

RESPONSE FROM THE NORTHERN SPIRIT REGIONAL COUNCIL TO THE INCIDENCES OF RACIAL VIOLENCE AND HATRED IN ALBERTA

Council of Action: Northern Spirit Regional Council

1. What is the issue?

We believe Jesus is calling Northern Spirit Regional Council to publicly speak out pastorally and prophetically in response to the cases of racial hate and intolerance reported in the province of Alberta.

2. Why is this issue important?

Recent media reports have recorded disturbing cases in the province of Alberta which include:

- attacks against Muslim women in Edmonton;
- Incidences of racist and hate language against persons of Asian heritage or descent.
- continuing prejudice and discrimination against Indigenous peoples in by police and other persons;
- incidences of verbal and physical attacks on Black persons in public spaces;
- Intolerance of persons who are part of the White culture.

Such cases have caused distress and fear among racialized persons and does not enable the growth of harmonious community life. Furthermore, these cases defy the official understanding of Canada being a multicultural nation; where each person can live out their cultural distinctiveness without fear of reprisal.

The United Church of Canada has declared that it is becoming an intercultural church since 2012. In 2020 the church made a further step to declare that it is becoming an anti-racist church. It must be humbly acknowledged that systemic racism still exists in Canada. It must be also acknowledged that intolerance to the diversity of cultures is still present in our society. Yet the church must also uphold that while the concept of race is a falsity it still holds sway on the thinking of many persons.

All persons are made in the image and likeness of God. Racism is a denial of this understanding. As followers of Christ the church proclaims a gospel of love and righteousness. Racism is an affront to any understanding of love and righteousness. In this regard the church also has a responsibility to stand up against bigotry, prejudice, and racism whenever it appears. The church has a pastoral responsibility to call on society to treat all persons with dignity and respect. The church has a prophetic responsibility to denounce anything that denies the image of God in all persons, even when it occurs within the church. The members of the church are part of the society. As such cases of racial violence, verbal attacks and physical abuse of persons based on culture, religious affiliation or sexual orientation also affects the members of the church.

The 2021 Manual indicates that among the many responsibilities of the regional council it is responsible for encouraging and engaging in “joining our collective hearts, voices, and resources to witness to the gospel and vision of Jesus for a compassionate and just society, both in Canada and around the world.”

3. How might the Regional Council respond to the issue?

That Northern Spirit Regional Council:

1. Instruct its Executive to write a letter to communities of faith decrying the recent cases of racism and hatred within the bounds of Northern Spirit Regional Council; and,
2. Create an Anti-Racism Task Group to:
 - a. Encourage and educate the Regional Council and Communities of Faith to seek ways to live out the church's commitment to becoming intercultural and anti-racist;
 - b. To work with the General Council Anti-Racism Common Table;
 - c. Seek to Network with other organizations working on anti-racism within the boundaries of the Regional Council and beyond, and encourage communities of faith to do the same;
 - d. Report to the next meeting of Northern Spirit Regional Council on its work.

Origin: First United Church, Fort Saskatchewan Community of Faith.

Regional Council Action: approved by Northern Spirit Regional Council on May 6, 2021.