

Willowdale Chapel
Elder Statement on Racial Injustice
June 17, 2020

Is this not 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?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?...

If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

And the LORD will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called ***the repairer*** of the breach, ***the restorer*** of streets to dwell in.

Isaiah 58:6-12

The recent killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and numerous other black men and women have sparked a national outcry over racial injustice in America. We, the elders of Willowdale Chapel, deeply grieve these deaths and the pain they inflict, especially our black and brown brothers and sisters. Processing these events through the lenses of the gospel, and a long history of racism, and the present pain of people in our community, we are compelled to respond.

We regard racism as a great evil – one clearly at odds with the gospel. While slavery, Jim Crow laws, and many other obvious forms of institutionalized racism are no longer enshrined in law, racism casts a long shadow in our social and economic structures, in our institutions, and in our hearts. That is, racial injustices are not merely historical events but are, rather, ongoing realities that place ever-present burdens on the shoulders of many people of color in our church and communities. Not least among these is the burden of fear that many of God’s image-bearers carry for themselves, their families, and friends.

We believe the church has an opportunity and responsibility to be agents of reconciliation and restoration within our community on issues of racial justice. This responsibility flows from God’s reconciling love and forgiveness toward us – a love that has torn down the dividing wall of hostility separating us from God, and from those who are different from us.

Willowdale has long endeavored to reflect God's reconciling heart – for example, by launching Willowdale en Español and building a relationship with Lincoln University. We have also been involved in addressing the effects of racial injustice by helping people living in our community on a range of issues (health, education, food insecurity, etc.). Many of our global outreach efforts focus on issues of justice, whether working with IJM to free slaves in India, or with Hope International to provide microloans in Africa.

And yet whatever our past efforts, we hear and we feel pain in the voices of our black and brown brothers and sisters in ways we have not heard and have not felt before. We confess that we have not absorbed their pain or carried their burden as our own. And we have not taken the evil of racism with the gravity and seriousness it deserves. We repent of our ignorance and insensitivity. We lay ourselves at the feet of Jesus, humbly seeking grace and asking that He fill us with His love in full measure. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we discern how He would have us lead His church, and ask that he would unify our body on these matters that so often divide.

In response to these things, we commit to the following actions:

Humbly **listen** to and **learn** from the pains and experiences of our black and brown brothers and sisters. We desire to do this by engaging in face-to-face relationships that build intimacy and unity in the body of Christ.

Commit to further **study**, recognizing the availability of significant Christ-centered scholarship, particularly from people of color, that can deepen our understanding. As an extension of this study, we commit to shepherding our body on these matters.

We hope that with greater understanding and attention, God and His Word will lead us, collectively and individually, toward deeper and more effective pathways to **action**, within the church and in collaboration with others.

We truly desire to be advocates and allies in the cause of racial justice. *We exist to love God, love each other, and love the world that Jesus, through his people, is working to restore.* May God grant us wisdom and fill us with his love as we purpose toward these ends.

The Elders of Willowdale Chapel

<i>Brian Campbell</i>	<i>Tom Piacentino</i>
<i>Vic Dupuis</i>	<i>Andy Puffenberger</i>
<i>Dave Hall</i>	<i>Jose Sabastro</i>
<i>Greg Lafferty</i>	<i>Luke Zubrod</i>