

Dear Brothers and Sisters -

Warm greetings to each of you across our U.S. and Canadian families of churches. We hope today finds you faithful, at peace, and fixed on Jesus. We, the regional family chairpersons, send you our heartfelt love as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the racial tensions in our countries at this hour.

The purpose of this letter is to communicate some of the thoughts we, as U.S. and Canadian church leaders, have in regard to racial topics as they apply to our U.S. and Canadian fellowship.

While our churches across the world form a wonderful, unified global collaboration of more than 800 congregations, we no longer have the kind of centralized leadership dynamic that allows us to collectively speak for each individual congregation. However, as regional family chairs we have been given the directive to initiate collaborative measures that will benefit the wholeness of our churches, the unity of our churches, and the pursuit of the mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus. Therefore, we felt we would be remiss if we did not speak up regarding the racial injustices suffered by many of our brothers and sisters.

As a group, we have been talking, praying and processing all that has been happening in our countries and in our fellowship over the past several weeks. At the request of the ICOC's committee on **Social, Cultural, Unity And Diversity** issues--SCUAD, for short--we would like to share several thoughts and observations from our perspective:

- **We wholeheartedly condemn the sins of hatred, racism and all forms of favoritism.**

Racism is a grievous sin that must be addressed in the likeness of all sins. At times, in our desire to stay out of "civilian affairs" (2 Timothy 2:4), we have not always adequately taught what the Bible teaches regarding racism, racial injustice and oppression. Our fellowship of churches has a beautiful diversity that reflects the missional work of God Almighty (Matthew 28:18-20), often in direct contrast to the communities around us. However, we do not want to take this diversity for granted. Continual teaching on sin--especially those that are as prevalent in society as racial favoritism and prejudice--is imperative if we are to stay on the narrow path of Jesus. As regional chairs, we are committed to biblical teaching that condemns hatred, racism and favoritism in all forms and espouses compassion and love.

- **We encourage healthy, healing dialogue.**

We are determined to make it our priority to listen to one another (James 1:19) and to love one another in ways that meet each other's specific needs (Philippians 2:1-11). It is our desire to devote ourselves to the cause of honest assessment and ongoing conversations about race and diversity within our churches. It is clear to us that there is a real need for more healthy dialogue on topics of diversity, cultural humility and conflict resolution in the context of our lives as Christians. We will continue to seek input from local church leadership for ways we can help support them in meeting the needs of the disciples God has placed in their care. We want to help in any way we can, to ensure that we as a fellowship are better prepared to engage with one another and glorify God (John 13:34-35, Ephesians 4:29-32).

- **We are deeply sorry and grieve with all affected by racial injustice.**

We grieve with every brother and sister who has been affected by racism and are deeply sorry for those times when the church has not felt like a safe refuge. We have heard painful stories from brothers and sisters who have experienced much suffering caused by racial injustice and prejudice. While we sadly recognize there are more stories yet unheard, we are committed to continuing conversations to better understand these experiences and perspectives, and to glean ideas for growth. We have been moved and encouraged by the faith and devotion to Jesus of so many heroic brothers and sisters, who have not allowed these hurts to cause them to become embittered. Their perseverance and commitment to righteousness, even when wronged, is an example to us all.

- **We desire for God's church to be a beacon of hope to the world.**

As we move forward we have an incredible opportunity to be a beacon of hope to so many in the world. In John 17:20-23, Jesus prays for the unity of all those who would believe in Him. Just think about it...2,000 years ago, Jesus prayed for *us* to have a unity like He and the Father share! This is a *supernatural* unity that is only possible through God. We must not settle for a *superficial* unity by avoiding difficult topics like race. We as the regional family chairs--all from different racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds--have grown closer to one another as we have engaged in these talks. We believe that difficult talks, had in a godly manner, bring us one step closer to being an answer to Jesus' prayer. Jesus prayed for us; let's commit to being part of the answer.

- **We are committed to greater love and spiritual health.**

There is still much work to do in order to truly understand the depth and complexity of the sin of racism and how it has impacted our fellowship. To that end, we are completely committed to progressing toward greater love and spiritual health. Paul tells the Ephesians, *You too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit* (Ephesians 2:22). There is a work that God has done, is doing, and will continue to do to make us individually and collectively more in the likeness of His Son.

Day of Prayer and Fasting -- August 12

As we grieve the effects of racism and commit to growing even more in our love and compassion for one another, we are asking that you join us for a **Day of Prayer and Fasting on Wednesday, August 12**. Let us take some time to detach from worldly influences and simply connect with God and seek His direction as a church. Let us pray for humility with one another and for God to root out anything that would prevent us from loving Him and loving each other. Finally, despite the obvious sin and division in the world, let us remember that we are a people of hope and not despair--as the Hebrew writer reminds us, *We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved* (Hebrews 10:39). Let us continue to forge ahead together, filled with the Holy Spirit's guidance and counsel to proclaim Jesus to a hurting world.

With Love and Respect in Christ –

Jimmy and Anita Allen (New England)

Ed and Deb Anton (ACR)

AT and Marci Arneson (Midwest)

Todd and Patty Asaad (Texas)

Danny and Gillianne Brisebois (Canada-East)

Ron and Lauri-Anne Conkling (Florida)

Vince and Robin Hawkins (Heartland)

Scott and Thereasa Kirkpatrick (Southeast)

Rafael and Griselda Lua (Pacific Southwest)

Daren and Karla Overstreet (Northwest)

Johnny and Glory Rivera (New York, New Jersey)

Chester and Sirikit Umaguig (Rocky Mountain)

This letter is written with the support and advisement of the Catalyst Team, the Elders Service Team and the SCUAD team. These groups fully support the sentiments being expressed here.