



Unity in Christ Affirmations

Introduction:

This document began as a request and outcome from the meeting on Racial Healing, which took place in Detroit at the end of June 2020, among pastors and laity in Detroit and Michigan District officials. This gathering took place while the Nation was still crippled by the Covid-19 virus and all of its impactful consequences. Then, there was the image of George Floyd dying as a police officer knelt on his neck and the awakening of the American conscience and clouded eyes seeing, perhaps for the first time clearly, racial divides.

God was not surprised by any of this, and neither should we have been because we live in a sinful world. Through it all, the Gospel message of the greatest healing known to man—the reconciliation of sinful people with God and reconciliation among people who live under the cross of Jesus—continued to give hope. This reconciliation comes through the forgiveness of sins achieved only through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the world (“... where there is forgiveness there is also life and salvation”). And the inspired Word of God continued to guide, inspire, and strengthen our lives and Christian response to racial divides and other problems we face so that we—God’s children—could have hope and so that we could bring hope, truth, light and Gospel healing to the world. While there is a widespread interest in discussing these concerns among all Christ-followers, we especially recognize—and are grateful for—younger generations of Christ-followers who are keenly interested in these issues and in the Church’s response and leading.

“Affirmations” are statements or propositions that declare truths that focus on a particular topic, offering greater clarity on the topic in times when it is needed. People choosing to know where the leadership of the Michigan District stand on racial divides, prejudice, or racial healing can read these affirmations. Individuals and local congregations are invited and encouraged to join with the leadership in considering and perhaps adopting these affirmations as they deem beneficial for themselves or for their ministry context. The Scripture passages that are listed are from the English Standard Version (ESV). They were included because they influenced the writers as they studied, prayed through, discussed, and inevitably formulated these resulting “Affirmations.”

Our Affirmations:

As redeemed children of God, we AFFIRM that:

1. God is the Creator of all people and all people are God’s creation, members of one family and one race—the human race;

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26–27).

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1–4, 14).

2. God EQUALLY loves ALL people of every time and generation—and for all time and eternity—of “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5), “from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9) as demonstrated by the life, atoning death, and resurrection of Jesus for the world;

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16, 17).

3. “Racism,” as we define it in this document, consists of prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular ethnic group, often with the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities—especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another—and is a rejection of Christ’s call for unity and of His clear teachings;

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35).

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

“And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:11).

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:20–23).

“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:11–22).

4. Racism devalues or minimizes the universal redemption of Jesus Christ and its intended purpose of reconciliation with God and with one another;

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:26–29).

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided?” (1 Corinthians 1:10–13).

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:1–6).

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:16–21).

5. Racism is a denial of the total depravity of humanity by assigning blame or fault to people based on the color of their skin or their ethnic background.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“As it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God’” (Romans 3:10–11).

“And he called the people to him and said to them, ‘Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.’ ... And he said, ‘Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone’” (Matthew 15:10–11; 16–20).

Cf. Ephesians 2:11–22 above.

6. Racism denies human beings of their innate wholeness and uniqueness as God's creation through social, economic, and political discrimination or exploitation;

“And he said to his people, ‘Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land’” (Exodus 1:9, 10).

“But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus” (Esther 3:6).

7. All of us should examine our own lives to see if we sinned against our sisters and brothers of other races, either by our actions (sins of commission) or our lack of action (sins of omission), in thought, in word, and in deed;

“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy” (Galatians 2:11–13).

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16–18).

“Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body” (Hebrews 13:1–3).

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:1–10).

8. One certain strength in our congregations—and in our communities—lies in the racial and cultural diversity God intended and determined should be in the Church (the local congregation being an expression of it) to bless one another and the communities in which it shines/ministers. Therefore, we must work toward developing a world in which each person's God-given value and gifts are respected and nurtured;

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13).

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same

function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:3–5).

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26).

9. Our commitment as individuals and as a community of believers is to wholly follow Jesus Christ in word and in deed;

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22).

10. Our commitment as individuals and as a community of believers is to embrace the understanding that our unity in Christ does not require uniformity, that is, the imposition of particular cultural norms (God-honoring practices, language, traditions, and values).

“John answered, ‘Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you’” (Luke 9:49, 50).

11. Our commitment as individuals and as a community of believers is to love and serve with all our effort and resources for the dignity, civic value, and self-determination of every person and group of persons, while not condoning immoral, violent, unethical, or unloving behavior according to the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, we reject:

- The practice of marginalizing people based on the color of their skin, their language, or cultural background.

Clarification: Anytime we attribute the words, actions, or motives of one person to the words, actions, or motives of all who share a cultural or ethnic heritage with that individual, we are marginalizing that particular group of people. For example, the statement, “All white people are racist” ignores the values and actions of white individuals who are not racist. Marginalizing people in this way can include statements that appear to be offered as a compliment. For example, “All Black people are good at sports” limits the possibilities and our expectations of Black people. What about amazing artists, scientists, entrepreneurs who happen to be black? While some might view the sample statement as a compliment to the athleticism of Black people, in reality it diminishes our view of their potential. A healthy alternative is to acknowledge the gifts and abilities of the individual as unique and not just a natural result of being a person of a specific race or cultural group.

- The practice of using race or ethnicity as criteria for calling professional church workers.

Clarification: A clear indicator of race-bias within our church body is the *de facto* assumption, particularly with clergy calls, that Black pastors should only be called to African American congregations and White pastors should only be called to Caucasian congregations.

- The failure to gently rebuke and, if needed, sternly warn those who marginalize others based on the color of their skin, their language, or cultural background.

Clarification: We need to speak up and gently rebuke a brother or sister in Christ when we hear them marginalizing a race or a culture. We can point out that their comment, while hopefully well intended, ignores the unique God-given ability of the individual and that individual’s faithful stewardship of the gift. (As important, a race or ethnic group’s capacity is far greater than that of

one individual.) It is hard to speak up. Yet, if we say nothing, our silence will be interpreted as an agreement with the statement.

- The practice of “scapegoating”—that is, blaming a race or ethnic group for the systemic problems of sin.

Clarification: We are much more comfortable with blaming others for our problems than accepting our own guilt. We curse one culture or race for depriving us of economic opportunity while we blame another culture for a high crime rate that has infected our communities. Not only does blaming other cultures or ethnic groups for our problems prevent us from taking responsibility for our own actions, it robs us of the power and opportunity to change our circumstances. As a result, we live our lives as victims. Freedom and opportunity begin with the recognition of our own faults, fears, and failures, and their release through confession and absolution. We avoid scapegoating by affirming that race and ethnicity are not the cause of problems; that it is broken sinful individuals like us who create problems.

- The failure to welcome into our fellowship of faith, without partiality, all who share our common confession or who are searching for truth, hope, love, and acceptance, regardless of race or ethnicity.
- The failure to provide equal access to a denominational leadership role or a platform of influence within our church body.

Clarification: While there is no formal or official process of grooming individuals for a denominational leadership role in our church body, individuals become known in Synod through circuit, district, and national service and speaking opportunities. Undoubtedly because of our lack of outreach to minorities and the resulting lack of minority members or attenders with participation in congregational life, rarely are minority race workers given opportunity to serve or a platform to speak that enables them to exercise leadership and influence over the greater denomination.

- The failure to support our brothers and sisters in Christ as they seek to build up their communities and defend the weak against injustice and discrimination.

Clarification: We fail to support our brothers and sisters in Christ with our prayers, our words of encouragement, our hands to join in the labor, and equitable financial lending and support (i.e., when loans are given at a higher percentage loan rate solely on the basis of race). While we are thankful for our legal system and those who serve in government and our police forces, sinful people have abused our trust and have failed to treat all people with respect and grace. Though not an easy or clear path, we are reminded in Scripture to defend those who cannot defend themselves and to speak out against those who use their position of power to marginalize an individual or an ethnic group.

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6).

“For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities: transgressing, and denying the Lord, and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words. Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey” (Isaiah 59:12–15).

12. Our commitment as individuals and as a community of believers is to demonstrate love, as we have been—and are—loved perfectly by Him, striving to embody the practices of a welcoming neighbor in our day-to-day living by:

- Advocating for equal justice under the law;
- Demonstrating mercy and being active in poverty interventions which promote self-sufficiency, healthy families, and faith;
- Affirming and encouraging those who have been marginalized due to their race or ethnic background;
- Walking humbly with our God using our faith and the mandate to love our neighbor to shape our practice of capitalism and our pursuit of God, His kingdom, and His righteousness.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

“Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29–31).

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:14–21).

“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8, 9).

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:18–21).

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness” (Galatians 5:22).

Please join us in praying this prayer “For National Integrity,” from the Lutheran Book of Prayer:

Lord God, Ruler of all men:

We confess

*The unruliness of our nature,
The disorderly inclinations of our minds,
The rebellious whims of our hearts.*

We recognize

*Our need to be guided,
Our need to be ruled,
Our need to be disciplined.*

We ask you

*To guide us by just laws,
To rule us with love,
To govern us through responsible leaders,*

*To give us judges who are wise,
To raise up leaders with integrity, justice,
and righteousness.*

We pray you

*Help us to exercise our freedom in love,
Help us to live as compassionate citizens,
Help us to work for the well-being of our
neighbors, and even our enemies.*

In Christ’s name, amen.

Adapted from *Lutheran Book of Prayer* (1970 edition)
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For further study:

- *Racism in the Church*, Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1994.
- *Creator’s Tapestry*, Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2009.
- “Faithful Witness in Wounded Cities” Dr. Theodore Hopkins & Mark Koschmann, May 2016, *Lutheran Mission Matters*.
- *Divided by Faith*, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, Oxford University Press. 2001.
- *One Nation Under God: Healing Racial Divides in America*, B. Keith Haney, Concordia Publishing House. 2017.
- *Restoring Civility: Lessons from the Master: Your Path to Rediscover Respect*, Kent R. Hunter and Tracee J. Swank. 2020.

s.D.g.

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Bible references are taken from ESV.

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