

THE CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

PASTORAL COUNCIL STATEMENT ON OUR COMMUNAL COMMITMENT TO ESTABLISHING RACIAL EQUITY AND DISMANTLING RACIAL INJUSTICE

Recently, a few Catholic social media outlets, web postings and even a cable news outlet drew attention to the Racial Justice Pledge posted on our website and recited by those who wish at the conclusion of Mass. Our livestream Mass which usually garners approximately 1500 views attracted more than 8000 views. Excerpts of the recitation of the pledge, sometimes edited out of context, have appeared, garnering 100s of more views. This statement places the Pledge in the context of our communal faith life. By this statement we also extend an invitation to those who have contacted us regarding the Pledge to engage with us in a prayerful, inclusive conversation that has Christ's message of love for all God's children at its heart.

Our community at The Church of St. Francis Xavier, in carrying out our communal sacramental life in faith, committed itself years ago to putting Catholic social teaching into practice through works of charity and acts of peace and justice. This commitment has led us to provide spiritual direction for parishioners to deepen their prayer life, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and offer a spiritual home to the LGBTQ+ community. More than two years ago, in furtherance of a commitment to racial justice that dates to at least 1964, we began a communal examination of institutional and systemic racial inequity – including the manifestation of that inequity in the Catholic Church.

As part of our self-examination we have sought to understand the term “white privilege” and how it operates to re-enforce racial injustice. “White privilege” has been defined as advantages that are taken for granted by white people and cannot be similarly enjoyed by people of color in the same context (government, community, workplace, schools, etc.).” These advantages pertain solely to the color of a person's skin.

It is uncomfortable and often distressing for white people to recognize that simply being white confers a presumptive superiority at the expense of

people of color. Initial reactions can be defensive: “Slavery ended in 1865.” “My family never benefited from black or brown labor.” “I’ve worked hard for everything I have.” These reactions seek to end the conversation. They seek to sidestep personal complicity in perpetuating the systems and institutions that support racial inequity. However, these reactions also confirm the speaker’s recognition that racial inequity exists – in housing, health care, education, the enjoyment of personal rights, and income, to name a few contexts.

Once we recognize racial injustice, the Gospel of Jesus compels us to act to remedy the injustice. The Racial Justice Pledge, posted on the parish website (can be found below) and recited at the conclusion of Mass, is an opportunity for us to dedicate ourselves – and our faith community – to the biblical cause of justice. In their pastoral letter on racism, “Open Wide Our Hearts” the US Bishops acknowledged “systemic racism”, stating that “all of us are in need of personal, ongoing conversion”. The letter continues, “To do justice requires an honest acknowledgment of our failures and the restoring of right relationships between us.” The pledge is offered in the spirit of advancing our conversion and restoring right relationships among us. It is our community’s hope that the pledge and our other ministries can foster conversations within our immediate and larger faith community. We welcome being at the forefront of this effort.

A PLEDGE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE Question format

The Church of St. Francis Xavier joins with people throughout the world, in committing itself to racial justice. And so we pledge together:

Please respond YES

DO YOU SUPPORT justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

DO YOU AFFIRM that white privilege is unfair and harmful to those who have it and to those who do not.

DO YOU AFFIRM that white privilege and the culture of white supremacy must be dismantled wherever it is present?

DO YOU SUPPORT racial equity, justice, and liberation for every person.

DO YOU AFFIRM the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Therefore, from this day forward . . .

WILL YOU strive to understand more deeply the injustice and suffering white privilege and white supremacy cause?

WILL YOU COMMIT to help transform our church culture to one that is actively engaged in seeking racial justice and equity for everyone.

WILL YOU make a greater effort to treat all people with the same respect you expect to receive.

WILL YOU COMMIT to developing the courage to live your beliefs and values of racial justice and equality.

WILL YOU strive daily to eliminate racial prejudice from your thoughts and actions so that you can better promote the racial justice efforts of our church.

WILL YOU renew and honor this pledge daily, knowing that our church, our community, our nation, and our world will be better places because of my efforts.

["Racial Equity Pledge" by First Unitarian Church of Dallas, Texas revised by SFX]