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April 5, 2019

The National Black Presbyterian Caucus Response to Institutional Racism in The Presbytery of Detroit

Peace Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is with a deep sense of hurt, pain and disappointment that I write you on behalf of the Board of Directors of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus to convey our displeasure with an incident of racial insensitivity and abuse of power experienced recently by one of our members. This incident was perpetrated by a few white leaders of the Presbytery of Detroit.

On Thursday, April 4, 2019 we received a copy of a letter of resignation from a young black male ruling elder and staff member of the Presbytery of Detroit. He resigned due to negative effects to his physical and spiritual health. After being subjected to a stressful workplace where in more than one conversation with white leadership of the Presbytery of Detroit the “N-Word” was used to make a point in an analogy. Unfortunately, after a significant amount of time after this conversation, there were still no efforts made by some white presbytery leaders to acknowledge this major insensitivity, repent and confess this sin and evil. The mere weak apology provided does not reconcile or repair this egregious behavior.

What time is it in the Church of Jesus Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) when members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) feel empowered to use the “N-Word”? What time is it sisters and brothers? It is evident it is time for a wakeup call! It’s time for a public display condemning this empowered behavior of marginalization and oppression of people of color. We are not only dealing with a specific personnel behavior issue in the Presbytery of Detroit between a white supervisor and a black employee we are also dealing with years of imbedded racism, white privilege and power that must be disrupted with the importance it requires.

We feel the pain of our young brother as he now must face the reality of the hurt of racism that we have failed to eradicate. He now has experienced the “Quality of Hurt” expressed by author Chester Himes. We, members of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus, take responsibility for the lack of effectiveness of our efforts to dismantle racism in the church and society.

Maybe if we had done more, spoken out more, challenged unjust polity and behavior, cried more, expressed our anger more, maybe our young brother would not have experienced deep hurt. Our young brother now must struggle with issues of acceptance, belonging, human value and worth. We are committed to remain on this battlefield to uplift our young brother and all our members, reminding them that they valued and children of God.

We, the Board of Directors of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus share the following:

1. We **condemn** the use of the “N-Word” in any context. This act and the behavior demonstrated by some white members of the Presbytery of Detroit is a sin that must be confessed and repented.

2. We request immediate action by the leadership of the Presbytery of Detroit that those involved be relieved of their duties including the Executive Presbyter until such a time that an investigation has been concluded. That condemnation of this unacceptable behavior be communicated to the Presbytery membership, Synod of the Covenant leadership, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, leadership of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Board of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus. We request immediate transparency and accountability. Waiting to be politically correct is unacceptable!

3. The National Black Presbyterian Caucus expects the Presbytery of Detroit to assume accountability for eradicating a culture of injustice, racial marginalization and oppression.

4. The National Black Presbyterian Caucus will join in all efforts that seeks God's justice and offers its advocacy to the Presbytery of Detroit in developing a solution to this problem. We commit to walk with the Presbytery of Detroit so we can say that this behavior will never happen again within the Presbytery of Detroit, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), perhaps in our country and never to occur in God's Beloved Community.

5. The National Black Presbyterian Caucus supports our members of the Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus and the current efforts being undertaken by some leaders of the Presbytery of Detroit. We stand in unity with them.

Sisters and brothers, we pray that those who know God commit to living in a community where any injustice that oppresses and marginalizes God's people does not exist and where all of God's creation thrives!

Bearing faithful witness to God's radical hope that we love one another.

Thomas H. Priest, Jr.
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President,
National Black Presbyterian Caucus