



## **Working Toward Inclusion and Racial Justice: A History**

Inclusion & Racial Justice Historic Review team  
Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church  
March 11, 2022

### **Introduction**

In a time when our nation is going through a racial reckoning, so, too, is our church. In 2020, the Session formed an Inclusion and Racial Justice Review Committee to explore and understand CCPC's role in systemic racism over time and develop a plan to create a more inclusive and just community.

One part of that exploration has been a study of the history of the church and surrounding community with a racial lens. The following paper is based on a review of historical documents and interviews with longtime church members.

### **Our Faith & Community History on Issues of Diversity, Inclusion and Racial Justice**

To understand the inclusion and racial justice history of Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church, it is important to know the history of our denomination, the Presbyterian Church USA. Our denomination is the result of several mergers over time. Each of those denominations has its individual history regarding inclusion and racial justice (or, in some cases, the lack of racial justice).

At times, some Presbyterian churches have embraced White supremacy; at others, and perhaps more often, they have acquiesced in the cultural mores of segregation and inequality. In more recent years, the denomination has repeatedly addressed issues of racial and ethnic justice and inclusion. To those ends, our denomination's

General Assembly created in 2016 a Special Committee on Racism, Truth, and Reconciliation. Its report is to be presented to the 2022 General Assembly in July.

CCPC was founded in 1908 in a community designed to be all white and exclusive. Its Session appears to have remained silent when Black communities were removed from Chevy Chase, DC and Tenleytown. Thus, CCPC, too, has acquiesced at times in contemporary racial mores. More recently, however, through our mission activities and otherwise, we have strived to work for a more just society. We are now exploring additional ways our congregation can further racial and ethnic justice.

## Our Denomination

After independence, the Presbyterian Church was organized and named the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). It held its first General Assembly in 1789. Soon thereafter, in 1793, the General Assembly adopted an overture from the New York synod calling for the abolition, albeit gradual, of slavery. *“This became the first time in American history that a theological conviction motivated ecclesiastical action to change the social system.”*<sup>1</sup> Follow-up, however, was mixed. The General Assembly did later denounce trafficking in enslaved people and their sale without consent, but owning them was never declared sinful as such, and Presbyterians, including pastors, owned thousands of enslaved people. Indeed, a pastor in Kentucky was removed for being too anti-slavery, and after 1818, the PCUSA did not address slavery at all until the Civil War. A separate denomination, the United Presbyterian Church in North America (UPCNA), formed in 1858, was more affirmatively anti-slavery.

In 1800s and 1900s, the Presbyterian Church experienced numerous splits and unifications. The most significant was during the Civil War when the churches in the Confederate States formed their own denomination which defended slavery and white supremacy and denounced the North’s “invasion.” After the war, that denomination continued as the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). Before the War, enslaved folks had worshiped with Whites, but typically from the rear or balcony. PCUS churches continued to try to hold Blacks in subservience after the war.

Meanwhile, the northern Presbyterian churches sent missionaries to work with Blacks in the South. The PCUSA formed a Board of Freedmen, which continued as a separate mission until 1923, when it was folded in with other missions. “Among

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<sup>1</sup>Archie Crouch, *Racial-Ethnic Ministry Policies--An Historical Overview*, Journal of Presbyterian History, 57:3, p. 274 (Fall 1979) (italics in original). This article is the basis for much of the discussion of the history of the denomination.

all the denominations, the [PCUSA and UPCNA] were in the forefront in establishing schools, institutes, and seminaries to prepare newly freed persons for church membership and citizenship in the community.”<sup>2</sup> As a result, Blacks chose the northern Presbyterian denominations over the PCUS, although other denominations, particularly the Baptists and Methodists, were more successful in attracting Black members.

The PCUSA also did mission work with other groups, including Native Americans and Asian immigrants, but it apparently did not oppose the removal of Native Americans to reservations or discriminations against Asians, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred immigration from China. In all these cases, there was apparently much patronizing by Whites. For Blacks, Asians, Indians, and Mexicans, the general principle was “separate but equal,” which “was a rhetorical subterfuge for ‘unequal and separate.’”<sup>3</sup> “In theory, [White Presbyterians] had nearly all rejected the idea of caste, but in practice they accommodated themselves to the racial patterns of the day.”<sup>4</sup>

It was only in 1945 that the PCUSA declared segregation “unchristian,” and in 1953, it called for full rights for Native Americans. In 1955, it called for the end of all-Black governing bodies, which continued to exist in the denomination until 1967<sup>5</sup>. In the meantime, the PCUSA and UPCNA had merged in 1958 to form the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. In 1964, its General Assembly characterized racism as “blasphemy.”

The southern PCUS endorsed desegregation in 1954 and began to move toward reconciliation with the northern denomination. As churches in the PCUS began to integrate, some PCUS churches left the denomination to form the separate Presbyterian Church in America, which also had more conservative theological views on such issues as ordination of women. Those churches that remained in the PCUS joined as the southern “stream” when the PCUS merged with the United Presbyterian Church in 1983 to form our current denomination: the Presbyterian Church (USA).

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<sup>2</sup> *All-Black Governing Bodies: The History and Contributions of All-Black Governing Bodies* p.41 (*A Report of the Presbyterian Church, Approved by the 205<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 1966.*

<sup>3</sup> Crouch, p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> The PCUSA had agreed to segregated presbyteries as a condition of merger in 1905 with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church based in Maryland.

Race and ethnicity are not the only issues involving exclusion. We discuss issues pertaining to inclusion of women and LGBTQ+ people in later sections.

## **Our Community and Our Church**

Chevy Chase, both in Maryland and the District, was developed primarily by the Chevy Chase Land Company, founded by U.S. Senator Francis Newlands of Nevada, a notorious racist. He sponsored a resolution at the 1908 Democratic Convention to repeal the constitutional amendment giving Black males the right to vote, and also urged the deportation of all Blacks. Chevy Chase was intended to be all White and exclusive. The property deeds contained covenants setting minimum values for houses, and many contained racially restrictive covenants, barring the sale of property to Blacks and other disfavored groups. These covenants meant that even if a seller was willing to sell a house to a Black buyer, neighbors could sue to block the sale. It was not until 1948 that the Supreme Court held that court enforcement of these covenants was unconstitutional. Racial discrimination by the sellers themselves, however, remained permissible until the enactment of the Fair Housing Act in 1968.

CCPC was founded in 1908 as a congregation in the PCUSA by a group of Presbyterians who wanted a closer church to their houses and who overcame the opposition from downtown churches that Chevy Chase was too far out. The principal organizer of this effort, Harry Martin, was a real estate developer (“Martin’s Addition to Chevy Chase”), who contributed \$1,000 of the \$3,000 purchase price for the church’s site. Martin inserted racially restrictive covenants in at least some of his sales. He was also a Democrat who supported Woodrow Wilson and worked in the Wilson administration during World War I.

Wilson, who was elected President in 1912 and reelected in 1916, was the son of a Presbyterian minister, who had been born in the South. He was also a segregationist. Under his administration, segregation became codified in federal work places and Black supervisors were demoted, which curtailed the economic advancement of Blacks in Washington. Until recently, this aspect of Wilson’s legacy has been overlooked or forgotten as historical memory focused on his Progressive agenda and his efforts to foster peace during and after World War I. Indeed, the stained-glass window installed in the 1950s that faces CCPC’s front entrance places Wilson as a peacemaker holding his Fourteen Points. (Perhaps coincidentally, the

adjoining panel features John Woolham, a Quaker who was one of the original abolitionists.)<sup>6</sup>

While the Chevy Chase Land Company intended that Chevy Chase be all White, there were still Black families living in Chevy Chase D.C. and Tenleytown. They were all forced out, beginning in the 1920s. First, there were two farms located in Chevy Chase D.C. between Northampton and Rittenhouse Streets. The southernmost was occupied by Black families who had tilled the land for 80 years. At the time, the D.C. schools were segregated, and the White school was overcrowded. (It was not until 1954 that the Supreme Court declared D.C. school segregation unconstitutional in a companion case to *Brown v. Board of Education*.) The Chevy Chase Citizens Association successfully urged that the farms be taken by eminent domain, and Lafayette Elementary School was built on the site, as was Lafayette Park. The Black families were scattered elsewhere in the city. This history was soon forgotten and only recently recalled. The park has just been renamed Lafayette-Pointer Park in honor of an ancestor of the Black families.

The other eviction occurred at Fort Reno, one of the forts that protected Washington during the Civil War. After the War, the Government sold lots, and mixed neighborhood of Blacks and Whites grew up. There were Black churches and a Black school. The 1902 McMillan Commission suggested that a vast park be established at Fort Reno. Relying on that proposal, neighbors and the Chevy Chase Land Company, supported by the Chevy Chase Citizens Association, urged in the 1920s that the neighborhood be cleared for parks and White schools. The Black families strenuously resisted, but ultimately, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission took the land piecemeal over the years. Deal Middle School was built in 1930 and Wilson High School in 1935.

Research has not to date revealed whether any CCPC members were leaders in the efforts to evict Black families. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that some CCPC members belonged to the Chevy Chase Citizens Association, which played a leading role in these efforts.

Given President Wilson's segregationist policies, the DC Council in December, 2021, approved the renaming of the neighborhood high school from Wilson to Jackson-Reed High School. Edna Jackson was the school's first black teacher and

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<sup>6</sup> The widow was designed and paid for by Wilbur LaRoe, Jr., a very active Presbyterian layperson and CCPC member. He was elected moderator of the denomination's General Assembly in 1917. He also served a number of governmental roles, including the chair of the D.C. Parole Board and on a governmental employee loyalty board. His selection of Wilson for the window may have been influenced by the fact that Wilson was his advisor at Princeton.

Vincent Reed its first black principal. Similarly, a long effort to have Newland's name removed from the fountain in the middle of Chevy Chase Circle took a step forward in January, 2022, when a bill was introduced in Congress to allow the removal. Congressional action is required because the Circle is federal land.

## **The Role of Women at CCPC**

The status of women at CCPC reflected the society at large when the church was founded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Men were the heads of households. They served in the leadership positions in the church. Women took on the support roles, but these were no less important.

The Centennial History of CCPC published in 2008, notes that in 1911, when the congregation dedicated its first house of worship--a small chapel—the Women's Guild had raised the money to buy the piano, pulpit furniture and carpet. Church women also formed a Women's Missionary Society. In 1958, a group of mothers worked with the clergy to create the Weekday Nursery School with Alicia Hardin as the director/teacher. She led the program for the next 25 years.

It was only in 1930 that the PCUSA authorized the ordination of lay women as elders, and it was not until 1957 that the first woman was ordained as a minister by the denomination.

It was not until 1961 that a woman, Hazel Elizabeth Johnson, was elected an elder at CCPC. Two decades passed before CCPC hired its first female clergy member, Associate Pastor Frances G. Wolfe, in 1980. The first, and still only Black clergy member was Dorothy McKinney Wright, interim associate pastor from 1990 to 1991. Molly Blythe Teichert, was ordained as CCPC's first female senior pastor in 2009.

In the early decades of the church, most CCPC women didn't work outside the home. Many joined Presbyterian Women and were divided into Circles that met during the day for fellowship and Bible study. The exception was the Business and Professional Women's Group that met on Saturdays. In the early 1980s, women with young children formed the Mothers Circle. As more women returned to the workforce, most of the circles gradually lost members and ceased to meet.

Today, CCPC women members play critical roles in the life of the church, serving as elders, deacons, Bible study leaders, teachers, fundraisers and leaders of several mission projects.

## **LGBTQ+ People at CCPC**

In recent years, two major changes in the Presbyterian Church's constitution (the Book of Order) have codified equal participation for LGBTQ+ members. On both issues—ordination and marriage—CCPC took an activist role in pushing for those changes.

### ***Ordination***

Policies prohibiting gay and lesbian ordination were first adopted by the denomination in the late 1970s. These applied to clergy, elders and deacons.

In 1996, the General Assembly voted on explicit language that said among the criteria for ordination was “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.” While the provision applied to all persons, the intent was to target LGBTQ+ people.

The issue caused much debate in the denomination over the next few years. It wasn't until May 2011, that there were enough votes in the General Assembly, followed by ratification of a majority of Presbyteries, to pass a new policy that removed the “fidelity in marriage” language. Some churches that opposed the change left the denomination.

In practice, candidates for ordination at CCPC were not quizzed about their sexual lives. Basically, it was “Don't ask, don't tell.” When the push came in 2011 to remove the prohibition, CCPC lobbied the National Capital Presbytery in favor of it.

In November 2009, while the ordination ban was still in place, CCPC called Molly Blythe Teichert to be its senior pastor. The Pastor Nominating Committee told her that one of the reasons she was called to CCPC was because she was in favor of the rights of LGBTQ+ people.

As part of the process of being transferred from one Presbytery to another, clergy must undergo an examination. At hers, Pastor Molly was questioned about whether she would ordain an LGBTQ+ person as an elder or deacon. When she answered yes, there was a debate about whether or not she should be accepted in the National Capital Presbytery. It was decided that she had a “scruple,” i.e., that she disagreed on a minor point of polity, and therefore could be allowed into the Presbytery.

### ***Same-Sex Marriage***

If the fight in the PC(USA) over ordination proved divisive, the fight over gay marriage proved even more so. Same sex marriage was legalized in the District of Columbia in March 2010. Maryland followed in January 2013. CCPC leaders felt it was only a matter of time before a same sex couple at CCPC wished to be married. Presbyterian ministers who performed such ceremonies could be penalized as could their church.

The CCPC congregation embarked on an 18-month process of discernment on the issue. In the end, a survey indicated that 74 percent of the congregation approved of allowing the pastors to preside at same sex marriages. The Session voted in 2013 to make it official.

Meanwhile, the issue was once again before the denomination's General Assembly. CCPC members lobbied other churches in the Presbytery to support the "marriage amendment" and eventually, a majority of the churches voted in favor. The National Capital Presbytery co-sponsored the amendment at the General Assembly meeting in 2014 to change the definition of marriage in the constitution. The amendment passed by a vote of 371 to 238. The amendment was then ratified by a majority of the presbyteries and took effect in March, 2015. It allowed clergy to perform such marriages if they chose, but did not require them to do so.

Later that year, on June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state bans on same sex marriage, thus legalizing it in all 50 states. And on June 20, 2015, Pastor Molly conducted CCPC's first same sex marriage, uniting Dan Bishop and Mark Summerfield.

The sanctioning of same sex marriage caused a number of churches to leave the PC(USA). Similarly, the decision of the CCPC Session and Pastor Molly's sermons in support of gay marriage, caused a number of members to leave CCPC. But most of the congregation supports and welcomes LGBTQ+ people, and the church website openly advertises this. Another landmark was reached in 2021 when the Rev. Keith Thompson, an engaged gay man, was hired as Acting Associate Pastor.

### **CCPC's Mission Actions to Promote Justice**



While CCPC may have been silent about segregation in its own neighborhood in the 1920s, it did make small contributions to the PCUSA Board of Freedmen which supported Black schools and colleges. Today, members still donate annually to the Christmas Joy offering which supports Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color.

CCPC appears to have limited its other mission and outreach activities in early years to making contributions to the denomination's various other missions, including some that might strike us odd ("Temperance"). Following World War II, the congregation began to conduct its own mission activities, both at home and abroad. The church supported the rebuilding of churches in Europe and supported a Korean orphanage. Locally, it supported a chaplaincy at D.C. General Hospital and knitted slippers for patients there. Local mission activity increased after the 1968 riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The Church sponsored bus tours of the city, described as "real eye openers," in the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary history of CCPC.

Along with continuing to support denominational missions financially, CCPC and individual members engaged in numerous mission activities in the following decades as volunteers and board members. Here is a sampling:

- Transition Assistance Program (formerly the Volunteer Assistance Corps) was founded by CCPC in 1980 and operates out of offices in the church. The volunteer staff helps homeless and working poor clients obtain birth certificates, IDs, and police clearances. African American men make up the majority of clients.
- In the 1980s, CCPC participated with three predominantly Black churches in the Allen Chapel Outreach Program on Alabama Ave, S.E. Founded and led by the late CCPC member Rose Jones, the program provided food, clothing, and financial assistance to low-income people. Members also served as tutors for children in predominantly Black community. There were also joint worship services among the churches.
- CCPC members, led by the late Louise White, started the Re-Entry Task Force, a city-wide watchdog group that addresses issues related to D.C. residents who are incarcerated or returning from prison. It grew out of CCPC's TAP program when volunteers recognized that city services for returning residents needed improvement. The task force was formed with

other churches, nonprofit organizations, government officials, and some returned residents.

- Since 1971, members have served as English tutors to recent immigrants in the long-standing English as a Second Language Program on Sundays after church.
- CCPC youth have participated in mission trips and various environmental actions.
- Members participate in the Free Minds Book Club, a writing workshop for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth, and the Prison Pen Pal program.
- In 1989 a CCPC member who had done graduate research in rural Kenya, connected CCPC with the Shikokho Women's Group. Since then, CCPC has supported the Village's health clinic, primary and secondary schools, and orphan feeding program. Many CCPC members have over the years visited and worked at Shikokho, and the support continues today.
- CCPC was a founding member in 1972 of Interfaith Works (formerly Community Ministries of Montgomery County). It provides residents in need with food, shelter, clothing, vocational services, financial literacy, and other types of support.
- Miriam's Kitchen (at Western Presbyterian Church) provides a largely homeless population with various services such as case management, food, medications, clothing, housing assistance and mail drop for benefit checks and other mail. Many CCPC members have served meals there.
- CCPC was an early congregation supporter and remains actively engaged with Friendship Place, which provides short-term shelter, permanent supportive housing and other services for people experiencing homelessness. CCPC is actively engaged on the FP Congregations Committee.
- For about 25 years, CCPC members have annually conducted the Gifts of Hope Market, which provides an opportunity for giving alternative Christmas gifts that support local and international missions.

- Over the last five decades, CCPC has sponsored refugees and asylum seekers settling in the U.S.<sup>7</sup>
  - In the 1970s, the Church sponsored two Vietnamese families of refugees.
  - More recently, starting in 2016, CCPC sponsored a Syrian family fleeing that country’s civil war. The family is now successfully settled in Maryland, and the parents are seeking U.S. citizenship. That same year, CCPC created the Refugee Sponsors Group, an email forum for dozens of area congregations to share information on sponsoring families.
  - CCPC is sponsoring a father and son from Guatemala seeking asylum, who were separated at the U.S.-Mexico border. They have resided with a CCPC family since 2019.
  - In early 2022, CCPC members began sponsoring a family of seven Afghan refugees, renting and furnishing housing for them and providing other support.
- Prior to COVID, we provided worship space for a Jewish congregation—Oneg Shabbat—and for the Church of the Redeemer, an Arabic congregation. CCPC also sponsored a Middle East Lecture series.

## **Choosing Church Officers**

The road to being an officer at CCPC runs through the Nominating Committee. This group of seven people recruits candidates for elders, deacons, auditors and their own committee. It must operate in accordance with the Presbyterian Book of Order, the corporate laws of the District of Columbia, and CCPC’s bylaws.

The Nominating Committee is made up of five people elected from the congregation at the annual meeting, plus one elder designated by the Session and one deacon designated by the Board of Deacons. Terms are for one year and no one can serve more than three years consecutively. The senior pastor is an ex officio member of the committee without a vote.

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<sup>7</sup> In 1939, CCPC member Wilbur LeRoe, Jr. testified before Congress on behalf of many religious insiders in support of allowing mostly Jewish refugee children to enter the U.S. Sadly, that effort failed.

In recent years, conscious efforts have been made to recruit racially diverse slates of candidates. Since nominated leaders must be church members, and CCPC's membership is not very diverse, this can be challenging. There has also been an effort to recruit younger people, but that too is challenging. Older members tend to have more time to devote to leadership roles than parents of young children for example. Agreeing to serve a three-year term—as required of elders and deacons—is daunting for some people no matter their stage of life.

The process is as follows: each fall, the Nominating Committee announces that nominations are open, and welcomes people to come forward. In reality, people don't tend to volunteer, so it's up to the committee members to contact people who they think would be good candidates. More people are asked than agree to serve. It is easier to recruit the required number of elders now that the size of the Session has been reduced to 12. Many more deacons are needed each year to reach the desired maximum of 30, and the committee often falls short of that target. In other words, opportunities abound for anyone who wants to be a leader at CCPC.

The annual meeting at which elections are held—usually in February or early March—provides one more opportunity to serve, since individuals can be nominated from the floor. In practice, this rarely happens.

Regardless of the challenges, the Nominating Committee in the past several years has put racial diversity as a goal in seeking candidates, and has made some headway in these efforts.

### **Race/Ethnicity at CCPC**

A few years ago, the General Assembly began requiring congregations to report the ethnicity of its membership. These figures are submitted by the Clerk of Session as part of the annual report to Presbytery. People searching for a church on the Presbyterian Church USA website can plug in their zip code in the “Find a Church” box, and see a range of data including the latest racial/ethnicity data of nearby churches. Here is CCPC's data as copied from that website:

## Year-at-a-Glance: Member Demographics at CCPC

November 29, 2021

<b>Membership</b>	<b>2020</b>
Membership as of 12-31-2020	496
Attendance	220
<b>Age</b>	
Under 25	49
26 - 40	54
41 - 55	111
56 - 70	124
71 and over	158
<b>Disabilities</b>	
Hearing	32
Mobility	9
Sight	30
Other	5
<b>Gender</b>	
Females	295
Males	201
<b>Racial Ethnic</b>	
Asian / Pacific Islander / South Asian	19
Black / African American / African	12
Hispanic / Latino	10
Middle Eastern / North African	12
Multiracial	0
Native American / Alaska / Native Indigenous	1
White	442

### Who Was Here Before?

The history of our church didn't start with the development of Chevy Chase. CCPC's origin story begins with the Native Americans who dwelled on the land before European settlers arrived. The story continues as enslaved Africans were brought to the region to work on the tobacco plantations, and continues through the Civil War, Reconstruction, and land development in the late 1800s to the early 1900s which

displaced African Americans in our area. To read more of this history, [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#).

## **Acknowledgements**

This narrative was developed by the CCPC Historic Review Team between November 2021 and February 2022. Team members are listed below. The project was part of the CCPC Inclusion & Racial Justice Review and its purpose was to help us understand and embrace our past – on the community, denominational and church levels – as a key step in our ongoing work to foster inclusion and racial justice in those spaces.

CCPC leadership, members and the Inclusion & Racial Justice Review Committee are indebted to these historians for their hard work and diligence in reviewing and abstracting countless documents and church records, then crafting and merging the narrative you see above.

Highlights of this narrative were presented to the CCPC congregation during Open Forum on March 13, 2022, as the first output of the IRJ Review. Findings and recommendations from the IRJ Review will be presented during Open Forum on April 3, 2022.

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