an old skin. We urge our White siblings to take on this life-giving work of letting-go.

**Freedom means being born from above.** To be born from above (John 3:3) is to hold ourselves accountable not to the way things are, but to the way God has promised us they will be: a Beloved Community marked by compassion, love and justice.

White supremacy has cast a nearly impenetrable shadow, but we cling to God’s promise. We know that in Christ whatever is broken can be restored. To be born from above, our church will need to join in reimagining and fostering new ways of being a society and a people. In this reimagined reality, the first would be last and the last first, not because there is a reversal of penalty and privilege, but because there is no longer last, no longer first.

Jesus’s life and mission were dedicated to this call: “to proclaim good news to the poor, … freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18–19). To be born from above is to hear and heed his calling as our own.

**Freedom means living into our Baptism.** Ultimately, the way to freedom for Episcopalians is embedded in the covenant we take on and renew at Baptism.

*We have promised as a church and as individual followers of Jesus to resist evil and — when we fail, for we surely will — to repent and return to our God.* In this moment, we must do the institutional and personal work of transformative truth-telling and repentance. Learning from the witness of our South African and Canadian siblings, we can organize diocesan and local truth convenings that feature public storytelling and confession of the racial violence and oppression in which Episcopal churches have been complicit. As truths come to light, we can commit to change structures, behaviors and practices that participate — even unconsciously — in White supremacy.

*We have promised as a church and as individual followers of Jesus to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to love our neighbors as ourselves.* In this moment, we must do the life-long
inner, interpersonal and institutional work of letting-go of Whiteness and instead embrace a way of life that looks like Jesus. This requires a fresh commitment to local and regional training and formation, especially in anti-racism, dismantling racism and internalized oppression. This season of disruption and displacement may be the ideal moment for us and our churches to pause, learn, reflect, let-go and reimagine life beyond Whiteness.

*We have promised to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.* In this moment we must do the social and structural work of justice and repair, with a special commitment to ending the brutal reign of White supremacy over Black, Brown, Native and Asian bodies. We must protest and witness against White supremacy in its many guises and invest our resources — financial, relational, political, intellectual, moral — in local, state and federal struggles to reimagine “criminal” justice. This begins with discarding a system of policing born of injustice, and promoting models that aim for community flourishing and freedom from the violence of systemic poverty and inequity. No one can claim to be free as long as these systems ruthlessly shackle, diminish and destroy the children of God.

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Can a denomination steeped in White supremacy turn and dedicate its life to dismantling the very structures of death that it blessed and built? Can it become Beloved Community, where the flourishing of every person and all creation is the hope of each, where the oppressed are liberated from oppression, and oppressors are at last free of the sin that oppresses?

We believe that, with God’s help, The Episcopal Church can become an instrument not of oppression but of God’s peace. It can grow followers of Jesus who are more concerned about taking up the cross of our crucified Lord than they are about maintaining the control and privilege of a crucifying culture.

We believe that we can become the nation and church that our first Black sister priest Pauli Murray called us to be, a “true community that is based upon equality, mutuality and reciprocity … that affirms the richness of individual diversity, as well as the common human ties that bind us together.”

As Jesus urged, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). It is then that we will be free.