

Recommendation:

The Presbytery of San Francisco overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to declare the use of that appealing to racism and xenophobia by politicians to energize their base to be

1. Contrary to the Word of God,
2. Condemned by the confessions of the Church, and
3. A violation of the proper role of the civil authority and therefore a challenge to the Presbyterian Church's mission and polity.

The Presbytery of San Francisco/San José/Redwoods overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) further to commit the Presbyterian Church (USA) to stand against the use of appealing to racism and xenophobia for political gain by

1. Calling upon Presbyterians to vote for candidates for every office and in every jurisdiction—including and especially candidates for the office of President of the United States—who do not use disavow appealing to xenophobia and racism to stir up political support;
2. Directing the Presbyterian Publishing house--through its regularly published periodicals--to name and celebrate those in the Church who are taking a stand against politicized racism and xenophobia in the United States;
3. Directing the Presbyterian Publishing house--through its regularly published periodicals--to recognize and celebrate the many ways that the PCUSA as a denomination, and members in particular, have broken down barriers and divisions among all those whom God has declared God's loving kindness to all people historically divided due to racial and cultural prejudice and religious exclusivism;
4. Encouraging the Stated Clerk to continue in the work of speaking out publicly to denounce the use of racism and xenophobia to stir up political support; and
5. Instructing Encouraging congregations to include anti-racism training in Christian education programs for Presbyterians of all ages.

Rationale:

When future generations remember, in years to come, historians write books about the era through which we are now living, they almost certainly will comment on the ways human society became increasingly divided in the second decade of the twenty-first century. In democracies, a certain amount of division can be healthy and even necessary, but we are living in times when healthy divisions around issues of politics and public policy have given way to societies split by wedges of racism and xenophobia. In several countries, such as Developments in the following countries are examples:

1. In the United States, where the President Donald Trump (among other things), has praised white nationalists as “good people”, has demonized immigrants and Muslims, has used derogatory and scatological language to speak about countries in Latin America and Africa, has suggested four sitting congresswomen of color “go back” to where they came from, and has cheered an attempted robbery at the home of an African American congressman, after calling his predominantly African American district “rat-infested”;

2. In the United Kingdom, where pro-Brexit politicians used misleading information to stoke anti-immigrant hysteria as a way of building support for Brexit;
3. In Hungary, where President Victor Orbán has used anti-immigrant rhetoric to create a society that is hostile to refugees;
4. In Russia, where Vladimir Putin has leveraged the use of racist and xenophobic disinformation on social media for political advantage;
5. In the Philippines, where Rodrigo Duterte, has used Islamophobia to strengthen political support for his imposition of martial law on the island of Mindinao;
6. In Brazil, where Jair Bolsonaro, rode to power on a wave of anti-indigenous and anti-black sentiment.

This use of Appealing to racism and xenophobia for political gain runs contrary to the spirit and letter of scripture, which teaches us, among other things,

1. that *all* humanity is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27),
2. that immigrants are to be treated with dignity and afforded legal rights (Leviticus 19:33-34),
3. that our neighbor just might be someone who worships differently than we do (Luke 10:25-37),
4. that the Gospel is for *all* nations (Matthew 28:18-20),
5. that in Christ “there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female ” (Galatians 3:28), and that,
6. in the fullness of time, God will draw all people from every place into the City of God where everyone will live as an immigrant (Isaiah 2:1-4, Revelation. 21).

The use of racism and xenophobia to energize a political base is condemned in the confessions of the Church, which tell us:

1. that civil magistrates must “preserve peace and public tranquility” (Second Helvetic Confession, 5.254), and
2. “ought especially to maintain piety, justice and peace according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth” (Westminster Confession of Faith 6.128).
3. The Confession of 1967 reminds us that “God has created the people of the world to be one universal family. In [God’s] reconciling love, [God] overcomes the barriers between brothers [and sisters] and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic differences, real or imaginary” (The Confession of 1977, 9.44).
4. That our unity in Christ “must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is a sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted” (Confession of Belhar, 10.3).
5. To “reject the false doctrine, as though the church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or the changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.” (The Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8.18).

It would be a dereliction of our duty if the Presbyterian Church (USA) were to remain silent when politicians use appeal to racism and xenophobia to energize their political bases, for such appeals to human sinfulness are contrary to the precepts of our polity.

1. The *Book of Order* reminds us that among the chief ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind, the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God, the maintenance of divine worship, the preservation of the truth, the promotion of social righteousness and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world (Book of Order F-1.0301). It is worth noting that no subgroup of humanity is excluded in the Great Ends of the Church.
2. The *Book of Order* admonishes us further when it says, “The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism “regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person” (F-1.0403).

In recent actions the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church has called our denomination to the work of racial justice. For example,

1. The 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) issued a call for the denomination to apologize to the descendants of native people who were taken to boarding schools.
2. The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed agencies of the PC(USA) to bolster the church’s commitment to antiracism training and “an understanding of systemic racism, including white privilege, power, and prejudice in relation to race.”
3. The 214th General Assembly (1999) approved a comprehensive policy document, “Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community” which among other things, affirmed that “diversity as God-given assets of the human family”, committed the denomination to “spiritually confronting the idolatry and ideology of White supremacy and White privilege,” and confessed the PC(USA)’s complicity in the creation and maintenance of racist structures and systems in all parts of our nation’s life, including the church itself.

We understand and bear witness to the fact that the use of appealing to racism and xenophobia for political gain has an adverse impact on communities where it occurs politicians employ racism and xenophobia. For example,

1. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, in the Donald Trump Era membership in white supremacist hate groups has risen by 30 percent and hate crimes are up seventeen percent (<https://www.npr.org/2019/02/20/696217158/u-s-hate-groups-rose-sharply-in-recent-years-watchdog-group-reports>).
2. According to the ACLU, under the Trump Administration’s immigration policies, thousands of children have been separated from their parents at the US/Mexico border (<https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights/immigrants-rights-and-detention/family-separation>), at least seven of whom have died in ICE detention (<https://www.aclu.org/blog/immigrants-rights/immigrants-rights-and-detention/immigrant-kids-keep-dying-cbp-detention>).

3. According to the ACLU the Trump Administration's ban on travelers from certain Muslim-majority countries has had a devastating affect on families whose members have been prevented by the ban from seeing each other (<https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights/living-muslim-ban>).

In fidelity to God's Word, under the guidance of the Confessions, in keeping with the church's mission in the world as directed by Christ's calling as expressed in our polity, consistent with actions of recent General Assemblies, and in prophetic response to the ways in which our sisters and brothers are harmed by the use of racism and xenophobia for political gain, we urge the passage of this overture.