



GOD'S CALL
TO ACTION

against Racism and Poverty

in 2024

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and God is calling us to respond.

God's Call to Action Against Racism and Poverty in 2024

As leaders from diverse segments of U.S. Christianity, we are called by the Spirit to work together with new urgency against racism and poverty in America. Racism and poverty have increased over the last couple of years, and God is calling us to respond. These are matters of simple morality, important to people of all faiths and no faith. They are also grounded in our Scriptures and our experience of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Racism is getting worse

Our nation has a history and legacy of racism and mistreatment against African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos. People of color continue to suffer problems related to race—high rates of death during childbirth, for example, and fear of gun violence and hate crimes as they go about their daily lives. Issues related to racism are now being fiercely debated across the country, and many people of color are fearful that racism is getting worse: ¹

- ▶ Some prominent leaders have made statements that escalate this fear.
- ▶ The Supreme Court ended Affirmative Action in higher education in 2023, and many businesses are reducing their efforts to promote racial equity in the workplace.² An array of cases related to both affirmative action and elections are on their way to the Supreme Court.
- ▶ Fourteen states passed legislation to restrict voting in 2023, and another six states passed legislation that will facilitate partisan interference in elections.³

- ▶ There has been some progress on criminal justice reform at the federal level,⁴ and at least 10 states have taken steps to address mass incarceration.⁵ But despite widespread protest, police reforms have been modest.⁶
- ▶ Communities of color continue to suffer exceptionally high rates of gun violence.⁷ Hate crimes increased in 2022, with two-thirds of them targeting racial and ethnic groups.⁸

Poverty has increased

Racial and ethnic minorities suffer a disproportionate share of the nation's poverty because of past and present discrimination, and poverty among all racial and ethnic groups (as measured by the Census Bureau's best measure) has surged since the end of 2021. The COVID-19 relief and recovery bills reduced poverty and hunger during the pandemic, but Congress couldn't muster the votes to maintain programs that were working. As a result, poverty has returned to the level of 2019 despite a strong job market. The current level of poverty is a political choice, and many members of Congress continue pushing for deep cuts in poverty-important programs.

Research recently published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* shows that sustained poverty is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. Heart disease, cancer, and smoking are the only risk factors associated with more deaths than poverty. Sustained poverty kills about 300,000 people each year. Even short-term poverty significantly raises the risk of a person's death.⁹

A fresh, energetic, multiracial movement to overcome both poverty and racism is our prayer.

To our churches

The Christian gospel moves us to love our neighbors, without exception. Loving our neighbors means being concerned about the well-being of every neighbor, including neighbors facing the injustices of racism and poverty. Racism and the neglect of poverty are sins against God. Racism is in conflict with the biblical teaching that we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1). Jesus said that how we treat the “least of these” is how we treat Christ himself (Matthew 25).

Local churches are on the front line of assistance in communities across the country. Some churches have also long been active in opposing racism. Yet there is an urgent need for much more to be done along these lines. We are releasing with this statement a companion document from the Circle of Protection, *Anti-Racism Educational Resources for Local Churches*.

The churches and Christians across the country also need to do more to influence public policy. We are called to be active in this year’s elections with racism and poverty in mind.

To the President and Members of Congress

We pray for all those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2), Conservative and liberal people may disagree on how to live up to our nation’s ideals, but our loving God calls all of us to work together for liberty and justice for everyone.

Our nation should be doing more, not less, to reduce poverty. Thus, we strongly support an expansion of the Child Tax Credit for low-income families.

When anti-poverty programs are cut, the most severely affected are African American, Latino, and Native American communities and people in the poorest countries in the world.

We look forward to a time when Congress can take bipartisan action on voting rights, gun violence, and discrimination against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. Even now, we look to political leaders from both parties to speak out on these issues.

We appeal to all people, especially Christians, to work for justice and opportunity for all. A fresh, energetic, multiracial movement to overcome both poverty and racism is our prayer. So help us God.

1. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/06/16/black-americans-racism-poll/>
2. <https://www.inc.com/brit-morse/top-dei-trends-2023-what-they-mean-year-ahead.html>
3. <https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/ensure-every-american-can-vote/voting-reform/state-voting-laws>
4. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/criminal-justice-reform>
5. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/top-trends-in-criminal-legal-reform-2023/>
6. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2023/06/03/george-floyd-police-reform>
7. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7242a4.htm>
8. <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics>
9. David Brady, Ulrich Kohler, and Hui Zheng, “Novel Estimates of Mortality Associated with Poverty in the US,” JAMA Network: JAMA Internal Medicine, April 17, 2023. https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2804032?guestAccessKey=5e3c70e5-f175-43ef-8e31-b04942227ccd&utm_source=For_The_Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_content=tf&utm_term=041723

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