



# A Free Methodist Response to Racism during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As a denomination committed to the worth of persons<sup>i</sup> and one that believes that “racism represents a particularly egregious affront to the dignity and worth of persons and its presence is manifest in the life, history, and institutions of all nations”<sup>ii</sup>, it is critical that we respond to the explicit acts of racism and systemic racism that is exacerbating the impact of COVID-19 for many people of color.<sup>iii</sup>

As the COVID-19 pandemic has spread, hate crimes, boycotting, villainization, xenophobia<sup>iv</sup>, and explicit racism toward members of the Asian and Asian-American community have increased. Asian and Asian-American businesses have been boycotted<sup>v</sup> and the homes of some have been vandalized. Our brothers and sisters are lamenting, grieving, and experiencing righteous anger at the ways racism continues to exclude and otherize them. These racist acts are a symptom of a racist ideology of “Yellow Peril”<sup>vi</sup> that remains embedded in our culture. This ideology systemically and culturally villainizes Asians and Asian-Americans and reinforces a perspective that Asians and Asian-Americans are perpetual foreigners in the U.S.—that they don’t belong. These recent acts of racism are a continued expression of the legacy of policies and practices intended to exclude, demean, and dehumanize Asian-Americans in the U.S. We must understand these racist acts and their undergirding ideology as sin and affirm the statement of the Asian American Christian Collaborative<sup>vii</sup>. Our bishops and many other Free Methodists have signed this statement and committed to combat this egregious rise in racism toward the Asian American community.

COVID-19 has also made transparent a historically inequitable and racially-biased health system. Although coronavirus does not biologically impact one racial group more than others, limited healthcare facilities in Black communities and an overrepresentation of underlying health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension exacerbate the probability of Black people contracting and dying from COVID-19<sup>viii</sup>. These inequities are not unique to the current crisis, but rather the result of ongoing racist policies and practices affecting the healthcare system as well as disparities in employment and housing resulting in more Black people employed in service jobs on the front lines and living in densely populated neighborhoods.

COVID-19 has also revealed the continued fear of Black people. Some in the Black community have expressed concerns that wearing a mask in public, as the CDC recommends, is a threat to their existence because it elicits fear<sup>ix</sup> from White people. These fears are based in racist ideologies fueled by a legacy of messages and images that associate Blackness with danger.



The undocumented peoples and their families have been excluded from the CARES Act<sup>x</sup> despite paying taxes and actively contributing to the welfare of society. While not all undocumented persons are Latinx, COVID-19 is acutely impacting the Latinx community. The same socioeconomic inequities that make Black and indigenous communities affect the Latinx community.<sup>xi</sup> And, data shows that U.S. Latino/as are experiencing the hardest hit<sup>xii</sup> in job losses, pay cuts.

Finally, Indigenous communities, which have historically lacked access to health services<sup>xiii</sup>, have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19<sup>xiv</sup>. Facilities in these communities are overrun with patients and because many residents of reservations have underlying conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart diseases thus increases their vulnerability to COVID-19. Again, these differences are not happenstance, but the result of practices and policies that disenfranchise Native communities and their culture.

Data is still emerging from the CDC and state health department and while we do not yet know what the future data will reveal, from what we know now the impact of COVID-19 are reinforcing social and economic inequities based on race.

Therefore, we call our denominational family to:

- Explicitly express that racism, of any kind, is incompatible to the Gospel and our commitment to holiness.
- Examine and lament the ways we as individuals, congregations, and a denomination have historically and currently perpetuate racism.
- Evoke humility by seeking to understand the effects of racism in our society and within the church.
- Engage in earnestly listening to people of color within and outside of the FMC who are affected by the racism that is being exacerbated by COVID-19.

In the book of Revelation, we are given the vision of an equitable and diverse Kingdom. This is the completion of God's covenant with God's people to make us one body from many nations (Abrahamic Covenant). Yet, we are not to passively hope that this Kingdom comes to pass. Rather, as Christians, we are called to actively co-labor with God in building this equitable and diverse Kingdom. As we affirmed at General Conference 2019, the FMC is called to be a Kingdom people. We are called to be marked by justice and holiness. We are called to care about what God cares about and hate what God hates. Thus we must uphold the *imago dei* (image of God) within all of God's creation, and we must actively oppose this present expression of racism and its impacts.



*“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.” — Revelation 7:9*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> From paragraph 3221 of the Free Methodist Book of Discipline.

<sup>ii</sup> A direct quote from paragraph 3221 of the Free Methodist Book of Discipline.

<sup>iii</sup> For more on this topic, visit <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/04/16/mapping-racial-inequity-amid-the-spread-of-covid-19/>

<sup>iv</sup> For more on xenophobia, visit [https://www.npr.org/2020/03/02/811363404/when-xenophobia-spreads-like-a-virus?fbclid=IwAR3uGuLz64nfpotNk-J6gQ\\_6cEdta0hjZ-E3ep8aaYzLulpzx4\\_6fTeLbg](https://www.npr.org/2020/03/02/811363404/when-xenophobia-spreads-like-a-virus?fbclid=IwAR3uGuLz64nfpotNk-J6gQ_6cEdta0hjZ-E3ep8aaYzLulpzx4_6fTeLbg)

<sup>v</sup> For more information on the boycotting of Asian-owned businesses, visit <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/feb/21/nyc-chinatown-coronavirus-fears-business>

<sup>vi</sup> For more the topic of Yellow Peril, visit [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow\\_Peril](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_Peril)

<sup>vii</sup> To read the statement referenced, visit <https://asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/covid19statement>

<sup>viii</sup> Read more about the unique situation of African Americans during COVID-19 at <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-why-african-americans-vulnerable-covid-19-health-race>

<sup>ix</sup> The NY Times features this topic in the following article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/us/coronavirus-masks-racism-african-americans.html>

<sup>x</sup> Visit <https://www.nilc.org/issues/economic-support/impact-of-covid19-relief-bills-on-immigrant-communities/> to learn about those excluded from the CARES Act.

<sup>xi</sup> Effects of COVID-19 on the Latinx Community are referenced here: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/18/the-virus-doesnt-discriminate-but-governments-do-latinos-disproportionately-hit-by-coronavirus>

<sup>xii</sup> Statistics can be found here: [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/03/u-s-latinos-among-hardest-hit-by-pay-cuts-job-losses-due-to-coronavirus/?utm\\_source=EmbraceRace+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=6bfdbb5ea6-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_04\\_06\\_02\\_29&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_765f8c2a27-6bfdbb5ea6-102032285](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/03/u-s-latinos-among-hardest-hit-by-pay-cuts-job-losses-due-to-coronavirus/?utm_source=EmbraceRace+Newsletter&utm_campaign=6bfdbb5ea6-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_06_02_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_765f8c2a27-6bfdbb5ea6-102032285)

<sup>xiii</sup> Data on the effects of COVID-19 on Native Americans is found here: <https://www.popsoci.com/story/health/covid-19-native-american-navajo-nation/>

<sup>xiv</sup> Visit <https://www.ihs.gov/coronavirus/> for more information.