World Church Diversity and Inclusion Team:
Preface to Community of Christ Scripture and Race Paper

The Community of Christ Scripture and Race Paper initially was developed in 2006 as a statement from a small ethnically diverse group from a primarily USA context. It was written to speak frankly and honestly of their experiences while recognizing that others around the world also experience racial injustices.

The paper also was shaped by other ethnic ministers, the Theology Taskforce, and the Diversity Committee. It was presented to the World Church Leadership Council for review and comments to increase awareness. The council recognized that the complexities of racial injustices are contextual and occur in different ways in different places. Church President Stephen M. Veazey has indicated that this document prompted him to prayerfully reflect on scripture, church history, and racism, which contributed to the inspired counsel offered to the church that is now Doctrine and Covenants 163:7.

The Diversity and Inclusion Team also would like to say that although the term race is used in this paper, it is important to clarify that race is a social invention used to categorize people for economic or power reasons. It is a fictional form of identity developed to separate people into distinct groups based on physical characteristics. There is no biological basis for a race. However, it is a lived experience. Ethnicity is unrelated to biology. It is a state of belonging that shares a sense of identity through customs, beliefs, religious practices, values, and much more. We all are members of ethnic groups.

Additionally, the team recognizes that efforts toward inclusion have been made by Community of Christ over the past sixteen years since the paper was written. We also recognize that there is much more work to do toward the goal of understanding and alleviating effects of racism. We support the efforts to work together to become a unified body where all are embraced equally.

The team suggests the First Presidency encourage church leadership at all levels commit to continued engagement and dialogue with members who are people of color within the USA and other nations to gain greater insight in addressing all the complexities of racism.
COMMUNITY OF CHRIST SCRIPTURE AND RACE

This statement is about scripture and race. It provides clarity about the Church’s past racism and current actions to repent and change.

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The Problem

As a faith community, we proclaim a gospel that embraces the equal worth of all people. However, our faith community has not always practiced nor recognized the worth of all persons by denying the full inclusion of all races and ethnicities in its life. Although the central teaching of the scriptures about the worth of all persons is clear, there are barriers which prevent people from participating and collaborating fully in Church life. The Church has at times used its heritage and sacred texts to promote injustices, harm and exclude people because of skin color.

The objective of this paper is not to make people feel guilty, but rather to help people understand how racism occurs in the Church so that together we can work on the problem.

Racism can be defined as prejudice + power. Prejudice is a preconceived idea that can be positive or negative. When negative it often results in unfavorable judgement or opinion of others. Power can be expressed through systems set up by a dominate culture. Once racist systems are set up they can continue to operate even if individuals are not personally racist. Racism can be thus both intentional and unintentional. Racism in the Church is the result of habits and institutional structures that continually privilege White people. While obvious to People of Color who suffer from it, White people usually do not see this. This can happen because of unconscious bias.

The voices of some people are not valued or recognized at all levels and sometimes they are even suppressed. Also the practice of tokenism may be used. There is a question about how resources, initiatives and programs are developed, implemented, and financed related to people of color. The Church as an institution has often ignored cultures, heritages, and traditions of nonwhites. It has assumed that permission is granted to interpret and change such elements without sensitive inquiry and indigenous collaboration.
The Church has not always fully engaged in an introspective, honest, and self-critical review of its past and present racist and oppressive practices. Racism hurts everyone. We are all damaged by a Christian community that fails to reconcile one to another and that does not follow the leading of the Spirit to practice honesty and love. The Church must confess that it has not always lived up to the Gospel, and that it has ignored the voice of the Spirit calling for repentance. In more recent times, church leaders are seeking to learn from the church’s history and shortcomings. They are also working to change how the church includes the value and beauty of cultures, heritages, and traditions to make the Gospel relevant. A change of attitudes and systems is vital to reflect the worth of all persons.

The Gospel

The good news of Jesus Christ as expressed in the scriptures is intended to guide and support us in our daily living and has equal respect for all people regardless of color, social class, or circumstance. The central teaching of the scriptures about the equal dignity of everyone is clear. Every human is created in the image of God. The early Church saw how Jesus broke down the barriers of division, and then went on to declare that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek. We see in the life of Jesus the full inclusion of every person. Jesus models compassion for the hurting among us. The Holy Spirit calls for justice for all. We are one global body in Christ, and there are no second-class members. Our heritage is as a church that values Continuing Revelation. We believe the Spirit continues to direct and guide us, and affirms the worth of all persons in our open canon of scripture. We believe all are called according to their gifts to share in ministry. We believe that Zion, the peaceable reign of God, must also be characterized by racial and ethnic equality and mutuality.

Racism is a betrayal of this central affirmation of the gospel – that persons are equally valued in the sight of God. We have sometimes unknowingly and sometimes deliberately used our sacred texts to justify unjust acts harm and exclude people because of skin color. Some passages of our scripture are racist. As a Church we must speak prophetically and publicly against them.

Our Commitment

The gospel offers forgiveness and a fresh new beginning. Therefore, we have hope, and we commit to go on building a new global community reflective of Zion, which honors the dignity of all humans equally. We commit ourselves to be faithful to Jesus who proclaimed that “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.”

In response to the Gospel and scripture, we bear witness that the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to faithfully be a multi-racial/ethnic body extending world-wide ministry by reaching out to all persons in honor, respect and equality.
Honoring the equal dignity of everyone and providing opportunity for individual empowerment and freedom, we commit ourselves to do the following:

- Be a Church that opposes racism and that will not use scripture to oppress, marginalize, diminish or dominate anyone.¹³
- Actively work to continue to change perceptions, attitudes and practices that deny full participation of all persons. We will learn new ways of reading, interpreting, and living out our scripture to affirm the worth of all.
- Be a Christ-centered Church celebrating the worth of all persons with mutual acceptance of all races and ethnicities. We affirm that only by promoting and living in a diverse Church will we exemplify our faithfulness to the good news of Jesus.

In Conclusion:
The Church is repenting of our sin of racism. We ask forgiveness from those who have been hurt. We will be accountable to those hurt in the past, accountable to those hurting today, and accountable to the future of all our children. We will continue to work for justice and inclusion for all.

Notes

(Biblical references are from the NRSV)

1. Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) 16:3c-e; 151:9; 162:6a.
2. Ephesians 4:15
3. Genesis 1:27
7. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31
8. D&C 16:3c-f
9. D&C 151:9; 162:6a
10. For example racist texts include the following: II Nephi 12:80-84; D&C 116:4
11. See for instance Scripture in Community of Christ, Affirmation Four
12. Mark 11:17
13. Scripture in Community of Christ, Affirmation Four