

Civil Rights Statement

Affirming Humanity, Establishing Justice, Restoring and Securing Community

Adopted by the MCC U.S. Board - January 12, 2001

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:27-28).

Commentary

The issue of civil rights continues to confront us. Our country and our congregations struggle with obtaining equality and healthy interdependent relationships with the many different members of our community. People of faith seek God's guidance as they call for racial and gender justice. In the public arena, there have been many mandates to pursue these ends. Yet success has remained elusive and questionable.

Civil rights have been traditionally defined as securing justice and equity in areas of common public interest such as education, employment, housing and voting rights. Federal actions and protections have followed this definition.

Civil rights and affirmative action efforts have been undergirded by notions of restitution, reparation and rebuilding. Yet after thirty years of such efforts, much frustration exists. Debate around these efforts continues to be controversial. For many, deliberation must extend the concern for justice toward a vision of peace for our communities and nation. One concept central to affirmative action is an attempt to correct historical and present imbalances - individually and corporately - that created disparities for persons of color, persons with disabilities and women in many areas of public life.

Over time, our constituents have expressed concerns about:

- the incidence of racial profiling within law enforcement;
- racial and gender disparities regarding criminal justice, economic and educational opportunities/performance, employment and health care;
- disability rights;
- the disproportional representation of women and children in poverty;
- concerns related to violence and harassment against women;
- discrimination in housing and banking;
- environmental racism;
- restorative relationships with Native peoples - notably regarding issues of sovereignty and historical trust;
- voting rights;
- and full and respectful relationships with communities/people of color, persons with disabilities and women.

Our Values in Operation

Through biblical and Anabaptist values by which MCC makes commitments to dismantle racism, we will ask the following questions when considering whether to

support particular legislation affecting civil rights and persons/communities of color, those with disabilities, and women.

Does the bill reflect:

- measures to eliminate racial and gender disparities?
- restorative justice - providing prompt, meaningful redress for past and current injustices?
- preventive measures against the possibility of future injustices?
- the concerns and participation of those who are discriminated against or disenfranchised?
- affirmation of the dignity and empowerment of communities - supporting opportunity, equity, service, mutual concern and respect for all?
- priority for non-violent peacemaking solutions and protections against abusive power?
- mindfulness of the environment, the land - its impact on people and creation?
- support for the free exercise of religion?

These values are pertinent to the matters of our Christian witness and work. We will continue to attempt to emulate Jesus' example, speak truth to power and be biblically based in our efforts to secure justice for all.

Commitments

Given our biblical, historical and organizational foundations, the MCC U.S. Board will continue to:

- work to dismantle racism, including a focus on systemic problems through our Damascus Road Program.
- implement a staffing and service configuration that is anti-racist and anti-sexist in nature and works to increase the capacity of congregations and communities of color.
- maintain relationships with people of color, persons with disabilities and women reflecting accountability and mutual respect.

We will extend this commitment by:

- seeking to join people and communities of color and women through specific occasions of listening - affirming their voice and priorities - in their advocacy for peace and justice;
- insuring our work for restorative justice reflects the concerns of people of color and women;
- supporting MCC U.S. Washington and regional offices and our Mennonite and Brethren in Christ constituents to speak distinctly to government regarding issues that affect people of color and women;
- supporting efforts that affirm the sovereignty of Native peoples and honor trust responsibilities;
- furthering the examination of race and public policy initiated at MCC Washington Office Spring Seminar 2000;

- and supporting the goals of affirmative action and civil rights mandates.

Whether or not full reparations or repair can be made to aggrieved persons or groups, there is still much we can do. We can make demonstrable, proactive positive efforts regarding justice for all. We acknowledge that power and privilege pose complex obstacles to forming a beloved community. We will engage these hindrances. We desire to be thoroughly accountable to communities of color and to each other. Through reflection, sharing, and action, we will encourage other members and institutions of our constituent family and society at-large to do the same.