

Grinnell Friends Church recognizes the need to strive for racial reconciliation in our nation, in our community, and also as a church. As a family of believers, we affirm the authority of scripture and its command to treat one another without bias regarding race or ethnicity. We also recognize that, as humans, it is part of our nature to draw near to those like us, whether in skin color, political leaning, or favorite sports team. While enjoying the company of someone who is like us is not a sin, disliking someone simply because they are different is a sin. As with every conflict, we are challenged to begin by examining and admitting our own fault in what continues to be a festering problem in our nation and in the larger Church. We are called to examine our own hearts and ask ourselves a few simple questions.

Our Friends Discipline (statement of doctrine) asks us this question: **Do you believe in the spiritual capacity of people of all races, and do you recognize their equality in the sight of God** (Query, or question, 10 to Monthly Meetings for Business)?

Genesis 1:26 states, Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...". Racism is a sinful denial of the presence of the image of God in part of God's children. Pastor Tony Evans clearly states, "Racism is not a skin problem, it is a sin problem." Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." These verses do not allow for treating some people differently from others.

A second question from Query 10 states: **Are you aware of your responsibility as a Christian to help in the elimination of racial discrimination and prejudice?** Christ's Second Commandment is restated in James 2:8-9: "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law breakers.'" We cannot follow the Lord Jesus Christ fully and harbor racial bias toward others. Racism and racial injustice are sin and are a rejection of Christ's Second Commandment. 'Loving your neighbor as yourself' obviously requires action.

In an issue of the Iowa Friend, our denomination's newsletter, the lead article was "America's Racial Crisis is a result of the failure of the church to deal with racism" by Dr. Tony Evans. **Evans indicated that the silence of evangelical churches about racism and racial injustice are the reasons the sin of racism continues to flourish in**

our country. Edmund Burke got right to the point when he wrote this in 1770: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Racism is a sinful evil that tears at the fabric of our community, state, and country. It is sin and is contrary to the Church and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have sinned. Racism is sin and we have been silent about it as a Church. 2 Chronicles 7:14 clearly states what our response to our sin of silence should be: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin, and will heal their land." We confess and repent of our sin of silence and inaction regarding racism and racial injustice and ask God's forgiveness. We need both personal and national confession of racism, both known and unknown.

There must be a contemporary call to all Americans to join together to find ways to build better relationships and a fresh commitment to treat all people justly with dignity and respect. We must prayerfully search our hearts, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and choose the path of justice, forgiveness, mercy, love, and grace.

Tom Showalter, our Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends General Superintendent (the administrator of our state church organization) wrote: "In my experiences, if you seek to have one thing removed (like racism), it will need to be replaced with something else (like Christian community). The Cross is what destroyed the dividing wall of hostility, Ephesians 2:14, 'For He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.'" The Lord's prayer gives us clear guidance: "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven." In this case, doing God's Kingdom work on Earth involves breaking down the barrier of racial discrimination, which requires action.

We are commissioning the Grinnell First Friends Ministry and Counsel (our church Spiritual Life board) to discuss and prayerfully examine the issues of racism and racial injustice. Our responsibility is to discover what we are to do now in Grinnell to "...destroy the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14) of racism and racial injustice and to replace them with Christ's love. We are seeking God's will about how we might personally come alongside people of color in Grinnell with an attitude of humility, to respond to our "responsibility as Christians to help in the elimination of racial discrimination and prejudice" (Query 10).