

56th General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church
Presiding Bishop's Report
June 9, 2021

“Not My will but Thy Will Be Done” (Luke 22:42)

Our Lord Jesus Christ's singular purpose was to do His Father's will. Early in His ministry He instructed His disciples to pray, “Thy will be done” (Matthew 6:10). In the Garden of Gethsemane He concluded, “Not My will but thy will be done” (Luke 22:42). He did what He had instructed His disciples to pray. Although He asked, “If possible, take this cup from Me,” He was willing to mold His will into the Father's. Amy Carmichael succinctly writes of weaving our will into God's in a poem:

“And shall I pray Thee change Thy will, my Father,
Until it be according unto mine?
But, no, Lord, no, that never shall be, rather
I pray Thee blend my human will with Thine.

Blending His will with the Father's is what Jesus did. It is what we are to do when we realize God's will is not something we'd planned, expected, or even wanted. So many times, in the last two pandemic years of this triennium, we've been reminded of that verse in Proverbs, “You can make plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail” (Proverbs 19:21). A little prayer expresses this proverb, “God, I trust you with all my heart. Wherever you want me to go, I will go, even if it's not where I planned. Lead me and I will follow.” The crisis of illness in our society has taken us where we did not plan. Yet God has led and by His grace we have followed. Our wills have been blended to His. And His will is always better than ours; it is good. As our African Anglican brothers and sisters are fond of saying, “God is good all the time; all the time God is Good”! For the first part of my Presiding Bishop's report, therefore, I would like to summarize God's goodness to us over the last triennium; where He has led, and by His grace we have followed:

- I. Where, by God's grace, we have blended our wills to His to see His goodness and many accomplishments to His glory.
 1. REC 100: At our last 2017 General Council, I introduced REC 100, an effort to plant 100 new REC missions and parishes as well as revitalize older ones. I appointed the Very Rev. Jason Grote as Canon Missioner. Hopefully you've been following the extraordinary developments: over twenty new missions and revitalizations have begun, the Lenten offerings based on the call for every adult Reformed Episcopalian to give \$100 per year were successful, the *Front Porch* newsletter publication, two growing Hispanic missions, and new church planter seminars and retreats. You will hear and read so much more in Canon Jason Grote's REC 100 Report. I thank him on behalf of all of us for his excellent leadership in this area.
 2. Publication of two editions of a new REC Hymnal: During the last triennium a new Reformed Episcopal hymnal, *The Book of Common Praise 2017*, has been

published by Anglican House Media Ministries of the Anglican Church in North America. It has gone through two printings. Another edition for the wider GAFCON and ACNA audience has been printed under the title, *Magnify the Lord*. Both printings have been at the cost of the publishing company. The REC also receives royalties for all hymnals sold. To date, I'm told that nearly 11,000 copies of our hymnal have been sold. Not only have REC parishes purchased our hymnal, but many ACNA and some Continuing Anglican congregations are using it as well.

3. Publication of the *Handbook for the Visitation of the Sick: Resources for Clergy and Lay Ministers*: We also published the *Handbook for the Visitation of the Sick* in honor of the Most Rev. Royal U. Grote. He began many years ago to accumulate numerous prayers for visiting the sick and the infirmed. He came across the work of one of our other priests who works with retired and assisted living situations. The result is an excellent aid for clergy and lay ministers. We've distributed these handbooks to all clergy and deaconesses around the REC.
4. The Board of Foreign Missions developments: BFM has done well amidst a big transition from the retirements and the sad loss of our dear friend in Christ, the Rev. Canon William Jerdan. Bishop Chuck was the served as the interim through a transition, for which I'm appreciative of his good work. We are grateful to God for the Rev. Canon John Boonzaaijer who responded to the call to step into leadership of the BFM. He is now the President of BFM and Canon for Foreign Missions. Under his leadership, we have seen an increase in giving, not only in our special Advent offerings, but in parish contributions on a regular basis. I know I speak on behalf of all of us in expressing our appreciation and gratitude for Canon Bill and his wife, Diane, for their faithful service. We have a resolution to that effect that will be given to Diane in memory of Canon Bill. It will be presented when Canon John gives his report. Also, upon the retirements of the Rt. Rev. Charles and Claudia Dorrington, Bishop Walter Banek and the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Bernier have been able to provide continued leadership and help for our exciting mission work in Cuba. We thank the Lord for Bishop Charles and Claudia as they were instruments in God's hands to plant what has become our most successful mission effort in the history of the Reformed Episcopal Church. I also thank Bp. Charles for his years of service as Bishop Ordinary of the Diocese of Western Canada. A resolution of appreciation will also be presented to them in the BFM Report. God also continues to bless the REC with the other important missions and dioceses in Croatia and Germany. In the last Triennium before the pandemic, I was able to visit our European missions on a semi-annual basis. My thanks as well to Bishop Chuck Gillin and the Rev. Dr. Doug Mills (now retired) for visiting these dioceses for me in 2018. I also asked all of us to pray that God would raise up new REC missionaries. The Lord has begun to answer our prayers with the Rev. Canon Robert and Traci Gresser. After Robert completes his Ph.D. in Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, he wants to teach in an Anglican seminary in the Global South.

5. The Unification of Theological Education: In the last triennium we have begun the process of unifying theological education. I formed a Sub-committee to Unify Theological Education to this end with the acronym SCUTE, under the oversight of the Theological Commission. I also set apart a committee within SCUTE chaired by the Rev. Canon Dr. Jonathan Riches, to determine options and the best way to bring greater unity without losing the important identity of each of our theological institutions. As a beginning to this unification, the deans and administrative staffs of each of our seminaries have begun to meet as part of SCUTE. The deans of each seminary now serve on each other's boards. Furthermore, you will see in Dr. Riches' report attached to the Theological Commission Report that we are making other significant progress. The best option for greater unification at present seems to be where Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Philadelphia might be able to offer an accredited degree for students at our other seminaries on their campuses using all faculty members where possible. The existing programs at our seminaries, however, will still be offered and continue unchanged. Each seminary's own identity will be maintained. This option has been approved by the Theological Commission as well as the individual boards. However, the proposal has only been approved in principle. The Association of Theological Schools will need to approve RES offering this program, and many details will need to be worked out. But this at least is a big start. Pray for us.
6. New Women of the Church organizations: In the past triennium I asked Mrs. Gale Hill in her capacity as President of the Committee on Women's Ministry to help create protocols primarily for the development of Women of the Church organizations in our newer dioceses, the Diocese of Mid America and the Diocese of the Central States. I also asked Dss. Canon Annette Johnson to assist Mrs. Hill in this effort. I have realized that while our older dioceses in the Northeast and Southeast already have effective Women of the Church organizations, the newer dioceses in their local parishes have needed direction in the development of Women of the Church chapters. They have wonderfully participated in the Women's Day luncheons and offerings under the oversight of the COWM. Yet parish and diocesan Women of the Church groups are only now beginning to form. Therefore, to lay a foundation for the organization of WOC parish and diocesan chapters, Mrs. Hill and Canon Johnson have formulated excellent protocols to launch this effort. These protocols have been approved by our Council of Bishops and the General Committee. It should be recognized, however, that the work that Mrs. Hill and Canon Johnson have done is not to be confused with the COWM, which is separate from existing and future WOC efforts. Regarding the Committee on Women's Ministry, according to my responsibility as Presiding Bishop outlined in the protocols, I have appointed as the new President for the COWM, Mrs. Gale Hill to continue. Thanks be to God she has graciously accepted. The protocols also, by the way, specify that the bishops appoint a representative from their diocese to serve on the COWM. Mrs. Hill will be contacting those appointed after this council.

7. New Committee of Intercessors for Clergy: I have also in the last triennium called for a Committee of Intercessors for Clergy. I have asked Dss. Canon Annette Johnson and Dss. Teresa Johnson to form this committee and create protocols. The background behind the intercessors is that our clergy and their families are on the frontlines of spiritual warfare and they need to be prayed for often. Those who will be involved in prayer are the deaconesses and Daughters of the Holy Cross. Canon Johnson and Dss. Teresa have established protocols that have been approved by the Council of Bishops and the General Committee. Canon Johnson and Dss. Theresa will process all initial requests to help provide privacy where required. With the permission of those requesting prayer, they will direct the request to other deaconesses and the Daughters of the Holy Cross. The contact email is: intercessors@rechurch.org. I encourage our clergy to utilize this important prayer ministry for themselves and their family's needs.
8. Update of the *Deaconess Handbook*: Dss. Canon Annette Johnson has also helped in the last triennium to revise the *Deaconess Handbook*. We have been so encouraged by the number of women who have become deaconesses, as well as other ladies who have entered postulancy. We now have over twenty deaconesses and postulants in the REC, with many more discerning and seeking approval for candidacy. These postulants are also participating in our Deaconess programs at our seminaries.
9. Child Protection Policies and Programs: Over the last triennium we have also implemented child protection programs and policies across the Reformed Episcopal Church. This is such an important need for constant vigilance in today's church. I thank Bishop Walter Banek and Chancellor Jeff Hurt, and their committee, for the leadership and help in this effort.
10. Bishops Resolution Opposing the Conscription of Women in the Military: I also call to your attention that in the last triennium the Council of Bishops and General Committee have approved a resolution with recommendations opposing the conscription of women into the military. It came to our attention that a special committee in the Pentagon was working on provision for women to be conscripted. It appears that at some point this will go into effect. In order to provide for a clear statement by our church opposing such action, our bishops and the General Committee have approved the resolution. It is attached to this report and will be posted on our website. The resolution also calls for Biblical teachings on the roles of men and women. In the next triennium I will be appointing a committee to begin this educational work for our church.
11. Successful Episcopal Retirements and Transitions: I also report that in the last triennium we successfully have gone through episcopal transitions in three of our dioceses. In the Dioceses of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic as well as the Central States, one ordinary accepted a call and returned to parish ministry, and the other retired: The Rt. Rev. David Hicks and the Rt. Rev. Daniel Morse. In both cases, the dioceses in a godly, unified, and in the instance of the NEMA Diocese, a peaceful and non-political election process, transitioned to new ordinaries. The Rt. Rev. Peter Manto had been Bishop Co-Adjutor, so no election was required.

The Rt. Rev. Chuck Gillin, who had been Suffragan Bishop, was elected to be the Ordinary. I thank Bishops Hicks for his service, although he has not fully retired but serves in another diocese in the ACNA. I also thank Bishop Morse for his many years of faithful service. He served for many years as Suffragan and Bishop Co-Adjutor of the Diocese of Mid America until he was called to establish a new missionary diocese and eventually the Diocese of the Central States. His work as a true missionary and leader is to be recognized and commended for his exceptional ministry. Also, during the latter part of our triennium that has been extended by a year, the Rt. Rev. Alphonza Gadsden has retired as Ordinary of the Diocese of the Southeast. Bishop Co Adjutor William White succeeded him in a smooth and godly transition. I thank God for my brother, Bishop Al, and his longstanding faithful and distinguished service. For the latter part of the triennium, he has served as Vice-President of the General Council. May God go with him and his dear Hester as they enter retirement for refreshment, and whatever service God might have for them. At the beginning of our first business session, we will begin presenting resolutions of appreciation for the fully retired ordinaries in our recent history who concluded their ministries without transferring to other jurisdictions and fields of service. Throughout council we will also continue presenting resolutions for other retired or deceased ordinaries from the beginning of this millennium who never received a resolution of appreciation from General Council.

12. Growth Through and Survival of the Pandemic: Finally in this first part of my report, in the latter part of this triennium for the past eighteen months, I'm grateful to God that we have stayed in His will regarding this trying period of the pandemic. I thank the Lord and all of you for the way we have been able to adapt in a godly manner, proceed, and now begin to come back together. This period has been a great challenge for the people of God, also during a time of political and cultural upheaval. We have had to figure out the best ways to continue to offer worship. This has varied across our country. Some of us have gone through extended periods of not being able to meet in person. Others of us have proceeded with less disruption. For most parts of our country, we're essentially on the other side of the pandemic. Other areas are just beginning to return to some semblance of normalcy. Thanks be to God, through this difficult time, we have been able to continue worship and maintain our unity in Christ. Furthermore, most of our churches, even our new mission works, have grown and some have even purchased their places of worship during this time of crisis. May God be praised that we are keeping the main thing the main thing, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We have much for which to be thankful over the past triennium. We have prayed, "Not our will but Thy will be done." As always, great is God's faithfulness, praised be His Blessed Name! And though we've had to change our plans to His, allowing ourselves to be blended to His will, we have by His grace been enabled to follow His plan for our lives. I'm reminded of words in the Book of Hebrews, "For you have need of endurance,

so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised" (Hebrews 10:36). Now we must continue to pray and do His good and perfect will. Once while St. Francis of Assisi was hoeing his garden, he was asked, "What would you do if you suddenly learned that you were to die at sunset today?" He replied, "I would finish hoeing my garden." That we might persist in "hoeing God's Garden," I turn to exhortations that God has put on my heart. I call this second section:

- II. Where we need to move forward in the good will of God.
 1. Regather and Renew our Mission: I call upon all of our churches and dioceses to regather for worship, resume ministry, and move forward reaching the world with the transforming love of Jesus Christ. No matter what our views of the pandemic, the time of fear is to come to an end. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will."
 2. Continue to grow REC 100 and Lenten Offerings: I call on us to continue to cultivate a missional DNA by becoming in every aspect of our parishes and dioceses a missional church. Let us implement the REC 100 principles of front porch ministries. At the last council our focus was launching new missions and planting new churches. This council, it's on revitalizing parishes. In this two-pronged REC 100 effort, I also call upon your support by every adult member giving at least \$100 per year in the Lenten offering devoted to REC 100. Given what the pandemic has done to church life across our continent, it is imperative that we become even more mission and ministry driven. Every parish vestry and rector must ask one fundamental question, "What is our ministry to the community?" Or, "Where are our ministries?" If there's no ministry going on beyond Sunday morning worship, a parish is simply not going to grow. In one sense the key to growth is simple. If you minister to them, they will come!
 3. I call upon our parishes to strengthen all their catechetical and educational programs. Our world is Biblically illiterate. Even many in the church do not know the Scriptures. David Younts writes in his book, *Beggaring Belief*, "Pollster George Gallup Jr. has long referred to America as a 'nation of biblical illiterates.' Only four in ten Americans know that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. A majority of citizens cannot name the four Gospels of the New Testament. Only three in ten teenagers know why Easter is celebrated. Two-thirds of Americans believe there are few, if any, absolute principles to direct human behavior. A new poll by the Barna Research Group suggests that religious illiteracy has increased . . . A similar number of born-again Christians deny the existence of the Holy Spirit and Satan. One in five denies Jesus' physical resurrection and believes he was a sinner. Earlier surveys of mainline . . . [denominations] revealed that barely half . . . believe in the devil, but 56 percent . . . believe in UFOs. One-third . . . have faith in astrology. While nearly three-fourths of all Americans believe in hell, hardly any believe it to be their likely destination in eternity. . . Former Secretary of Education William Bennett concludes that 'We have become the

kind of society that civilized countries used to send missionaries to.” Bennett is correct.

Therefore, as part of my exhortation for catechetical outreach, I call for expanded educational efforts such as men’s, women’s, and couples Bible studies, new member and inquirer classes, youth ministries, and extensive confirmation programs. I even ask every vestry and congregation in our jurisdiction to consider whether your parish might be able to have some kind of Christian school, whether pre-school, primary, or secondary level of parochial education. The pandemic has created a great moment of opportunity for Christian education. Many public-school systems have alienated Christian and non-Christian families by their approach to the pandemic. Then, there is even the more serious problem of how the public-school systems have now turned to indoctrinating our children with secular, and even sexual and pagan world views antithetical to the Christian Faith. I encourage you to talk to our important Anglican School Association or the clergy and laity in parishes that have schools. What they have discovered is, “If you teach their children they will come.” The school families may not join the parish, but schools transform a parish into a community of new, young families. The residual effects of this, the Celtic Christian principle of evangelism, is the possibility to belong before believing. And the more front porch ministries in a parish to which visitors may belong-before-believing will eventually translate into growth.

4. I call upon all of our parishes to support the work of the Board of Foreign Missions, pray for, give to, and raise up new REC missionaries. My predecessor, the Most Rev. Royal U. Grote, called for all REC parishes to put the BFM in their budget by giving at least \$500 per year. I restore this call to all of our parishes. I also ask that you continue to pray that God will raise up missionaries who will go out and plant REC missions and churches around the world. Sending missionaries is at the heart of the Great Commission.
5. For my most extensive exhortation, I call upon all of us to respond to encroaching cultural and social worldviews among Scripturally committed churches with a Gospel and Biblical worldview. All too often when the church attempts to be, “all things to all people that by all means we might save some,” she allows culture to seduce her into introducing secular thinking and concepts that insidiously confuse, confound and even violate foundational Biblical commitments (1 Corinthians 9:22, ESV). Far too often St. Paul’s statement about becoming all things to win some by finding common ground with the world, fails to heed the apostle’s other statement, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). For St. Paul, the will of God is clear in how we are to interface with the culture to win some to Christ. Whatever common ground with the world that St. Paul

suggests in one passage, should not be interpreted to mean conformity to the world's, secular thought. Rather, St. Paul calls for transformation to a "Christian mind," in the words of the Anglican scholar, Harry Blamires, who wrote a book by this title. Elizabeth Elliot, popular Anglican, Christian author refers to conformity to the world as capitulation. She grew up in the Reformed Episcopal Church and became the wife of Jim Elliot, one of the seven Wheaton graduates and missionaries in the 1950s, who were martyred by the Auca Indians in South America while attempting to spread the Gospel to these lost people. She once observed about the will of God: "The will of God is not something you add to your life. It's a course you choose. You either line yourself up with the Son of God...or you capitulate to the principle which governs the rest of the world." In light of Scripture's call to be transformed by the mind of Christ, and not "capitulate to the principle that governs the rest of the world," I would like to address two different challenges for the church with summaries of a Biblical world and life view regarding them.

The first concerns ministry within the Anglican Church in America in support of a statement out of the College of Bishops that addresses a group of Anglican Christians struggling with same-sex attraction. They prefer to identify themselves as "same-sex Christian," "Gay-Christian," or "Gay-Anglican." The context for the need to produce the statement was that our Archbishop and bishops were asked by one of the Anglican seminaries to offer guidance as to the advisability or not in the use of these designations. For clarification, the purpose of the statement was not a complete Biblical analysis of homosexuality, since much of this work has been done already, and the Constitution and Canons of both the ACNA and REC are clear that any form of homosexual behavior is sin according to the Scriptures. The particular group in question agrees that homosexual practice is wrong. The report out of the College of Bishops, *Sexuality and Identity: A Pastoral Statement from the College of Bishops*, therefore responded to the specific request with a narrower but important purpose. For your information, Bishop Walter Banek and I participated significantly in the task force appointed to write the statement. I was given a major role in the final editing. The statement summarily does, however, present our Biblical commitments to the Scriptural standard of marriage and morality. To the specific purpose for which it was written, the statement concludes for a number of reasons why sexually hyphenated designations of Christians struggling with same-sex attraction is neither Biblical, historical, nor pastoral. The statement also reassured these misguided believers of our commitment to love, help and care for those Christians wrestling with this disorder. It was unanimously approved by the College of Bishops in January 2021.

However, subsequent to the release of the statement there was ongoing discussion and unsuccessful pushback attempts on the part of a few. Yet, as the vast majority in the ACNA and the College of Bishops remains steadfast with the

statement, there will be continued effort to clarify and help our brothers and sisters dealing with same-sex attraction. In the spirit of contributing further Scriptural instruction and light on inappropriate, sexually hyphenated language for Christian groups, I therefore offer the following. It is a summary of the Biblical world view of sexuality touching the matter, as reflected in the wisdom of the College of Bishops' statement.

- (1) Although some Christians have always in the history of the church dealt with same-sex attraction in the context of homosexual disorder, Scripture nowhere speaks of same-sex attraction as a Biblically sanctioned category. James does refer in his epistle to, "lust conceived as giving birth to sin" (James 1:15). No doubt temptation is not sin. However, James is not suggesting that sin is only in the action, the birthing of it. He's doing the opposite. He uses conception and birth language to explain how the two are one. The beginning of the birthing of sin is at the desire and attraction level of conception. This is where giving into temptation, sin, starts and is to be resisted. For example, if a married man said he was attracted to other women besides his wife, but he does not intend to act upon such an attraction, how would Biblical wisdom respond? According to James it's the beginning of lust even if the man says he does not want, nor intend to have sex with other women. In other words, the attraction itself speaks of an evil that is not allowed by the prior relationship of the man to his wife. Furthermore, pastoral experience in the church reveals, that attractions beyond one's spouse do lead to action, even if the latter was not initially intended. Other Scripture expands on the limits of attraction only permitted prior relationships.

The apostle Paul expresses the limits imposed by prior relationship in terms of only two possible relational attractions for Christians, singleness bound to the Lord in celibacy, and Biblical marriage to a spouse (1 Corinthians 7:24-40). Regarding marriage, he advises to remain in the state in which a married person finds himself/herself. That is, the prior relationship governs any other relationship and attraction, such as the example to which I just referred. Importantly, concerning the single or celibate person, St. Paul Biblically reasons the same way. The difference is that the prior relationship for the single person according to St. Paul is to the Lord. Similar to marriage, he advises to remain in the state to which one is called. But single and celibate Christians are to have a unique singular relationship to the Lord that is to be jealously guarded in the same way as a married relationship between husband and wife. In explaining this bond, he uses very precise language touching on attraction when he says, "The [Christian] woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in *body and spirit*" (1 Corinthians 7:34 NASV). Notice that St. Paul adds with reference to the single Christian, "and spirit." He's not only

concerned about faithful action, “the body.” He also speaks of the “spirit” of the single person, which encompasses attraction and desire. His point is that the prior relationship of a single and celibate person to the Lord limits attraction only to Him. St. Paul argues that this is a strength in the Kingdom of God. The advantage of the celibate call commended by St. Paul is that there are no other attractions and therefore distractions from serving the Lord. Any other attraction involving the “spirit” of a single person is explained as in some sense drawing the celibate from singular attraction to the Lord. The only possible exception for the single person to be attracted to another besides the Lord according to St. Paul would be if the celibate were to be called toward and into Biblical marriage. For the apostle, there are only two Biblical attractions, the singular attraction to the Lord, and the exclusive attraction to one’s spouse. There is no suggestion anywhere in the Scriptures that there’s a third category of same-sex attraction. Without any clear Biblical evidence for using sexual hyphenations in the church with reference to those of the same gender, therefore, such designations should not be used to categorize Christians.

- (2) Biblical friendship is permissible and commendable, but Scripture does not hyphenate Scriptural friendships with sexual words. The Bible has much to say regarding godly friendships. If the word attraction only means wanting to have a friendship with someone of the same or opposite sex there is nothing inherently wrong. This is good. But here again, Scripture never involves sexual words and their connotations with Biblical friendship. It doesn’t hyphenate the word sex with any relationship for that matter. Furthermore, not even Biblical marriage is described as opposite-sex attraction with sexual language. Godly marriage according to Scripture is in its essence companionship, expressed in God’s purpose to provide for Adam “a helper fit for him,” that is a companion (Genesis 2:18). And even this kind of companionship is limited to the marriage of a man and woman. So why bring sexual language into desire for friendship if Scripture does not? It is especially unwise to do so given our culture when the church struggles with not being conformed by wrong sexual worldviews and language.
- (3) For all of these reasons, the church has never approved moral and sexual hyphenations such as “same-sex or gay-Christian,” let alone “gay-Anglican.” We don’t speak of adulterous, kleptomaniac, lying or any sort of Christian with moral hyphenation. We don’t even refer to Christians who struggle with alcohol as “alcoholic-Christians.” Rather, the church has only encouraged sub-groupings and hyphenations associated in terms of worship, service, and mission. This is demonstrated all through the history of the church from monasticism to mission. Grouping around desire is self-serving, not other-serving as the Scriptures call us to be and do. Then pastorally speaking, to put oneself in a social context of the same sexual attraction for which action on

the attraction is forbidden is unwise. This would be like putting a man struggling with lust for other women into a Bible study with recovering prostitutes. It's not a pastoral approach for healing a sexual disorder.

Therefore, I exhort us to resist the language and categories of sexual attraction and relationship, that neither Scripture nor the historic church's understanding of the Bible would permit. At the very least, such novel language pulls the edge of a secular, homosexual worldview into the church. At worst, it could lead, as attraction consistently does, to homosexual behavior that has so divided the 21st century church. Let us resist any trace of conformity to the secular worldview. At the same time, I call us to love all sinners including homosexuals and those struggling with homosexual inclinations. In this we must strive to welcome and show them that Jesus Christ and His church loves, accepts and wants pastorally to help them. All the while, however, we must with God's help, remain steadfast and clear on God's view of human sexuality, Biblical marriage, and sexual desire, attraction and behaviors.

A second cultural concern where we must not be conformed to the world but be transformed in Christ concerns the church's response to the sins of racial prejudice, hatred, and violence in our society. In recent months we have seen tragic, unjust, and unacceptable use of force in racially oriented crimes. These situations have included "the bad cop," as well as retaliatory groups answering hate with hate and equal prejudice. Although not everyone is a racist, nor do these kinds of tragedy mean that all police are racist, Christians must speak the truth in love and peace with the standard of the Word of God. This calls for the application of a Biblical world view to provide not only the Scriptural understanding of race, but to avoid being conformed to the world by secular racial theories. While models such as Critical Race Theory may at some points offer useful information, they are not necessarily Biblical nor Christian in their premises, principles, and practices. They can even at times become explicitly anti-Christian displaying another kind of religious prejudice. And since they are only theories, they can offer misinformation or exclude key information. Moreover, these secular racial theories in the hands of some biased researchers unfortunately succumb to atheistic totalitarian, Marxist ideologies.

Christians therefore must be extremely careful not to rely on secular theories and worldviews regarding any subject such as race and racism. Non-Christian viewpoints entering the Kingdom of God can confuse, mislead, and conform God's people to the world instead of transforming their minds to the will of God. When this happens, our answers then become no different from a fallen, sinful mind, failing to offer true Scriptural solutions to cultural problems. I know some believe that if we concede to secular viewpoints where we can, some might be won to the Biblical view. Unfortunately, the opposite has proven to be the case throughout Christian history. When the church does not maintain a clear Biblical

world view, demonstrating where Scripture actually has the better idea and approach, the unbeliever doesn't truly convert and the church all too often becomes more like the world rather than vice versa. Worse, in cultural issues such as race we can lose sight of the main thing that is to be the main thing, the Gospel of the love of Christ that is the only true way for removing prejudice and for reaching all ethnicities. To help us stay in the will of God and not be conformed to the world on such an important issue, I present a brief summary of the Biblical world and life view of race that the church uniquely has to offer all societies especially at this time.

(1) The early chapters of Genesis teach that God created humanity in His image, *Imago Dei*. This distinguishes humans from all other creatures. The Hebrew words and language for the Image of God in humanity have been defined as mental and spiritual faculties that people share with God, the appointment of humankind as God's representatives on earth, and a capacity to relate to God. All three of these elements of *Imago Dei* reveal humans as essentially religious. The word religion comes from the Latin, *religio*, meaning to bind or covenant. Not only are humans in the Image of God essentially religious but they are made to have covenant only with the One, True, God who made them. In this, humans are formed first and foremost to worship God. They are created doxological creatures before anything else. God also shaped other aspects into humanity such as economics, education, politics and even race. Yet all of these are not the essence of the *Imago Dei* in mankind. Though important and equal elements of humanity, they are secondary to the *Imago Dei*. They are to be subordinated to God and His covenantal will for humanity. And if humanity allows these other components such as economics, politics or even race to deny or neglect humanity as essentially religious, these areas can actually become a replacement religion. Here is a key place where secular, non-creationist worldviews and racial theories err. Regarding race, they can begin to define race in importance over religion. And in this they can be and are often antagonistic to Christianity.

The Biblical creationist worldview does teach that God created humans with different colors of skin, but it's a very different understanding from non-Christian views of ethnicity. St. Paul says, "And he [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). Some translations such as the King James Version and others interpret the phrase "one man" as "one blood." Actually, the Greek text only says "one," as in, "God made from one every nation of mankind." Either way, in one man including his blood, all the people and nations originated. This is why the Anglican Evangelical scholar John Stott observes, "Both the dignity and the equality of human beings are traced in Scripture to our creation." The Biblical view has historically been that all humanity is actually one race as in one blood in many ethnicities. This is reflected in the origin of the English word

“race.” It probably comes by way of the Italian word, *razza*, from the Latin *radix*, which means root. The Biblical view of race is that there is one root to one man with one blood. As the saying goes, “we all bleed red no matter the color of our skin.”

Important for us to note, the Biblical creationist model of humanity as one root, blood and race with many ethnicities, was challenged by Enlightenment, evolutionary, and Darwinian theories in the 18th and 19th centuries. They abandoned race in terms of common root and blood. They started redefining race in terms of physical features. They further categorized these racial features into an evolutionary scheme seeing certain ethnic characteristics as less evolved than others. This led to totalitarian abuses of races defined as less and more human. Nazis and Marxists of the 20th century, even declared some races as subhuman, resulting in genocide committed against millions of Jews and other races. Sadly, even some Christian theologians over the last two centuries have been lured away from a creationist to an evolutionary view of race. They too fell into the trap of racist perspectives. Yet it must be understood that they abandoned a thorough Biblical creationist worldview to arrive at errant racial conclusions. This points not only to the difference between the Biblical creationist world view, but it also alerts us to the danger of Christians using secular, evolutionary theories to address the problems of race. And when secular race theorists attempt to use evolutionary models to correct the problems of racism, they commit other errors because of the explicitly atheistic premises of any non-creationist worldview.

- (2) The Biblical world view of race teaches that Adam and Eve’s sinful rebellion against God resulted in segmenting humanity in terms of ethnicity. God created one race, one blood in different colors united by grace. Sinful, fallen humans divided the one race, one blood of humanity by subjugating races according to national power structures. Although God did form tribes and nations, he did not make one race more pure than another (Genesis 10). He made all races equal and called for every person to be treated equally. His blessing and cursing were not on one race or tribe due to ethnicity but faithfulness or unfaithfulness to His covenant (Genesis 9:25). St. Peter says, “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34). The Word of God in passages such as this one actually provides a fuller, more accurate, and truly corrective understanding of racism than secular theories. Holy Writ teaches that the specific sin of racism is the spiritual problem of hate and prejudice against and preferential treatment of one race above another due to ethnicity. The Bible reveals that sinful “partiality” toward certain humans and races, to use St. Peter’s language, is the cause of racial prejudice. The Scriptures even go to a deeper root source of the sin of

racism. The origin of all sin is pride leading to hatred, anger and violence. Racial arrogance is in the fallen heart of prejudice resulting in hatred that elevates or denigrates a person on the basis of the color of skin. The Scriptures in this spiritual assessment present a critical sin view of racism, with which secular theories are not concerned in their analyses.

In addition, Scripture teaches that all of humanity represented by Adam and Eve fell into sin (Romans 5:12). The apostle concludes, "All have sinned and fall short of God's glory" (Romans 3:23). Everyone in every race is a sinner. No one person or race is exempt from the effects of sin. However, although humanity became totally depraved this does not mean that every person has become *utterly* depraved. There's a big difference between totally and utterly. Total depravity means that humans in every aspect of their person – mind, emotion, and will – became tainted and enslaved by sin. This is not the same as utter depravity. The phrase utter depravity suggests that every sinner commits every sin. This goes beyond the Scriptural teaching of the effect of the fall. By God's restraining common grace every human does not become so utterly depraved that he/she commits every sin. Just as not every individual is a murderer, or robs a bank, not every person participates in the sin of racism. On this point, secular racial theories like CRT actually exceed the Biblical doctrine of sin by effectively accusing all humans of certain races of the sin of racism. They say things like, "all white people are racists." This kind of generalization is not accurate according to Scripture or experience, any more than it would be to say that every human is a murderer. It's reducing individuals of a race to utter and not just total depravity. It is more Scripturally precise to say all races have racists but not everyone in a given race is a racist.

Thus, because of a more accurate evaluation of racism as a sin problem, a Biblical worldview provides a spiritual solution of true love for God and neighbor leading to peace that goes to the source of fallen pride and hatred regardless of the racial sins of prejudice and abuse. Only by turning to the God of the Bible can sinful, racial injustice be overcome. In the words of Ken Ham and A. Charles Ware in their book, *One Race, One Blood*, "race is a sin issue not a skin issue." The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reflected this Biblical viewpoint when he said, "I look for the day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character." To quote St. Peter again, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." The only, ultimate solution to the sin of racism is the "Fear of the Lord and obedience to Him," the Gospel, which is the Biblical doctrine of salvation.

- (3) The third aspect of the Biblical world view of race is redemption in Jesus Christ that restores God's intended created purpose of one race, one blood

in many skin colors. As the Scriptures say, "So God loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to the end that all who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). St. Paul explains, "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 broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:13-14). The blood of Christ unites our blood into the original, created purpose of God that sin jeopardized. St. Paul says elsewhere that as we receive by faith what he calls, the blessed or consecrated "bread and cup," "we share in the Body and the Blood of Christ." Furthermore, he adds that as "we share in the Body of Christ, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). According to the Biblical worldview of salvation, union in and by means of Jesus Christ is the ultimate solution to joining together all ethnicities. Christ is the only One who can break down all racial "dividing walls of hostility." This unity in diversity of one body one blood is indeed the picture of heaven as described by the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation. Seven times we're told that the redeemed community of humans in heaven has been redeemed from, "every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). Do you think the New Testament is trying to make a point about race? As Ham and Ware say, "the move from race relations to grace relations" redeems humanity to what God intended at creation.

Among the early church fathers such as Tertullian and Origen of Alexandria, they often referred to this aforementioned Biblical teaching as Christ's redemption forming into one race all ethnicities in the church. This is not to say that all ethnic distinctions are removed or no longer recognized or important. Redemption does not make God's people color blind but ethnically appreciative. The early church fathers further explained their insight by pointing out that the New Testament speaks of only three races: Jew, Gentile, and the Church. In Scripture the distinction is actually threefold in this sense, the Jewish race, the Gentile races including all ethnicities, and the Church in which the ethnicities of the world are and can only be truly united. In the Kingdom of God all ethnicities are equal and to be equally reached in Christ with no preference for any single race apart from the others. There is no east nor west, no north nor south. The dividing wall between Jew, Gentile, and all races is torn down by the Gospel. To quote our wonderful invitation in Holy Communion, "All who love our Divine Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity are affectionately invited to the Lord's Table."

Furthermore, the early church fathers also taught from the Scriptures that though Christ makes all one, God does not neglect ethnicity by redemption. Rather, grace leads the church to recognize that each race brings gifts into the church to form a whole. Like the oneness of marriage, unity does not

remove diversity. A man and woman, by becoming one in marriage, do not cease to be male and female. Their unity is in complementing each other with the diverseness that each brings to the unity. Diversity is good, and unified in Christ. In the church, all races are brought into God's Kingdom to contribute to each other, that all together might reach all the ethnicities of the world for Christ. This is the redemption in Christ that also restores humanity.

- (4) The final aspect of the Biblical world view is restoration in Jesus Christ to love, care for, and include all ethnicities. This is sometimes called sanctification of character leading to loving God and one's neighbor. We see restoration at work in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). The Good Samaritan not only saves the man near death. He picks him up, takes care of him, and leads him to a hospital where he can be fully restored. Regarding the sin of racism, Jesus Christ not only takes away hate, but He puts love in the heart for all people, regardless of race, creed or color. This is the restoration effect of redemption in Jesus Christ. It's Christians who write hymns like, "Jesus loves the little children; all the children of the world; red, brown, yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight; Jesus loves the little children of the world." Not only are colors and races precious in Jesus' sight. God restores them to the preciousness of their racial identity in Jesus Christ.

In addition, concerning Gospel restoration from racism, secular racial theories generally fail to recognize how Jesus Christ and Christianity have the greatest story of restoring all races, especially ones of color, with the Gospel and a Biblical world view. Ironically, one of the positive methods of secular race theories is called storytelling. They use skillful storytelling techniques to correct false narratives and add important aspects to history. No doubt some erring interpreters of Scripture for a brief period once misinterpreted the curse on Canaan in the Old Testament to be on Ham resulting in racial stigmatizing (Genesis 9:25). Although the faulty interpretation has been acknowledged, corrected and rejected, the larger narrative of the overall positive effect of the Gospel and its stories in Christian history has been mostly neglected by secular racial theorists. In fact, it can be argued from any objective reading of the last two thousand years, the most effective and only real freedom humanity has ever known has resulted from Christianity's impact. Even today, look at where there is still open slavery practiced. It's places Christianity either has never had influence or has been rejected and oppressed. Islam for example, has throughout its entire history produced one oppressive slave state after another even down to the present. Slavery is still practiced in Islamic countries. Secular race theories conspicuously neglect this travesty as well as the true Christian story. They will note the importance of the abolitionists in the 19th century. What they fail to emphasize is the

significance of their Christian commitment that led to their abolitionist views. They will mention sometimes the remarkable story of overcoming slavery and racism in England by courageous Anglican Evangelicals like William Wilberforce and John Newton who authored the great hymn, *Amazing Grace*. What some don't mention is John Newton's own testimony of how he was changed from being a slave trader, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, to become a champion for the very people whom he had hated and enslaved.

Though Christians are sinners saved by grace and not perfect in this life, the prevailing Gospel story regarding race is overwhelmingly constructive. One of the most powerful stories of Christian restoration is the first African Bishop, Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-1891). When only twelve years old, his family was captured by Muslim slave traders in Western Africa. Traveling in the captors' slave ship, a British Royal Navy Squadron of Ships enforcing the ban on slave trade intercepted the vessel. Crowther converted to Christianity through English missionaries. Eventually called into the ministry, the English Church Missionary Society provided for his education at Oxford University where he earned a doctoral degree. Upon returning to Nigeria with the CMS, he became the first Anglican African Bishop. During the same period, Henry Townsend, was a 19th century Anglican missionary to the West Coast of Africa in the area of Abeokuta, Nigeria. He encountered slave markets. On a certain day he attended one, bought a slave, and right in front of everyone after he had purchased the man, unshackled his chains, and set him free. That act became a powerful Christian witness for the man and his culture. Both men worked together to spread the Gospel and stop the evil slave trade.

There is also our own history in the Reformed Episcopal Church. It is a classic example of how Jesus Christ changes people from being racist. The first Reformed Episcopal bishop in South Carolina was Peter Fassyoux Stephens. He was the white Commandant of the Citadel in Charleston and fought for the South in the Civil War. After the war was over, Christ moved in his life. He took up the cause of freed African American slaves. He worked to reform the educational system in South Carolina so that African Americans could receive an education. And when the Episcopal Church would not ordain African American Christian men called into Holy Orders, he ordained them after they had left the Episcopal Church. He, together with these faithful lay and clergy African Americans, began a grand work for Christ. It continues to this day as a key witness in and from the Reformed Episcopal Church in the Diocese of the Southeast.

These are just some among myriads of stories in Christian history of how Jesus Christ can and does restore a lost humanity from racism and ethnic

prejudice, if a person will truly believe in Him and embrace the Holy Scriptures' model for living. Jesus Christ was not a white Caucasian. He was a Jew, and He was "woke," before any of us. He has awakened His followers throughout history down to the present. Faithful Biblical Christians are already indeed "woke." Our society needs to hear the Christian story of redemption and restoration in Christ alone.

I could go so much further with this exhortation calling us to a Gospel and Scriptural model of race. I've only touched the surface with the Biblical world view of creation, fall, redemption and restoration regarding ethnicity. Much more needs to be done in articulating a Biblical Race Theology. If it's Scriptural, it's not a theory. Much more can be developed on the Biblical perspective, as well as critique of secular approaches. This is the only way to become all things to all that some might come to Christ, without at the same time being conformed to the world. This is our responsibility as Christian scholars and believers in keeping the main thing the main thing. It is only the Gospel that redeems and restores humans to love, to respect, to honor, to care for, and to reach, all ethnicities. We must always, by God's grace, keep the main thing the main thing, attempting to reach the world for Christ. We should also remain vigilant in keeping the main thing the main thing in our work together in the Reformed Episcopal Church. To this end close to home, I offer a final second exhortation as we stand together as a Reformed Episcopal Church of many ethnicities.

Second in these challenging times of racial turmoil, I exhort us to renew our stand with our African American brothers and sisters, especially our fellow Reformed Episcopalians. I believe we can strengthen our work together first by weeping with those who weep. My/our hearts go out especially for our African American brothers and sisters who have lived once again through a painful period and witnessed racially oriented crimes. We are all grieved and concerned. But for our African American brothers and sisters, old wounds have been reopened from the recent abuses in our culture. Although not all in our society are racist, it has pointed out the need for reform among some our law enforcement agencies. We should realize the effects of these tragic events on our brothers and sisters, hurt with them, uphold them, pray for them, and weep with those who weep. At the same time in our stand together to proclaim Christ, particularly those of us in the Anglican Church in North America and in the Reformed Episcopal Church, let us not lose sight of the difference between faithful, Biblical and believing Gospel churches and the unbelieving culture. I don't know of any lay or clergy in the ACNA or the REC who are racist. Some may be confused and frustrated, but the word racist does not apply to our fellow Biblical Anglicans. I ask us not to be confused with the confusion in our society to the extent that we forget the distinction between lost sinner without the grace of God and saved sinners by grace in Biblical churches. I know we have so much

more in which we must be sanctified. I realize that in our increasingly diverse society, we in a Biblical church must reach all diversities with the Gospel. In calling us to stand with our fellow African American Reformed Episcopalians, I ask that they minister to us and help us better to fulfill the Great Commission to all ethnicities of the world and in our ministries together. All of our churches need more ethnic diversity. Finally, as part of this second exhortation, though many of us may not have experienced the same kind of oppression in our own recent histories, I also hear in Scripture that, "there is no sin that is not common to humanity." I'm reminded of the words of Brother Lawrence in his classic, *Practicing the Presence of God*, "If we're truly devoted to doing God's will, pain and pleasure won't make any difference to us." We weep with those who weep and work for a better day when we may rejoice with those who rejoice.

I come to the end of my report to this 56th General Council with the theme, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." I have summarized where, by God's grace, we have continued to walk together in God's will. God has given us many victories over the last, extended triennium. I have also exhorted us in a number of areas where I pray by God's grace, we will continue in His will. In this as you can see, I also have been compelled by my teaching office and responsibility as a bishop and as your Presiding Bishop to offer Scriptural guidance regarding two social and cultural areas. I have drawn from St. Paul, who says in the will of God we are to be transformed to think Christianly with a Biblical world and life view, and not to be conformed to nor confused by the world's secular models. As my grandmother used to say, "Eat the cherries but spit out the pits."

In closing, I thank all of you for the privilege and honor of being allowed to serve as your Presiding Bishop, now an additional term. I humbly accept this awesome responsibility and ask for your constant prayers. Thank you for re-electing me in the will of the Lord. I thank all who have served with me, the Council of Bishops, the General Committee, the denominational staff, and all the clergy and the laity. I especially thank my wife, Susan, and my whole family who patiently and understandingly have given husband, dad and granddad the time to serve. You are truly God's people. What a blessing to serve you. With all my predecessors, I call upon the Reformed Episcopal Church to uphold the sanctity of life. To this end I also exhort our clergy to preach on the importance of protecting all human life in the womb at least one Sunday a year at the Feast of Holy Innocents, or on a Sunday nearest to the infamous Roe v. Wade decision that legalized the slaughter of millions of unborn children since 1972. May God help us to stand firm and do His will. As I began on the theme of "thy will be done," I end with a blessing calling for the same: "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may *do his will*, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)

The Most Rev. Dr. Ray R. Sutton, Presiding Bishop
June 9, 2021