



Church World Service Platform on Racial Justice

The CWS mission is to transform communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster. This cannot be effectively pursued without a deep understanding of the role that racism has played in creating and perpetuating these struggles that plague humankind worldwide. As a faith-based organization, we hold that all people are created in the image of God and are equal in God's sight. As Dr. King wrote, in a posthumously-published essay, "the Black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all of its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing the evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced."¹

Black, Indigenous and Persons of Color (BIPOC) communities in the United States and around the world are disproportionately impacted by hunger, poverty, displacement, disaster, and climate change. This is not by happenstance. White supremacy and misogyny continue to target and destroy the lives and communities of BIPOC. This is a daily life oppression, carried out by unjust international and national economic and legal systems, militarism disguised as law enforcement, and discriminatory immigration policies. The United States begins its history with the genocide of Indigenous people and centuries of kidnapping, trafficking, selling, and the enslavement of African Americans. This legacy has evolved to present day systemic racism and caste-systems, fueled by a myth of racial superiority that has been backed by ultra-conservative theology and unscientific dogma which continue to influence popular culture. In the United States, systemic racism is manifest in unequal access to quality education², employment³, affordable housing, health care, capital, community investments, political representation and mass incarceration. As a result, BIPOC individuals are disproportionately impacted by poverty, marginalization, homelessness, hunger, malnutrition⁴, violence, gender-based violence, human rights abuses,⁵ exposure to pollutants, and disenfranchisement. Racism and misogyny are mutually reinforcing ideological systems, rooted in entrenched patriarchal norms that persist everywhere, causing layered risks and vulnerabilities based on gender, race, color and ethnicity.

For decades, Black community leaders in the United States and human rights leaders around the world have been calling attention to these injustices and demanding change. Many refugees and immigrants, including CWS clients, staff, and partners, are impacted by the same systemic racism, police brutality, criminalization, and imprisonment that these leaders are working to stop. The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) and other Black-led organizations have made the world aware that political interventions are necessary in order to change the policies, culture, and politics that excuse and perpetuate racial injustice. Their cause is our cause, and we recognize that CWS must do more in solidarity with these leaders.

Grounded in these realities and a commitment to our mission, CWS pledges to implement racial justice, equity, and inclusion practices that ensure CWS leadership and staff are representative of the diverse BIPOC we serve and actively identify and correct organizational policies and practices that result in inequitable treatment of BIPOC staff, partners, and clients. We will also promote resources created by Black-led organizations and Black and indigenous-led women's organizations and commit to educating and empowering our staff, network, partners, and donors to listen to BIPOC communities, respond with integrity to their needs, and invest in their capacities, and to engage in conversations with family members, neighbors, coworkers and friends that dismantle white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and racism. We commit to work with BIPOC community leaders and organizations in calling on congressional, state, and local policy makers to make the following reforms, many of which have been promoted by the M4BL and Campaign Zero. Recommended resources are linked below.

Divest & Invest

In the United States, institutional racial bias and systemic underfunding of community needs have perpetuated the myth that law enforcement is the answer to poverty, homelessness, and mental health issues. Nothing could

¹ "The Land Beyond," Vincent Harding <https://sojo.net/magazine/january-1983/land-beyond>

² "7 findings that illustrate racial disparities in education," The Brookings Institution <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2016/06/06/7-findings-that-illustrate-racial-disparities-in-education/>

³ "Systematic Inequality and Economic Opportunity," Center for American Progress <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472910/systematic-inequality-economic-opportunity/>

⁴ "Inequality exacerbates hunger, malnutrition and obesity in Latin America and the Caribbean" The United Nations World Food Programme <https://www.wfp.org/news/inequality-exacerbates-hunger-malnutrition-and-obesity-latin-america-and-caribbean>

⁵ "Current situation of indigenous and afro-american peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean" La Comisión Económica para América Latina <https://www.cepal.org/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/prensa/noticias/comunicados/2/132/P132.xml>

be further from the truth. Housing discrimination, underfunded public education, zero tolerance policies and over-policing BIPOC neighborhoods and communities have led to the school-to-prison pipeline. Community needs that are currently treated as law enforcement issues would be better served with increased funding for public education and after-school programming, nutrition and well-being support, health care services, workforce development programs, mental health response teams, violence prevention and intervention programs, and education and training for civilians on bystander intervention. Repurposing empty buildings, houses, apartments, and hotels to house people, regardless of income, race, gender, sexuality, immigration status, or history of incarceration, would be more effective at preventing and responding to homelessness than arresting people for loitering, panhandling, soliciting, camping, and sleeping in public spaces⁶. Similarly, wrap-around services are more appropriate and effective than police presence in schools or responding to behavioral challenges with arrests. And the billions of dollars spent on immigration enforcement would be better utilized for immigration judges, lawyers, legal orientation programs and integration services.

Rather than a reliance on incarceration, a more holistic justice system should focus on healing and transformation for victims and offenders alike. All for-profit prisons, jails, detention facilities, probation, parole, food, phone, and other criminal justice related services should be immediately banned, as the corporations that benefit from these lucrative contracts value their profits more than justice or human life and lobby for more activities to be criminalized with imprisonment. Tax dollars are immorally wasted on prisons and detention facilities, which rely on refuted notions of retribution rather than rehabilitation. The ways in which jails, detention centers, youth facilities and prisons currently operate must end. This includes, among other unjust practices, ending pre-trial detention, banning solitary confinement, ceasing the shackling of pregnant prisoners, increasing access to quality healthcare, ensuring that all communication to and from incarcerated people is free, and addressing the needs of youth and vulnerable populations.

Federal, state, and local government budgets should redirect billions of dollars that currently fund police departments to instead increase access to quality and affordable housing, education, employment programs, living-wage jobs, universal healthcare, mental health services, and restorative justice programs. Systemic racial inequities in income, education, and access to human needs, resulting from centuries of slavery, Jim Crow law enforcement and discrimination, must be righted. This includes investments in BIPOC-owned businesses, small business associations, credit unions, and banks; BIPOC farmers; and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. With nearly 700 people dying every day because of poverty and inequality in the United States, the need for both immediate and sustainable food solutions are critical. SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Food Assistance Program) currently supports the latter priority, but even now, it falls short of meeting basic nutritional requirements: the minimum allowance for an eligible person is \$16 per month for food. For BIPOC families facing numerous obstacles, this support is a potential lifeline in the fight against hunger and a pathway out of poverty, but \$16 simply isn't enough in 2020. As a starting point, Congress should immediately double the minimum SNAP benefit to at least \$30 per month, increase the SNAP maximum by 15 percent, and increase funding for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program and local food banks. Food security should be prioritized over police funding. Together, these reforms will reduce the need for a large police presence and achieve true community security, rather than abandoning people and dealing with the results as a law enforcement issue. In addition, as a result of COVID-19, hunger is certain to increase in many countries throughout the world, impacting the poorest and most vulnerable communities. The United States should step up and provide life-saving assistance to our global neighbors in need.⁷

Demilitarize & Decriminalize

Military equipment and weapons of war have no place in our communities. Policy makers should ban the procurement and use of military equipment by law enforcement entities, including immigration enforcement. The use of force should be banned, including during protests. Resisting arrest, not complying with an order, or perceived disrespect are not excuses for police violence. Independent, civilian-led investigations and prosecutions should hold police accountable for all injury and death. Police should be trained in de-escalation tactics, but more importantly, mental health professionals and service-oriented teams should be utilized, rather than police, to respond to human needs. Police departments should be required to pay their own legal costs and

⁶ "A growing body of research comparing the cost of homelessness to the cost of providing housing to homeless people consistently shows that housing, rather than jailing, homeless people is the much more successful and cost-effective option." The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities, pg 30. https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/No_Safe_Place.pdf

⁷"COVID-19 Brief: Impact on Food Security," U.S. Global Leadership Coalition <https://www.usgclc.org/coronavirus/global-hunger/>

settlements, rather than localities' general funds. Law enforcement should not be present, or a fixture at any education institution including K-12 schools, colleges and universities.

Laws that target and are disproportionately enforced on BIPOC should be ended or reformed⁸. The failed “war on drugs” policies were designed to justify criminalization and incarceration of BIPOC communities steeped in coded racialized language to create fear and pander to political agendas. The result of these policies are still felt today with over 2.3 million people incarcerated, more than any other country in the world. Racial profiling, “stop and frisk” policies and the use of quotas for arrests should be banned, and activities that do not threaten public safety should be decriminalized, including loitering, spitting, jaywalking, bicycling on the sidewalk, disorderly conduct, drug possession, panhandling, soliciting, camping and sleeping in public, and immigration violations. Such offenses account for more than 80% of total court dockets⁹. Street economies should also be decriminalized, since public funds and police should not be used to protect corporate profits over the wellbeing of people and communities. Decriminalization must also be retroactive, including the immediate release and record expungement of all such offenses and investments in restorative services, mental health programs, and job training and placement¹⁰. Eligibility for housing, education, licenses, voting, loans, employment, and other services should never be contingent on prior interactions with the police or the justice system.

Equal Access to Justice

BIPOC are consistently arrested, prosecuted, sentenced, deported, and killed at disproportionate rates, demonstrating a systemic problem. The death penalty and capital punishment should be immediately abolished, as it has been proven to be a racially biased and faulty process, and also because it is inhumane, wrong, and violates human rights¹¹. Policy makers should end money bail, fines, fees, court surcharges and defendant-funded court proceedings, all which penalize people for lack of monetary resources and wreak havoc on individuals and families already struggling to make ends meet, particularly BIPOC people who are more likely to be levied with these requirements during encounters with the justice system. In order to ensure that police departments are accountable to the communities they serve, every law enforcement entity should be guided and evaluated by a civilian-controlled community review board. These review boards should control police department budgets and policies, determine training requirements and disciplinary action, ensure complaints processes are accessible and transparent, and hold the authority to hire and fire officers and subpoena relevant agency information and evidence. Everyone's right to record police should be respected and upheld.

The rights of all people to live and have their voice heard must be a priority at all levels. The United States should institute universal, automatic voter registration, make elections days federal holidays, ban all disenfranchisement laws including for incarcerated people, and adequately fund election protection efforts to uphold every person's right to vote. All courts should immediately end the exclusion of jurors based on race. The fact that BIPOC people are often excluded from sitting on juries due to their race has undermined the ability of the justice system to be equitable, unbiased, and have defendants judged by their peers. Labor protections should equally apply to all workers, including those whose rights are regularly abused with impunity such as domestic workers, farm workers, tipped workers, and incarcerated individuals. The surveillance of BIPOC communities should immediately end, as these communities are disproportionately harmed by the government's expansion of new law enforcement technologies and databases. All immigration raids and the use of immigration detention should also end, and access to legal representation should be made available in immigration court.

Climate and Environmental Justice

White capitalism holds a legacy of unchecked power that dictates how land around the world is used, distributed and dismantled. As a direct result of this, BIPOC communities have systematically borne the brunt of the global ecological crisis, environmental degradation, climate change, and unequal energy access. They have been the least consulted and able to influence the policy-making process, which is particularly egregious given

⁸ “An Unjust Burden: The Disparate Treatment of Black Americans in the Criminal Justice System,” Vera Institute of Justice <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/for-the-record-unjust-burden-racial-disparities.pdf>

⁹ “America's Massive Misdemeanor System Deepens Inequality,” Equal Justice Initiative <https://eji.org/news/americas-massive-misdemeanor-system-deepens-inequality/#:~:text=Natapoff%20estimates%20that%20misdemeanors%20comprise,judge%20face%20crushing%20case%20loads.>

¹⁰ Movement for Black Lives Policy Platform <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/invest-divest/>

¹¹ “Death Penalty,” Equal Justice Initiative <https://eji.org/issues/death-penalty/>

Indigenous people's role in taking care of 80% of earth's biodiversity¹². The United States remains an outsized consumer of energy and emitter of the greenhouse gas emissions which drive climate change. On top of ongoing ecological and climate crises, COVID-19 has rolled back hard-won development gains and puts millions more at risk of abject poverty¹³. The vast majority of these are BIPOC who have little or negligible power in local, national or international negotiations, and little access to the capital needed to adjust to new realities. At the same time, the United States is increasingly retreating from critical multilateral spaces where the solutions to these interlocking challenges are being sought, with disastrous consequences for the global, collective effort.

In the United States, systemic racism has long delivered policies which cause BIPOC to endure various forms of environmental racism, as manifested by multiple problems including higher rates of water and air pollution, enforced substandard housing, exposure to toxic effluent, less health care coverage, insufficient access to state and federal support, and higher mortality and comorbidity rates. Infant mortality and asthma rates in BIPOC communities are well above the national average and correlated with higher-than-average levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

Opportunities for reform exist, despite this grim calculus. A majority of Americans say the federal government is doing too little on climate change¹⁴. This, and M4BL provides an opportunity to better promote racial equality concerns in climate and environmental advocacy through the frame of Climate Justice. The United States can and must stop drilling for oil and gas on Indigenous lands; decarbonize the economy; reinstate environmental protections to ensure that BIPOC communities can reduce pollutants and toxins, access clean water, air and food; and ensure access to complaints and redress mechanisms to voice their needs. Finance solutions offered at state and federal levels must include outreach to and investments in BIPOC communities, including resourcing BIPOC-owned businesses, technical assistance, increasing BIPOC communities' purchasing power for green technology, and prioritizing BIPOC in the development of green jobs¹⁵.

The United States must also rejoin the Paris Agreement and increase its targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, commensurate with its historic responsibility for the climate crisis and capacity to address it¹⁶. By resuming its global leadership role in climate negotiations, the United States can mitigate challenges which now threaten to increase poverty among BIPOC communities. By promoting gender equitable initiatives such as the Gender Action Plan¹⁷, it can help lift women's political visibility and environmental leadership, thereby addressing gender and racial prejudices¹⁸ that exist in the climate space.

Gender Equality¹⁹

Racism and sexism around the world and in the United States have shaped a reality in which BIPOC femmes and women are disproportionately more likely to live in poverty, be homeless, face abuse, and take on caretaking responsibilities of children and elderly relatives that prevent them from breaking a cycle of poverty²⁰. Anti-discrimination civil rights protections must ensure that all people have full access to education, employment, healthcare, and housing regardless of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. In the United States, Black women make just 63 cents to the dollar made by their white male counterparts²¹. Race and gender wage gaps must be ended and equitable pay enforced. Policy makers should ensure bodily autonomy, access to reproductive services, paid parental leave, and affordable, quality child and elder care for all people. Laws that criminalize survivors of violence, such as "mandatory arrest" and "failure to protect" should be drastically reformed, and sex work should be decriminalized. These reforms and decriminalization should be retroactive, including the immediate release and record expungement of all such offenses and investments in restorative services, mental health programs, and job training and placement for those wrongfully arrested, fined, and/or imprisoned for such activities.

¹² "The World's Best Forest Guardians: Indigenous Peoples," Rainforest Alliance

<https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/articles/indigenous-peoples-the-best-forest-guardians>

¹³ "Looking ahead: the long-term cost of COVID-19," Church World Service <https://cwsqglobal.org/looking-ahead-the-long-term-cost-of-covid-19/>

¹⁴ "Americans increasingly see climate change as a crisis, poll shows," The Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/americans-increasingly-see-climate-change-as-a-crisis-poll-shows/2019/09/12/74234db0-cd2a-11e9-87fa-8501a456c003_story.html

¹⁵ "Fastest Growing Occupations," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics <https://www.bls.gov/oooh/fastest-growing.htm>

¹⁶ "Can Climate Change Fuelled Loss and Damage Ever Be Repaired?" Civil Society Equity Review <http://civilsocietyreview.org/report2019/>

¹⁷ "The Gender Action Plan," United Nations <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/workstreams/the-gender-action-plan>

¹⁸ "Like I wasn't there': climate activist Vanessa Nakate on being erased from a movement," The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/29/vanessa-nakate-interview-climate-activism-cropped-photo-davos>

¹⁹ Policy on Gender Equality, Church World Service <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ABj-CHThPPtDnHtxyX-hPkWvCVnGvV34/view?usp=sharing>

²⁰ "Racism and Sexism Combine to Shortchange Working Black Women," Center for American Progress

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/news/2019/08/22/473775/racism-sexism-combine-shortchange-working-black-women/>

²¹ "Equal Pay for Black Women" National Women's Law Center <https://nwl.org/resources/equal-pay-for-black-women/>

Men, women, boys and girls - including gender fluid BIPOC - face disproportionate levels of violence, discrimination and prejudice, including within the judicial system. This manifests in multiple, gendered patterns: African American men and boys are disproportionately criminalized, racially profiled²², and subjected to violent tactics by the police, including extra judicial murder²³. Indigenous communities also experience disproportionately high levels of violence and incarceration. More than 83 percent of Indigenous women have experienced violence in their lifetimes²⁴; their murder rate is ten times the national average. Indigenous men are four times more likely to be incarcerated than white. These patterns of gendered threats, vulnerabilities and risks are consistent across the United States and around the world and must be changed.

Recommended resources

- Policy platforms: [Movement for Black Lives](#), [Campaign Zero](#), [8 to Abolition](#)
- Faith Community Support for Black Lives Matter Protests bit.ly/BLMsanctuary
- Thoughtful articles and other resources: [The Story Has Gotten Away from Us: Six months of life and death in America](#), [America, This is Your Chance](#), [An Open Letter to My Fellow White Christians](#), [Breathe, Pray, Meditate: Born From Resistance](#), [Black Churches Now Leading In Crises](#)
- Member Communion statements and other resources for congregations:
 - [Alliance of Baptists: Joint Statement on Racism in the U.S.](#)
 - [American Baptist Churches USA: Acts of Racial Injustice – A Letter from American Baptist Churches Interim General Secretary](#)
 - [Christian Methodist Episcopal Church: Statement of the College of Bishops: Protests Over Murder of George Floyd](#)
 - [Church of the Brethren: The killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis is condemned in statements by two ecumenical organizations of which the Church of the Brethren is a founding member](#)
 - [Community of Christ: Council of Twelve USA Team Statement on Racial Injustice](#)
 - [The Episcopal Church: Responding to Racist Violence](#)
 - [LEARN, PRAY, ACT: Resources for Addressing Racist Violence and Police Brutality](#)
 - [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: This is the Day](#)
 - [Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: Statement of Metropolitan Methodios of Boston on the Death of George Floyd](#)
 - [Moravian Church in America: "I have called you by name..." a message from the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Miller](#)
 - [Orthodox Church in America: Holy Synod Issues Statement on Recent Tragic Events](#)
 - [Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends: Black Lives Matter: Quaker Schools Share Powerful Messages and Resources](#)
 - [Presbyterian Church \(USA\): PMA President and Executive Director Diane Moffett issues statement on recent protests, shooting & Racial Justice Resources](#)
 - [Reformed Church in America: Responding To Racism And Listening To The African American And Black Community](#)
 - [Serbian Orthodox Church in the U.S.A. and Canada: Assembly of Bishops' Executive Committee calls all to Prayer for Justice and Peace during Nationwide Civil Unrest](#)
 - [Ukrainian Orthodox Church in America: Statement of the Council of Bishops Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA: IS OUR NATION AT THE THRESHOLD OF CHANGE?](#)
 - [United Church of Christ: Racism a deadly virus that white people must help eradicate, UCC panel says](#)
 - [The United Methodist Church: Council of Bishops statement on the Scourge of Racism](#)

²² "Racial Profiling: Definition," American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org/other/racial-profiling-definition>

²³ "What we've learned about police shootings 5 years after Ferguson," The Washington Post https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/08/09/what-weve-learned-about-police-shootings-years-after-ferguson/?arc404=true&itid=lk_inline_manual_19

²⁴ "Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women," National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center <http://nativephilanthropy.issuelab.org/resources/33184/33184.pdf>