

The Sarasota Statementⁱ

2020 Prologue:

In January of 2017, around the time of the presidential inauguration, we gathered as a small group of church leaders to offer theological framing of that political, religious, and cultural moment in U.S. history through the Sarasota Statement. Our intention was to confess the sins of our past, acknowledge the threats of the present, and reaffirm the teachings, values, and practices of God's vision for justice and Jesus' way of love. As we have learned from the German Confessing Church and faith leaders of the U.S. Civil Rights movement, the Church today cannot keep silent. We have the obligation to confess faith in God by standing against racism, imperialism, and any thought, action, or policy that denies the dignity and humanity of God's children and the sanctity of the planet.

Since that time, much of the corruption and brutality many feared and some resisted has grown more rampant and accepted. White supremacy and nationalism have found fertile soil in U.S. Christianity and daily destroy the lives, health, and freedoms of people who struggle to survive simply because of the body, gender, color of skin, class, or country into which they were born. Additionally, immoral handling of the coronavirus pandemic and lack of basic compassion from our political leaders have brought unimaginable suffering to millions of people across the nation.

When we composed the Sarasota Statement, we sought to proclaim our hope in Jesus Christ, take responsibility for the ways we fall short, and commit ourselves to more concrete action. While we sought to engage a broad audience with a prophetic word, we did not speak as prophetically as we could have and prioritized the comfort of dominant voices. While we committed to dismantle white supremacy, we failed to surrender our privilege to align with those for whom power is actively and systemically denied. While we committed to reject and resist racist practices, not all of us fathomed the depths to which societal and religious structures would go to protect white privilege and perpetuate patriarchy. Even in our attempt to seek and proclaim justice we sinned and caused our siblings harm. For this we repent, we seek forgiveness, and we pray for transformation.

As Black women, men, and children are ruthlessly murdered, and people of color and those made poor endure the sins of institutional bias, discrimination, and justice denied, we unequivocally declare that Black lives matter and we stand for the liberation of all oppressed peoples. We acknowledge that there can be no reconciliation without reparations. We reaffirm the Gospel truth that we are one family in God's household; no one is an outsider or stranger. We pray not simply for decency and belonging, but also for value restored, voices amplified, legacies renewed, and livelihoods revived. All humans deserve health care and clean water. People of every gender, culture, and identity have the right to integrity over their bodies. And the planet, in all its richness and diversity, is to be cherished as a gift given by God.

We implore our siblings in the church to come alongside us as we re-engage the Sarasota Statement — wrestling with what it means to live anew the liberating teachings of Jesus — and to take up the cross of discipleship in this particular and turbulent time. We must ask ourselves: How do we challenge religious, cultural, and political ideologies and usher in God's beloved community by

building an antiracist church? How do we work to disrupt our own complicity in unjust systems? How do we disavow a false faith that mirrors the divisions of our hearts, society, and nation?

No matter what the future holds, in this particular moment we believe God calls the Church to declare our faith boldly, to embody Christ's love radically, to demand justice fully, and to participate in the Spirit's transformation and healing of our world. As writers of this statement, we offer our voices in this moment. As persons of privilege of varying degrees, we repent of our own complicity in systemic injustice. As agents of the gospel, we strive to love one another as God loves us.

To God be the glory.

The Sarasota Statement authors

2017 Preamble:

We, a small and imperfect reflection of the church, gather in heart, mind, and body to search for words to speak our faith convictions in our particular cultural context: the hope we proclaim, the ways we fall short, and the actions to which we commit ourselves.¹

We are people of hope who confess Jesus Christ is Lord over a Kingdom² in which no one is hungry, violence is no more, and all suffering is gone. All sit together around a shared table,³ wolves and lambs enjoy each other's company,⁴ and every tear is wiped away from every eye.⁵

Our hope is not simply that we will experience this Kingdom, which is truly *kin-dom*, in the future, but that, as Christ's prayer demands, this Kingdom comes "to earth as it is in heaven."⁶ So strong is this hope that we lament any and all instances of its absence.⁷ When we witness hunger, injustice, discrimination, violence, or suffering, we grieve deeply and repent of our sins that have enabled such brokenness to persist - knowing that these things should not be.⁸

Furthermore, we are incited to act and to be vehicles of change through which God's Kingdom breaks into the world and our earthly lives.⁹ Our commitment is to acts that feed, clothe, instruct, reconcile, admonish, heal, and comfort – reflecting the power of God's hope and an eagerness to see the Kingdom made manifest.¹⁰

We believe God's Kingdom comes not because we are confident in our own capacities, but because we trust in God,¹¹ who can do more than we can ask or imagine.¹² We are humbled and amazed that, in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God includes us¹³ in the work of redeeming all creation¹⁴ and reconciling¹⁵ the whole world.

We offer the following statement in hopes that others within our denomination and beyond might find echoes of their own struggles and convictions, and be both comforted and challenged. We address this statement directly to all whom the church has harmed, in recognition and apology, as we vow to do and be better, with God's help.¹⁶

To God be the glory.¹⁷

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¹ Book of Confessions (BoC) 9.50

² BoC 7.026

³ Luke 14:7-24

⁴ Isaiah 11:6

⁵ Revelation 21:4

⁶ Matthew 6:10

⁷ BoC 9.55

⁸ Matthew 4:17; I John 1:8-10; BoC 4.088, 5.093, 7.014, 11.3

⁹ BoC 4.122, 5.048

¹⁰ Luke 17:20-21; Mark 1:15

¹¹ BoC 3.01

¹² Ephesians 3:20

¹³ John 15:15

¹⁴ Romans 8:22

¹⁵ II Corinthians 5:20

¹⁶ BoC 4.089

¹⁷ BoC 7.001

PART I

To the people we ignore, reject, or demonize for living outside the tribes we claim:

We trust our Lord and Savior who calls disciples to love unconditionally,¹⁸ who confronts brutality by refusing to take arms,¹⁹ and who defies racism by forming a community out of every tribe, people, and nation.²⁰ Jesus aligns with people who are poor, meek, persecuted, and reviled, and calls the church to do the same.²¹ To be a Christian is to be continuously undone and remade²² by a Savior who encounters us in ways we might not expect, through a collection of people we might otherwise reject, screen, or censor.²³

We grieve the ways in which we create division between people whom Christ has created for community.²⁴ We grieve that we have segregated and broken our communities along worldly constructs of race, class, ideology, and belief.²⁵

We commit to move beyond like-minded choruses that reinforce our biases,²⁶ joining the community that reflects God's grace, Christ's kingdom, and the Spirit's action.²⁷ We commit to reject and resist all racist practices, however explicit or subtle. We commit to dismantle white supremacy, including societal structures that maintain and protect white privilege.²⁸ We defy attempts to target and ostracize fellow human beings on the basis of blood and soil.²⁹

PART II

To the people we dehumanize and dismiss on the basis of political and ideological differences, and those who suffer at the hands of our idolatry:

We trust in Jesus Christ, the Servant-Lord of all,³⁰ whose ministry liberates the oppressed, welcomes the outcast, and upends systems of death-dealing power.³¹ Through humility and sacrifice Jesus brings life to all and commissions his followers to do the same.³²

We grieve that the Church conflates Jesus' message with political platforms and looks to partisan ideologies to affirm its ethics and action.³³ We grieve that we idolize³⁴ political leaders and fail to measure their promises and policies against God's law of love.³⁵ We grieve that our political ideologies deceive and distract us from the demands of a lived faith: to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.³⁶

We commit to pray for our leaders to support and enact policies that further God's redeeming justice throughout the world.³⁷ We also commit to doing our part, working to empower those who have systematically been excluded from the benefits of democracy and equity.³⁸ Therefore, we will vigilantly speak against tyranny,³⁹ resist the temptation to claim privilege for ourselves,⁴⁰ and oppose efforts that co-opt our faith for partisan gain. In fidelity to God alone,⁴¹ we share in Christ's love for all people and nations,⁴² denying and denouncing any nationalism and allegiances that compromise this love.

¹⁸ Matthew 5:38-48; 1 John 4:19-21; BoC 3.24

¹⁹ Matthew 5:39, 26:52-55

²⁰ Galatians 3:27-29; BoC 10.5

²¹ BoC 10.7

²² Isaiah 64:8; II Corinthians 5:17

²³ John 4:7; Matthew 11:19; Luke 8:1-3; BoC 4.054, 10.3

²⁴ Matthew 28:19

²⁵ BoC 10.1, 10.3, 11.3

²⁶ Gen. 11:1-9

²⁷ BoC 9.31, 10.3

²⁸ Ephesians 2:14; Galatians 3:28

²⁹ Matthew 15:21-29; Luke 7:1-10

³⁰ Philippians 2:1-11; BoC 4.001, 4.050, 6.012, 6.024

³¹ Mark 1:23-26; Luke 4:16-19, 7:34; Matthew 27:45-54; BoC 6.052, 11.4

³² Matthew 11:29; Hebrews 10:10; John 10:10; Luke 9:23-24, 9:46-48; BoC 9.53

³³ BoC 8.12

³⁴ BoC 4.095, 5.116, 7.215

³⁵ BoC 4.004, 5.023, 8.15, 8.21

³⁶ BoC 8.18; Micah 6:8

³⁷ Jeremiah 29:7; Romans 13:1; 1 Timothy 2:2; BoC 3.24, 5.253, 6.128, 6.130

³⁸ BoC 9.25; II Corinthians 5:19-20; Philippians 2:1-8

³⁹ BoC, 3.14, 6.109

⁴⁰ BoC 4.094

⁴¹ Exodus 20:3; Luke 4:8; BoC 4.026, 7.001

⁴² Matthew 28:19; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 John 4:20-21; BoC, 8.14

PART III

To the people for whom we have failed to seek justice, offer hospitality, or fully embrace as part of God's beloved family:

We, as people of faith, trust that God's transforming Word⁴³ continuously meets us anew, and so we seek silence for reflecting, discerning, and imagining the Kingdom of God.⁴⁴ In our silence, we listen for the stories of those whose cries for justice we have disregarded and whose expressions of faith we have refused to hear.⁴⁵

We grieve the ways our silence indulges cowardice, justifies irresponsibility, and promotes fear in the face of injustice.⁴⁶ Such silence leaves room for falsehood and complacency to choke out truth and compassion. As those being made new, we partner with Christ in bringing the Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven.⁴⁷ We insist on the truth and we strive against systemic injustice.⁴⁸ We follow Jesus who stands with and for those who are unjustly marginalized and oppressed and calls us to do the same without hesitation.⁴⁹ We decry any attempt to co-opt the gospel for purposes of excluding those whom Jesus sought, welcomed, and made his own.⁵⁰

We commit to welcome and protect refugees and immigrants.⁵¹ We condemn hatred and bigotry against those of other faiths.⁵² We reject classism and systemic economic inequality.⁵³ We denounce a culture of violence that brutalizes or alienates bodies on the basis of ability, sexual or gender identity, ethnicity, or color of skin.⁵⁴ We work for the healing of our planet from the wounds our own carelessness inflicts.⁵⁵

Closing:

We trust that God is always at work in our world and in our lives, giving us joy and calling us to be faithful to Jesus' vision of the Kingdom.⁵⁶ We commit to continuously rededicate ourselves to this work and strive, with hearty faith, to live this Kingdom on earth, proclaiming: Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!⁵⁷

ⁱNEXT Church and The Presbyterian Foundation worked together to convene this group of writers and facilitate the writing process of this statement in January 2017.

⁴³ John 1:1-5; BoC 8.11

⁴⁴ Psalm 46:10; I Kings 19:11-18;
BoC 9.43

⁴⁵ BoC 11.4

⁴⁶ II Timothy 1:7; BoC 8.08

⁴⁷ Matthew 6:9-10; BoC 7.102, 10.3

⁴⁸ BoC 10.7

⁴⁹ Luke 21:1-4; BoC 3.14, 10.9

⁵⁰ Luke 15; BoC 4.107

⁵¹ Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:34, I
Peter 1:1-2; BoC 9.45

⁵² BoC 9.44

⁵³ BoC 9.46

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:27; Galatians
3:28; BoC 4.105 - 4.106

⁵⁵ Genesis 2:15; Hosea 4:2-3;
Romans 8:22-24

⁵⁶ Romans 5:5

⁵⁷ Matthew 6:31-33; BoC 5.115,
6.077, 7.185, 11.4