



**A Statement and Challenge  
from the  
WPAUMC Anti-Racism Team (ART)  
July 15, 2020**

The members of the Western PA Conference Anti-Racism Team (ART) are appalled and filled with grief by the unjust deaths of persons of color in recent months. Unfortunately, these are not new or isolated events, but a continuous and trending reality. Sadly, once again we must stand against such evil acts, believing the time to engage in finding the solution is now. We stand in solidarity with families of the victims and agree with people in our country and around the world who realize these deaths are a manifestation of the systemic racism that has been present in American society for far too long. Such horrific events compel us to speak out, stand up, and act from within our very own context.

The Western PA Conference, believing the Church should take a lead with such efforts, commissioned the Anti-Racism Team in 2008. ART members were trained to recognize instances of implicit bias, as well as racial and gender privilege, while helping other leaders and congregation members to do the same. In 2020, our Conference and District Anti-racism teams remain committed to combat the sin of racism, by dismantling the systems that perpetuate it, recognizing its occurrences within ourselves, the WPA Annual Conference, and beyond the church walls, and by supporting beliefs, actions, movements and development of policies needed to tear down unjust practices.

In September 2019, the entire WPA Anti-racism Team read and assessed the book, *How to Be An Antiracist* before recommending it to some District Superintendents for ART groups in their areas. The author and professor Dr. Ibram X. Kendi proposes a core principle for understanding racism and anti-racism. He says the terms racist and anti-racist are not fixed identities to be used as pejorative or complimentary labels for people. Rather, both simply describe a person's action or inaction.

"One allows racial inequities to persevere and the other confronts the inequities," he explains. "Anti-racism moves from social witness to social action. Antiracists support such policy through their actions or expression of ideas."

ART seeks to identify structures that maintain systemic racism and inequality and replace them with just, liberating, and life-giving structures -- the key to dismantling racism.

## A Challenge

The 2020 ART congregation representatives *Don Blinn, Heather Burtch, Marilyn Larrimer, Peggy Ward*, as well as assigned Appointive Cabinet representatives *Dawn Hand, Paul Ritchey, and Renee' Mikell* proudly proclaim that we are anti-racists. We invite all like-minded individuals to join us in doing the same.

***"If your heart is as my heart, take my hand."*** -- John Wesley

These troubling times remind us about the importance of joining hands with as many individuals and groups as possible to become engaged in the work of antiracism like it has never been done before. We believe that collectively we have enough gifts, innovation, and diversity of thought to conduct both micro and macro-level work.

**First**, join in our denomination's new initiative "[Dismantling Racism: Pressing on to Freedom](#)," launched by the Council of Bishops and our General Agencies

**Next**, we extend a challenge to support initiatives within our churches and communities in Western Pennsylvania. Here are a few suggestions to **Take Action Against Racism**:

Support WPA Anti-Racism Team Initiatives with at least one **George Floyd 8:46 Action Item**

- **SIT** with the Conference Anti Racism Team twice monthly for 8 months, 46 minutes each time for a ZOOM call. Share perspectives, Deepen relationships, Listen and Learn, Discuss possible solutions
- **GIVE** Challenge at least 8 people from your congregation to give some configuration of \$8.46. For the next eight months, ask each person or group to give \$8 or \$8.46; \$4 or 46 cents for a future donation toward a George Floyd Memorial Scholarship at one of several colleges and universities or the [United Methodist Black College Fund](#). A challenge to establish a George Floyd scholarship initially was made by Scott Hagan, President of [North Central University](#), a small Christian university in downtown Minneapolis, to other college presidents. It quickly picked up steam. [Read more.](#)
- **VOTING ASSISTANCE** For the next four months, help 8 or 4 or 6 disadvantaged people from communities of color or other disenfranchised voting populations to navigate barriers and gain equal access to ballot boxes. For example: One district antiracism team lead by Marilyn Larrimer is sending stamps to a group of people who need to mail in their ballots.

### Equity Legislation

- **SUPPORT** the [End Racial and Religious Profiling Act of 2019](#) - H.R.4339 to eliminate racial profiling by law enforcement or the more recent bills such as [HR7130, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act](#), which passed the U.S. House of Representatives in June 2020.
- **LEARN** more about legislation on police reform and how to follow it at [umcjustice.org/news-and-stories/take-action-on-police-reform-1061](https://umcjustice.org/news-and-stories/take-action-on-police-reform-1061)

The UMC Justice website, from the UMC Board of Church and Society, also includes information on how to communicate with legislators on each bill.

- **CONTACT** your Legislators  
Learn how at [unitedmethodistwomen.org/members-leaders/action/contact-congress](https://unitedmethodistwomen.org/members-leaders/action/contact-congress). Find names and contact information of all of your elected officials [here](#) (League of Women Voters of the U.S.)

## Monitor Local Law Enforcement Policy

- **LEARN** more about policing policies in your community and ask for change, if needed.  
For example, Mayor Bill Peduto supports **4 of 8 proposed restrictive use of force policies** in the City of Pittsburgh
  - Bans Chokeholds and Strangleholds (Yes)
  - Requires De-escalation (Yes)
  - Requires Warning Before Shooting (Yes)
  - Has Use of Force Continuum (Yes)
  - **Duty to Intervene (No)**
  - **Ban Shooting at Moving Vehicles (No)**
  - **Requires Comprehensive Reporting (No)**
  - **Exhaust All Alternatives Before Shooting (No)**

Email us @ [antiracism@wpaumc.org](mailto:antiracism@wpaumc.org) for more information about working together