

February 5, 2025

To: Rev. Kyle Walker, Grace Presbytery
Cc: Rev. Laura Walters, Grace Presbytery

Rev. Walker,

Our rather small congregation of Grace First in Weatherford west of Fort Worth and the county seat for Parker County, began work toward an anti-racism policy as required by PCUSA and the Book of Order with some trepidation and many questions, including why do we have to do this? For a solo pastor, 1 clerk, 1 volunteer retired attorney, and nine Session members the task seemed beyond our reach. We found, however, that the group was willing to give time on a Saturday to begin the work under the leadership of Rev. Laura Walters, Coordinator of Community Engagement and Public Witness. I had heard from you through a regional meeting that there was a person on the Grace Presbytery staff (Laura) with experience in this type of work, and Rev. Slyter who knew Laura from work within Grace Presbytery believed she would be a good resource for us. We soon learned that her passion and experience were what we needed and worked with her to find a date to schedule a Saturday leadership retreat.

A winter storm came through our area on Thursday of that week dropping several inches of snow. With schools cancelled on Friday, we were not at all sure that we could follow through with our plans for the Saturday morning meeting. Laura did not want to cancel even though she had an hour's drive to Weatherford, so we delayed the start time and found that everyone else planned to come in as well.

So, with Laura's leadership we began the work of determining what the anti-racism policy for Grace First Presbyterian Church in Weatherford, Texas would look like. With Laura's guidance, we felt free to talk about the need for a policy and of changing our behaviors along with our mindsets. It was a safe space to discuss: where are we as a congregation with regard to racism and race relations in the community? We had already been working cooperatively with a Black church in our community to provide school supplies for students, but what more could we do together? We also asked, What might be some next steps? Are we doing what we are called to do? What other groups might we work with to develop multi-racial relationships in our community?

After four hours including discussions throughout the lunch break, some beginning steps were developed and then reviewed by the Session at the January stated session meeting. We haven't yet found a title for our policy that resonates with everyone, but we have faith that the name will become clear to us soon. We do have a written policy draft with section titles of: *Why this policy needs to exist; What are we hoping to accomplish with this policy; How do we propose to effectuate this policy; and A clear statement as to required frequency of review of the policy.* Session has agreed to review the policy in April or May before as the newly elected officers join in this policy development.

I want to thank you for providing guidance in allowing each church to develop its own policy over time and especially for suggesting working with Laura to begin to understand allyship. I would encourage other churches to take advantage of Laura's wisdom, skills, and energy. Our experience has been positive and encouraging. We know we have work to do, but we are now more open to seeing, listening to, working with and learning from others in this one world that God has given to us all.

The following is a list of our initial steps to developing an anti-racism policy for our church:

- The hardest step is the first one—agree to begin the work and get a commitment from all involved
- Visit with Laura and schedule a time when the full group can work without interruption for several hours
- Schedule a planning time with Laura and a few leaders to plan the meeting
- Provide a safe place and time to visit over a meal
- Agree to initial steps and have a sub group bring a summary to the full group.
- Schedule follow-up work sessions and review progress knowing that growth isn't always in a straight line. We often need to loop back to recommit or to take a side trip before returning.
- Pray for open minds and open hearts—the opportunities will follow

With gratitude and hope,
Linda Crownover, Clerk of Session
Grace First Presbyterian Church