

# July 2020 — Time for some groundbreaking

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This is a groundbreaking year. As the COVID-19 pandemic has upended all our lives, we have learned how to connect digitally, creatively finding new ways to worship together and to organize meetings online. We have surprised ourselves as we have discovered the new opportunities this opens up for us, bringing people from across the world into worship and meetings as never before. Even our 224th General Assembly went digital for the first time in our denomination's history, and while it meant that a number of concessions had to be made to the business we could conduct, we still came together with participants, including global partners and mission co-workers from across the world.

We should never doubt what we can still learn, and what new things we can do.

At the same time, we are also grappling with another pandemic — racism — and its manifestation in police brutality and impunity. Graphically we have seen it here in the cold-blooded murder of George Floyd, but unfortunately this is not just a U.S. problem. It's global, which is why people worldwide are speaking out and our partners have sent us messages making the connection between their experience and ours.

For those of us who are white, this pandemic of institutionalized racism does not have the same impact. It may trouble us, but it does not upend our lives and so too often we let it pass, learn nothing new and have little cause to act differently. This has to change. Racism is a disease spread by white people and we need to act on it. White privilege and white supremacy are not to be taken for granted. They are part of a disordered system that we have inherited. Our silence and inaction perpetuate it. Racism is poisoning relationships here and across the world. One of my Damascus road moments was when I realized that, globally, my people, white people, are a minority. Yet the world is ordered around our systems and our white majority nations (in North America, Europe and Australasia) are the beneficiaries of all this, as, for the most part, are white people.

As we have developed new and transformed ways of working, learning new skills day by day to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, so must we do the same with racism. How is it impacting our relationships locally and globally? Historically, Christian mission has been identified with colonialism and the exporting of white supremacy. While we have adopted statements that call us to do mission in partnership, we still need to examine our relationships with our global partners. Are there ways we still practice and reinforce old models of mission, acting as if we know better, taking control and offering solutions, rather than listening to, learning from and deeply understanding others within their context? Standing in solidarity also means bearing the pain and holding the tension, and not rushing to the answers. These solutions we must find together, so that we are all transformed by the experience.

Few of us embrace change easily, much less radical change. Only when we find ourselves in uncomfortable places with few alternative options do we stop and genuinely appraise things afresh. COVID-19 has caused us to rethink many things and to change our lives accordingly. It is time to do the same with racism and reimagine what being church and participating in God's mission might look like as the people of God overcoming systemic racism in our societies, nation and world. There is no other way to love our neighbors as ourselves than to be in full communion with them, suffering and rejoicing with each other, realizing together Jesus' promise of abundant life for all.