

Drawn from *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community, Churchwide Antiracism Policy*, as approved by the 222nd General Assembly of the PC(USA) in summer 2016

God's Purpose for Us: The Intercultural Community

"...The Christian response to the contemporary problem of racism must be developed in light of a clear biblical and theological understanding of what it means to be human. The Reformed perspective on the meaning of humanness is informed by John Calvin's assertion that proper knowledge of ourselves as humans is achievable only through a knowledge of God and God's will for human community.

...Calvin used the notion of the image of God to capture the essence of the biblical understanding of what it means to be human: human beings were made by God, in the image of God....In consonance with God's perspective, humans must appreciate the sacredness and sanctity of all human life; establish relationships based on the rule of love, respect, and dignity; assume moral responsibility for nurturing the bonds of mutual affection; render supportive aid to those in need; avoid hurtful attitudes and harmful actions; and make justice the basis of one's treatment of others. Thus, Calvin and other Reformers established a critical linkage between the image of God in humans and the divine mandate to make justice, love, and peace the fundamental basis of human relationships.

...In the Old Testament, God's deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt is illustrative of the importance God places on justice in human community. God works to establish justice and peace in community through laws that establish right relationships in the human family.⁴ God's restorative activity in the exodus is followed by the giving of covenantal law, which is aimed at establishing the rule of love and justice in the community. The essence of law is commitment to a covenantal relationship that establishes the proper relationship with God, and that derivatively establishes right relationships between and among humans...

The New Testament embraces and expands the viewpoint of God's commitment to love and justice. The divine reinforcement of moral law undergirding right relationships is proclaimed and witnessed through the person, work, and gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus stands firmly in the tradition of Amos, Isaiah, and Hosea when he chastises those who neglect the weightier matters of justice and mercy, and when he announces that nations will be judged by the way they treat those who are less fortunate. Jesus' explanation of the essence of the law as covenantal integrity between neighbors who express relationships marked by love and justice reveals that love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable. In Jesus' discussion of the kingdom of God and in his injunctions in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus unequivocally proclaims that God's will for the human community is to live as a family of mutually supportive, caring siblings (Mt. 5:1-12, NRSV).

The early church of the New Testament further advances the notion of divine commitment to justice in its explication of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In Acts the workings of the Holy Spirit to create community among the faithful reveal the celebration of diversity and inclusiveness as God's purpose for the human family as mediated through the church.

Moreover, it is the Holy Spirit that empowers and inspires Peter's proclamation of the priesthood of all believers—accentuating the egalitarian nature of the Christian community and its implications for all creation (Acts 2; 1 Pet. 2:9–10, NRSV).

Martin Luther King Jr.'s understanding of "The Beloved Community" provides an example of an antiracism vision that is rooted in the biblical vision of God's will for human relationships. This vision is grounded in our common origin as children of God from which we derive our inalienable worth, dignity, and sanctity. The vision affirms that every person's right to be free, to be treated as persons not things, and to be valued as full members of the human community are gifts from God. The solidarity of the human family and the social character of all human life indicate that no person can develop fully apart from interaction with others. All persons are mutually linked and meant to live and grow in relationship with each other as we share a common destiny. Therefore, differences of ethnicity and culture are to be viewed as God-given gifts to be celebrated, rather than obstacles to be overcome. The Beloved Community or more contemporarily, the Intercultural Community, symbolizes that network of human relationships where diversity is embraced; where the content of one's character is more important than skin color; where love, justice, and peace emerge as the preeminent norms for all relationships; and where institutional power is humanized by moral values so that it serves the interest of justice..."