

## **Building Bridges for Our Future**

“What does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”  
(Micah 6:8)

“. . . for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light  
yet to break forth from His holy Word”  
(*Farewell Discourse of the Rev. John Robinson*)

### **Introduction**

To be the church is to be a people on the move. Through the power of the Spirit, God calls the church together, builds up the community, and then sets the community on the path of discipleship which inevitably leads out into the world where the living Christ is already present as the source of love, truth, and life who animates the whole inhabited earth. Like her Lord, the church-community ultimately does not exist for herself; rather, she exists to be a true and good neighbor, and a genuine witness in word and deed to the love of God revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The image of journeying together with God and one another is deeply rooted in our own Congregational history and identity. When the early Congregationalists in England and New England gathered together, they did so with the expectation that our God is a living God with a word to speak to the community in the here and now. As John Robinson, the pastor of the Leiden separatist community from which the early Pilgrims would come said, “for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth from His holy word.”<sup>1</sup> The word that the early Congregationalists expected to hear was one that was meant to guide, enliven, correct, and

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Gaius Glenn Atkins & Frederick L. Fagley, *History of American Congregationalism* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1942), 60.

move the community forward and out into the world to love and serve their neighbors in places with which they were as yet profoundly unfamiliar.<sup>2</sup>

To be a true and good neighbor and genuine witness to God's love requires many things, including the commitment to listen, learn, to seek the guidance of the Spirit of God, and to be willing to be creative and faithful in response to God's leading. And from time to time, it is good for a congregation to take stock of how effective it is in its service to God in the world in which it lives. The reason for this is that the social context in which congregations find themselves are constantly evolving, as are the spoken and unspoken needs and challenges of the time.

Colonial Church recently went through such a process, which was called ReForming. The central question of this process was: "What is God calling us to next?" The process included extensive reflection by church leadership, a detailed congregational survey and multiple listening sessions for interaction between the congregation and leadership, as well as preaching themes and other opportunities to discern together the next chapter into which God is calling our community.

The results of this process included the articulation of five distinct Core Values, of which are comprised: 1) Welcome, Beloved; 2) Risk Together the Messy Path of Faith; 3) Wrestle with the Tensions in God's Word and World; 4) Immerse in Sacred Spaces and Rhythms; and 5) Do Good, for Christ's Sake. The ordering of the values was deliberate, beginning with "Welcome, Beloved," and ending with "Do Good, for Christ's Sake." ReForming offered the opportunity for the community together to collectively discern its strengths and challenges, and to begin the process of reimagining how our congregation was going to show up in the world.

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<sup>2</sup> See Arthur A. Rouner, Jr., *The Congregational Way of Life* (Oak Creek, WI: Congregational Press, 1972).

## **How shall we show up in the world?**

With the energy and direction initiated by the ReForming process, and in keeping with the deepest impulses of our Congregational tradition, our congregation has continued the ongoing work of collective reimagining so that we can continue to be effective in our service to God in our neighborhoods and communities and beyond. As a part of this work, the congregation unanimously called Rev. Jeff Lindsay as our Senior Minister in February of 2020, energized by his vision to join with God who is doing a new thing in our midst through prayer, and missional re-alignment in this next season. In addition to a long history of loving Christ and this community, Jeff has brought with him a set of ministry priorities to invest in our future together with Christ, the community, lay leadership, and staff.

One key development in building this future is the creation of an alternative worship service. Notwithstanding the limitations we have encountered as our community and the larger world has grappled with the COVID-19 virus, the alternative worship service has launched and experienced significant success. The alternative format has provided a space for many people within our community and beyond, to connect with our congregation, to hear God speak in a medium that feels more familiar than a more traditional format, and to feel genuinely welcome, seen, and loved.

A second development has been reconceptualizing Youth and Children's ministry. This area in the life of the church was given a significant priority by our new Senior Minister and has seen a major investment through new hires and staffing changes. The overall goal is to create a seamless experience for emerging generations: children, youth, and emerging adults.

A third development which was especially sidelined by the outbreak of COVID-19, was to reimagine what it means for us to be a missional community and re-engage more deeply so

that we might “Do Good for Christ’s Sake.” In addition to tangible efforts like featuring ministries of the month, we are seeking to be intentional about ways that the campus of our community might become a missional hub for good in our neighborhood as we seek to love and serve the community around us, further helping us live into our value of “Welcome, Beloved.”

Every congregation is faced with the question of how they will show up or be a presence in the wider world. How are we perceived as we pursue the commission that Jesus has called us to? What are the roadblocks that keep us from being more effective as followers of Jesus and people who want to love our neighbors? Here too, our congregation’s work of discernment through the ReForming process highlights the need to embrace and courageously live into our first Core Value of “Welcome, Beloved.”

This has become all the more pressing in light of transformations happening in our society, especially in regard to racial injustice. The murder of George Floyd in late May by a member of the Minneapolis Police Department left our communities, the nation, and even the wider world in a state of shock, anger, and bewilderment. While the uprisings and unrest that have followed are in part a response to the events surrounding Mr. Floyd’s death, they are rooted in a much longer history, one with which our congregation and communities are only beginning to grapple. Nevertheless, a longing to be a people who are committed to Jesus’ vision of God’s shalom and to be a congregation that truly does mean all are welcome has led many to commit themselves to trying to understand the dynamics of racial injustice in our world and community, and to trying to find ways to rectify them.

The present cultural moment offers a significant opportunity to learn and consider how we want to show up in a world that for many people is turned upside down. Recognition of this

significant moment has also led to a felt need to revisit a conversation which has been going on in our congregation among laity and leadership for some time, regarding the name “Colonial.”

Before delving further into consideration of our name, it is important to pause so as to ground ourselves by naming how our faith in Jesus is the animating force behind our consideration of a name change as we seek to grow in Christ and serve our world through loving God and our neighbors as ourselves, bearing witness to the good news of Jesus.

### **What does the Lord Require of You?**

As we consider how to move out into the world and to inhabit our core value of “Welcome, Beloved” a useful text for thinking about our way forward may be found in Micah 6:8: “God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” This passage appears in a section where the prophet Micah is asking the question: “What does proper worship of God actually look like?” God’s answer comes in the succinct statement that we are called to seek justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. What might these three aspects have to say about our congregation’s Core Value of “Welcome, Beloved” in light of the question of a name change?

#### *1) Doing Justice*

It is interesting that doing justice is the first thing that the prophet mentions. It’s not offering more incense or better sacrifices or better unleavened bread. In fact, the prophet recites those options in the verses just preceding verse 8. What God wants is not *things*, but our very *lives*. God wants us to turn and, for starters, do justice.

Doing justice carries with it the idea of actively pursuing something, and that something is equity for all. In the broader biblical witness, justice often carries with it the sense of creating the conditions for a flourishing life. It refers to God's "burning compassion for the oppressed. . . . His being merciful, compassionate."<sup>3</sup> In the context of Micah, this understanding of justice is even more pronounced as the prophet recounts time and again the abuses that were occurring in Israel: "The powerful oppress the powerless (2:1-2, 8-9; 3:1-3, 9-10), laborers are exploited (3:10), courts are corrupt (3:11)."<sup>4</sup> This dismal picture offers the contrast against which the life of discipleship is worked out: "To do justice means to work for the establishment of equity for all, especially for the powerless."<sup>5</sup> The command to do justice places our common life in the center as we are called to seek communal and social arrangements which make it possible for all people to access the flourishing life that God intends.

In view of this command, "Welcome, Beloved" means working, through God's Spirit, to make our community as welcoming as possible by removing unnecessary barriers for people so that they can join in the pilgrimage of faith to which God calls all people. Furthermore it means allowing our common life of welcome that we already seek to live into to truly inform how we are present in the world, a world that is in dire need of love and justice.

## 2) *Loving Kindness*

The second command is also deeply rooted in the vision of the prophets and reinforces the basic thrust of the first command. "Kindness" here is a translation of the potent Hebrew word *Hesed*, which can also be translated as mercy, love, steady love, and kindness. It is above all associated with God. What it conveys is a sense of active and loyal love. In other words, in

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<sup>3</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperOne Publications, 2001), 256-257.

<sup>4</sup> James Limburg, *Hosea—Micah* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press), 192.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

keeping with the command to do justice, God is not merely interested in our having an emotional connection to God, but in our deep, deep commitment and loyalty to God and to our neighbor, which is made apparent by actions of care.

To love kindness then is to place care for others at the center, for the verb used here for “love” carries a sense of active engagement or seeking. It means, “to practice a life of reliable solidarity,”<sup>6</sup> wherein the question we find ourselves asking is not “who is my neighbor?” but “am I being a neighbor to all whom I meet?”

Our commitment to be a welcoming congregation clearly aligns with, and receives added vigor, from the command to “love kindness.” It calls us to recognize the ways in which we can and should be in solidarity with everyone we encounter, especially with individuals and communities that have suffered historic and ongoing injustice.

### 3) *Walk Humbly with Your God*

“Walk humbly”—both of these words are important. To “walk” is a Hebrew word closely connected to living an ethical life, and to going on a journey. In the Christian tradition it takes on the connotation of discipleship, “walking after” Jesus or taking the Jesus way.<sup>7</sup> The command then reiterates the basic pursuits of justice and kindness, but now brings in the word “humble.” They way that we are called to pursue justice and to love kindness is in humility.

The word here for “humility” only appears one other time in the Hebrew Bible (Proverbs 11:2). Scholars note that it is best understood in contrast to pride, arrogance, and shame, all of which are associated with being self-centered. Thus, to be humble is to be attentive to the other, to be cognizant that one is, “on the path with them, to be in relation to them and with reference to

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Walk Humbly with Your God: Micah 6:8,” *Journal for Preachers* 33/4 (Pentecost, 2010): 14.

<sup>7</sup> See James Limburg, *Hosea—Micah* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press), 192-93.

them on the way.”<sup>8</sup> Micah indicates who the primary companion on our journey will be: God. But, the whole of Micah makes clear who this God is: the God of justice and kindness. Thus, our journey is with God and all those whom God also is seeking out and traveling with, all those to whom God is seeking to extend justice and kindness.

It would seem then that our value of “Welcome, Beloved” deeply aligns with the call that we hear from Micah. These considerations, wedded with the call to both make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20) and to be reconcilers (2 Corinthians 5:11-21), animates our quest to consider the missional challenges of our current name.

### **What is “Colonial” meant to acknowledge or represent?**

With roots going back to 1902, Colonial Church was founded in 1946 in the Country Club district of Edina. The descriptor “Colonial” is, in the context of the United States, above all associated with the early settler period, generally dated from the mid-sixteenth century up to the founding of the Republic in 1789.

Given this range of time, and based on other unique aspects in our congregation, there are two significant factors that the name was meant to convey when first chosen.<sup>9</sup> The primary reason for choosing “Colonial” for the church’s name was to connect the church to the Puritan and Pilgrim traditions from which the Congregational tradition springs. The Colonial era is generally understood to name the time frame during which the English religious refugees came over to the North American continent.

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<sup>8</sup> Brueggemann, “Walk Humbly with Your God: Micah 6:8,” 16.

<sup>9</sup> A brief comment by Rev. Kenneth E. Seim, the founding minister of the church, supports this analysis. See *The Colonial Church of Edina: A Look at Fifty Years 1946-1996*, written and edited by Lorelei Bergman, Lois Collins, and Jan Moe, (Edina: Colonial Church, 1996), 2.

The Protestant reformation in England took a unique pathway beginning in 1532 when Henry VIII chose to break away from the Roman Catholic Church. For a variety of political, social, and theological reasons, Henry and his successors wound up producing a church form that retained many aspects of Catholic doctrine and practice, while including some key Reformation principles. This compromise did not sit well with everyone in England, particularly those shaped by the theology of John Calvin in Geneva. These groups identified themselves as Puritans or Pilgrims. Some of them wanted to reform the church from within, while others wanted to separate themselves.

By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, persecution of both Puritans and Pilgrims led many to flee as refugees to areas in North America which were being explored by the English. The first Royal Charter issued to the Pilgrims was in 1620, which marks the date of their departure and settlement near what is now called Plymouth, Massachusetts. It is this tradition, and the later developments associated with the Puritans, Boston, and wider New England, which are the root of the Congregational tradition to which the name “Colonial” is meant to refer.

The tradition is highlighted in a variety of ways in our congregation, including the naming of various rooms in our church after key figures among the early Puritans, hanging a copy of the Mayflower Compact in the Commons, and the physical layout and architectural style of our building, which draws directly from the New England style churches for which the Puritans were famously known.

The second reason that the name was chosen is also rooted in the Colonial era. With the end of WWII, the desire to reaffirm many of the best aspects of the American democratic tradition would have been palpable in 1946 when our church was founded. Our congregation has a longstanding history not only of celebrating its religious heritage, but also some of the key

aspects of the American democratic tradition. Naming one of the rooms in our building after Abigail Adams, wife of the second president of the United States John Adams, as well as hanging copies of the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, and the Bill of Rights in the Commons are all unique expressions of the desire to honor the best aspects of the American democratic tradition.

### **Why might “Colonial” cause concern now?**

The meanings and associations of words or descriptors can sometimes shift over time. And that is certainly the case with the word “colonial.” Notwithstanding the initial desires of the congregation back in 1946, “Colonial” doesn’t just name a specific historical era, nor does it speak only about the Puritan migration or later evolution of the American democratic republic. It has, rather, especially come to be associated with the political-economic dynamics by which events unfolded in the early modern period, events which proved to have disastrous consequences for everyone involved, especially for communities of color and native or indigenous peoples. This is often named under the descriptor: *colonialism*.

The word colonialism is meant to name the historical and political-economic processes and events of exploration, exploitation, dispossession, enslavement, oppression, under-development, and eventually dependency which occurred as European powers encountered other peoples and lands from the 15<sup>th</sup> up into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when decolonization began. Furthermore, the association of colonialism with these historical events of exploitation and abuse is not just a matter of academic debate—the average person in our current time and context often makes similar connections.

## I. Colonialism as a Historical Phenomenon:

Overall there are three significant processes/systems with which colonialism has come to be connected: 1) the genocide of native peoples and dispossession of their land; 2) the creation of the modern slave system and the construction of racial hierarchy to justify it; and 3) the engagement with cultures, peoples and lands in Africa and Asia which have resulted in an asymmetrical relationship of dependency.

Before we turn to each of these examples, we should point out that many of the practices and policies which formed the bedrock of colonialism were initially pioneered within the European context itself, against other Europeans. Beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Irish found themselves subjected to the ambitions of the English king, Henry II, who with the help of the Catholic Church claimed he had a right and responsibility to rule over Ireland and its people. Similar events also occurred in eastern Europe, notably Lithuania and other Slavic lands in the waning of the Middle Ages.<sup>10</sup> Many of these events, though unique, included a similar dynamic—take control of the natural resources, subjugate the local population, and extract wealth, typically through cheap or free manual labor. This same process was eventually reproduced on a much larger scale, and with a much greater toll on human life, in the Atlantic basin.

### 1) *Genocide and Dispossession of Native Lands*

The arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492 on the island of Hispaniola was indeed a world altering event.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, it had disastrous consequences for indigenous peoples

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<sup>10</sup> See Robert Miller, et al, *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9-10; see also, James A. Froude, *The English in Ireland*, 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1874).

<sup>11</sup> “Francisco López de Gómara, biographer of Hernán Cortés, . . . described the “discovery” of the Americas as, “the greatest event since the creation of world except for the birth and death of our Savior. That is why

across the Americas. Whether through disease, plague, enslavement, famine, or war, the population was decimated. As one scholar has noted: “It will be recalled that in 1500 the world population is approximately 400 million, of whom 80 million live in the Americas. By the middle of the sixteenth century, out of these 80 million, there remain ten.”<sup>12</sup>

The depopulation of the Americas was accompanied by European claims to possess and control sovereignty over the lands which they “discovered.” In the context of North America this was carried out through the development of a legal doctrine known as the “Doctrine of Discovery.” The Discovery Doctrine has several roots in European history, the most relevant of which were the Roman Catholic Church’s attempt to settle disputes between Spain and Portugal regarding which areas in the Americas should be allowed to be explored, settled, and dominated by either country. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the first of a series of legal declarations which effectively split the Americas into two spheres to be dominated by Spain and Portugal. This was done without the knowledge or consent of the native peoples living in those lands.<sup>13</sup>

Over time, the Doctrine of Discovery evolved to include three significant aspects: right of sovereignty, right of use, and right of residence. The various Royal Charters issued to potential settlers—whether of Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, or English origin—included these distinctions and their attendant provisions. New settlers could possess a given area provided it was not already controlled by “another Christian prince.”<sup>14</sup> Native peoples retained the rights to

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they call it the New World,” (Christian T. Collins Winn & Amos Yong, “The Apocalypse of Colonialism; Or, Notes Towards a Postcolonial Eschatology,” in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, ed. Smith, et al (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 141.

<sup>12</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 133.

<sup>13</sup> See Miller, *Discovering Indigenous Lands*, 10-15; see also Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008); and Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> See *ibid.*, 18-19.

use the land, and to reside on the land, but they were no longer the true sovereign of their lands. This fact becomes clear under the concept of preemption. Preemption refers to the fact that if a tribe or native group wished to sell their lands, they could only sell to the European power who had “discovered” the land, or who held the sovereignty of the land through the right of Discovery. The privilege of preemption made plain that the native peoples did not ultimately control their land because they could not sell it to whomever they wished. As colonists multiplied, the right of preemption made it possible for land to be bought at very cheap prices, or simply to be taken through further conquest.

Over time, this doctrine became the basis for Native American law in the United States through a series of legal rulings, the most significant of which was *Johnson vs. M’Intosh* (1823). Chief Justice Marshall summed up the position which the US government would pursue through the 19<sup>th</sup> century up into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup>, which was that, “discovery gave an exclusive right to extinguish the Indian title of occupancy, either through purchase or by conquest . . .”<sup>15</sup>

Thankfully there have been some changes in regard to government engagement with indigenous populations in the United States; nevertheless, the Doctrine of Discovery continues to have a brutal legacy with ongoing repercussions.

## 2) *The Creation of the Slave Economy and the Construction of Racial Hierarchy to Justify It*

The second major dynamic with which colonialism is associated is the creation of the slave economy which came to dominate the Americas well up into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the development of the concept of race and racial hierarchy which was used to justify the exploitation especially of African and indigenous peoples.

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<sup>15</sup> As quoted in Miller, et al, *Discovering Indigenous Lands*, 56.

Most people have some familiarity with the history of slavery in the United States. Though slavery has ancient roots, the form of chattel slavery which evolved in the United States and other parts of the Americas was unique in its barbarism. It was also central to the colonial enterprise. “Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period that roughly coincides with the colonial periods of North and South America, nearly thirteen million Africans were enslaved and shipped west across the Atlantic, while two to four million Native Americans were enslaved and traded by European colonists in America. In fact, though, this pairing was no coincidence. Slavery and colonization went hand in hand. . . . It was a deadly symbiosis.”<sup>16</sup>

The tie that bound slavery and colonialism together was economics. “With the limited population of Europe in the sixteenth century, the free laborers necessary to cultivate the staple crops of sugar, tobacco and cotton in the New World could not have been supplied in quantities adequate to permit large-scale production. Slavery was necessary for this, and to get slaves the Europeans turned first to the aborigines and then to Africa.”<sup>17</sup> Both the northern and southern colonies were entangled in the slave economy and the slave trade, which became key planks for the success of the colonial enterprise.<sup>18</sup> Early on, even poor whites or Europeans who were indentured were also put to work, with at least 10,000 coming from Bristol, England alone between 1654-1685.<sup>19</sup> As the Atlantic slave trade developed, however, the trade coalesced around the exploitation of African men and women, who had to endure deadly and dehumanizing

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<sup>16</sup> Wendy Warren, *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2016), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 6; For a discussion of Native American enslavement, see Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> See Marc Howard Ross, *Slavery in the North: Forgetting History and Recovering Memory* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015); and Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> See Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 9-10.

conditions both on the Middle Passage from Africa to the New World and when they eventually arrived in the Caribbean or North America.<sup>20</sup> The trade can only be described as the systematic attempt, “to capture and commodify other people.”<sup>21</sup>

There were many, however, both in North America and Europe who objected to the slave trade, which was often called “man stealing.”<sup>22</sup> As such, a theoretical justification was required. This came in the form of the burgeoning theory of race and racial hierarchy. Thus, “Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery.”<sup>23</sup> 1619 is typically the date cited for the beginning of the slave trade in North America with the arrival of 20 Angolan slaves in Virginia. Over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, several laws were enacted in the English colonies<sup>24</sup> which effectively combined phenotype or skin-color with slave or subhuman status. These laws stripped people of African descent of many of their rights, whether they were free or enslaved, including the notion that Christian baptism could change the status of life-long enslavement, a particular fear of plantation owners.<sup>25</sup> To be black, then, was in some sense to be associated with the odium of being a slave.

These early laws and the practices which accompanied them became the basis for egregious claims made later regarding the humanity of people of color. One such instance, with Minnesota ties, was the infamous Dred Scott case of 1857, in which the then Chief Justice Roger

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<sup>20</sup> See Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*.

<sup>21</sup> Warren, *New England Bound*, 113.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Dublin: W. Whitestone, 1775); for an extensive history of abolitionism see Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> See *Africans in America: Colonial Laws*, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1h315.html> (accessed 7/23/20, 4:50 pm).

<sup>25</sup> See Jon Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Taney argued that people of African descent do not share the same protections or privileges as Euro-Americans found in the Constitution, simply because they were black.<sup>26</sup>

Even with the Civil War and the ending of racial slavery, racism has persisted and evolved in a number of different ways, though one of its persistent results has been to place people of color in situations of profound vulnerability and to continue to distort and dehumanize people of color and Euro-Americans alike.

3) *The Engagement with Cultures and Peoples in Africa and Asia which Placed Those Peoples at a Distinct Disadvantage in Relation to Western Powers and an Asymmetrical Relationship of Dependency*

The last phenomenon with which colonialism is associated is sometimes described as imperialism in an attempt to mark it off from the earlier colonial era. However, it exhibits many of the same basic dynamics of exploitation and was experienced as colonization in places like Africa and Asia. It refers to a series of exploitative ventures which happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which resulted in 90% of the world coming under some form of European rule.<sup>27</sup> In this case, European powers didn't typically attempt to colonize a given area through dispatching settlers but sought rather to assert political and economic power and social control through military might and other means.

Among the other means was an ideological sense of certainty of the inferiority of people of color in other lands, and the desire to spread "western civilization." "Colonial and imperial rule was legitimized by anthropological theories which increasingly portrayed peoples of the

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<sup>26</sup> See Paul Finkelman (ed.), *Dred Scott v. Sandford: A Brief History with Documents*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> "This division between the rest and the west was made fairly absolute in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the expansion of the European empires, as a result of which nine-tenths of the entire land surface of the globe was controlled by Europeans, or European-derived, powers" (Robert C. J. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 2).

colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves (despite having done so perfectly well for millennia) and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interests.”<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, as has been shown over time, the work of development actually created relationships of dependency, and was often little more than another form of disguised exploitation.

The situation was especially egregious in places like Africa, from which European countries would extract raw materials, through underpaid local labor, most of whom were deliberately undereducated since the only jobs generally available or open to them were forms of menial labor. Once the raw materials were extracted, they were then shipped home to Europe where they were transformed into goods in factories that generally offered relatively stable and well-paying manufacturing jobs. Then, once the goods were produced and refined, they were often sent back to the African market (as well as other markets), even though they were typically out of reach of the average African worker because they did not make enough money.<sup>29</sup>

Thankfully, this form of colonialism only lasted for about 70 years and came to an end in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the relationships of dependency begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century continue, such that Western countries are the primary beneficiaries in their relationships with countries in places like Africa, Latin America, and Asia at the expense of those other countries.

## II. Colonialism in the Popular Imagination

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> “What did colonial governments do in the interest of Africans? Supposedly, they built railroads, schools, hospitals, and the like. The sum total of these services was amazingly small. . . . Indeed, what was called ‘the development of Africa’ by the colonialists was a cynical short-hand expression for ‘the intensification of colonial exploitation in Africa to develop capitalist Europe’” (Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, rev. ed. [Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1981], 205, 223).

That colonialism continues to be associated with these three broad historical and political-economic forms of exploitation is not just an academic debate or something that is discussed in the media. The following quotes come from individuals who live in the Twin Cities region, but who are either not currently associated with our community, or who have some loose connection. The quotes come from both our white neighbors and neighbors of color, people who are of varied ages, political and spiritual persuasions. Their responses are generally indicative of the broader perception of the name “Colonial.” Their responses were given to the question:

“What do you think of when you hear ‘colonial’?”

- “I think of colonization. I think of colonial rule which is power rooted in controlling and taking....dehumanizing...” Genevieve, 25
- “A country is under the control of another”- Richard, 63
- “I think of a bunch of white colonists, likely carting slaves, with an out of date world view. Colonialism at its core assumes superiority of world view. It assumes there’s a lesser culture or human who must be guided by smarter, most likely white, rulers”- Michael, 29
- “The word has changed meaning over the past few decades. To ‘colonize’ means to wipe out what is there before. In 2020, it comes across as outdated and arrogant. It sounds culturally tone deaf.”- Thomas, 51
- “I think of someone/something in power exerting their power over someone/something weaker.”- Joy, 43
- “When I hear colonial, I think of past and continued colonization of indigenous people”- Julie, 33
- “When I hear the word colonial I think of colonization and loss of power, land, and culture. I immediately think white people.”- Vanessa, 28
- “Old, conservative, Southern, imperialist”- Todd, 55
- “When I think of the word 'colonial,' I think of an oppressive system that enslaved millions of people, not just in the US but across the globe, by white Europeans in order to steal land and resources from indigenous people. It still exists today in the US through mass incarceration and other systems.” - Anna, 30
- “It just makes me think of a verrrrry white space that has not even begun to do the decolonizing work that will make the space even remotely safe for my Black self. if anything, it sounds proud of a colonial (aka violent as hell) legacy. So it's a giant nope for me” - Anonymous, 27

It is worth noting here that purpose of the present paper is neither to affix blame nor to offer absolution for the history of violence associated with colonialism recounted in brief above.

It is rather to raise the question of whether our use of the name “Colonial” impedes our mission to serve our world, to share the gospel of God’s reign with everyone in word and deed, and to be a community that welcomes in line with Micah 6:8, reliably standing in solidarity with our neighbors as a logical consequence of the call to follow Jesus.

If the descriptor “Colonial” is not only historically speaking associated with a history which Christians would rightly abhor, and if that descriptor offers a significant stumbling block to people who might otherwise join our community, and if keeping the name is interpreted by many as perpetuating a history with which we would not otherwise want to be associated, then perhaps it is time to consider a different name. One that keeps with our Congregational history, but which doesn’t carry the historical burdens and connotations of the word “Colonial.”

### **Keeping in Step with Our Congregationalist Tradition**

To consider changing the name of our church at this moment is deeply consonant with the spirit of innovation in the Congregational tradition which has animated our congregation from its inception.

Though Congregationalists and the Congregational tradition was certainly entangled in the history of colonialism, some of the loudest voices who protested mistreatment of native peoples, dispossession of lands, slavery, racism, and foreign domination, have come out of Congregationalism.

As noted above, when the Pilgrim’s came over to the small settlement at Plymouth, they embarked with a sense of expectation that God’s Word and Spirit still speak. In his farewell address, John Robinson had encouraged those who were about to make the journey to be prepared to receive new light since more truth and light were, “yet to break forth from His holy

word.”<sup>30</sup> This sense of anticipation and free thinking have been central to the Congregational tradition, sometimes even causing divisions among Congregationalists.

One such division occurred during the period of the Great Awakening when Jonathan Edwards argued that the revival of religion happening within his own town and congregation was the work of God.<sup>31</sup> It may seem strange to some, but many Congregationalists opposed this idea. The two sides actually split into two factions within the towns and congregations scattered across New England, sometimes leading to permanent splits.<sup>32</sup> The two sides were generally called Old Light Congregationalists (anti-revival) and New Light Congregationalists (pro-revival). Though these splits were unfortunate, they highlight the dynamism within Congregationalism produced by the spirit of innovation and the ongoing desire to attend to the new ways in which God is at work in the church and the world.

The need to listen for how God is at work in the world has also at times produced a significant social witness within our tradition. For instance, in 1776 Samuel Hopkins, a student of Jonathan Edwards, added his voice to that of the Quakers and other black abolitionists when he preached a sermon on Isaiah 1:15, titled “This Whole Country Have Their Hands Full of Blood This Day.”<sup>33</sup> The sermon was a broadside attack on slavery and the slave trade. It began a history of significant participation in the abolitionist movement by Congregationalists like

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<sup>30</sup> Atkins & Fagley, *History of American Congregationalism*, 60.

<sup>31</sup> See his 1753 pamphlet, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. by John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 57-87.

<sup>32</sup> See Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 57-61.

<sup>33</sup> See ‘*This whole country have their hands full of Blood this day*’: *Transcription and Introduction of an Antislavery Sermon Manuscript Attributed to the Reverend Samuel Hopkins*, ed. by Jonathan Sassi (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2004).

Lemuel Haynes, Theodore Weld, Lewis Tappan, and Henry Ward Beecher.<sup>34</sup> The Congregationalist commitment to a democratic spirit in religious and social life spread out far beyond the bounds of the church and became important in other areas like the inclusion of women in ministry and the political life of the nation, the care for the poor and economic justice, concern for human and civil rights, and participation in the peace movement, among others.<sup>35</sup> For instance, it was the Congregational Church at South Butler, New York, that took the extraordinary step in 1853 of ordaining and calling as their pastor Antoinette Brown, making her the first woman ordained to the ministry of the pulpit by a Protestant denomination.<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, our own congregation has also been open to the spirit of innovation in significant ways. For instance, in the tumultuous period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, our congregation made concerted efforts to build significant relationships with major African American churches in the Twin Cities through pulpit sharing, and through the invitation of nationally recognized speakers like Civil Rights leaders Howard Thurman and William E. Pannell.

During the 1960s the congregation became the first church in the state of Minnesota to hire a full-time minister devoted solely to Youth Ministry and developed several pioneering ministries with youth around the Twin Cities. During the height of the Vietnam war, the church created space both for those who wanted to serve in the military and for conscientious objectors.

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<sup>34</sup> See Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*; Donald W. Dayton, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage: A Tradition of Integrating Piety and Justice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014); Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999); and Timothy Smith, *Revival and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).

<sup>35</sup> See Atkins & Fagley, *History of American Congregationalism*, 246-264; Barbara Brown Zikmund (ed.), *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1984); and Charles Chatfield, "The Bible and American Peace Movements," in *The Bible and Social Reform*, ed. by Ernest R. Sandeen (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 105-132.

<sup>36</sup> See Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Biblical Arguments and Women's Place in the Church," in *The Bible and Social Reform*, 85-104.

In the 1970s, the church also began to incorporate the insights of the counseling movement, opening a counseling center which was eventually staffed with several full-time and part-time counselors. More recently, our community sought to leverage the significant social capital within the church and the spirit of social entrepreneurship in our broader region and launched Innové, which has helped to incubate several very successful non-profit ministries, that serve locally and world-wide.

### **What will this enable us to do?**

Embarking on this process of communal self-evaluation means to courageously step into the next chapter of the church with trust in God's guidance and love for our neighbors here and now. Many members of our community would acknowledge a heart's desire for our beloved church to grow and this is a critical step in engaging an entirely new demographic of people. It shows our neighbors and surrounding communities that our church is not culturally tone-deaf and is not committed more to the past than the future, rather, we will be intentionally positioning ourselves as a community of faith who hear the needs of people and respond with love, respect and a gospel that can speak to all people.

Ultimately changing the church's name—a key symbol of who we are and what we are about in the world—further aligns our community's values and vision with our ministries and sacred spaces. As we reimagine music during worship, engagement with emerging generations, and what it means to be mission partners with other groups, we will no longer have to experience the 'moment of hesitation'. That moment when individuals outside of our community hear our church's name and wonder about our intentions, the level of our self-awareness, and the genuineness of our professed love of our neighbor. The validity of these questions seems clear—

why would a church of Christ followers committed to doing good in the world identify themselves with a name that is associated with such a troubling history? If nothing else, choosing a new name allows us the opportunity to more authentically embrace who we want to be and to make this clear to those around us, especially those to whom we want to reach out with the good news of God's love.

### **What are the potential costs of such a change?**

With any change comes the potential cost of fracturing our congregation and losing community members. We have heard it repeatedly said that what makes our congregation special is not so much the building, the name, or even the ministries, as it is the relationships we have built over many years, and the culture of welcome that we have sought to live into. Staff and lay leadership earnestly hope that individual's commitment to the congregation runs deeper than the name. One thing that is quite certain is that changing the name of the congregation will not change what makes the congregation so special.

While we acknowledge that not all members of the church will initially be in favor of such a change, we encourage every person in the congregation to view this process as another opportunity to lean into conversations with one another and embody one of the key components of Congregational culture with the objectives of understanding and learning.

For those who fear the cost being a loss of our history and our connection to our Congregational roots, rest assured the name change proposal has absolutely nothing to do with erasing our past. Rather it's about building upon the richness of our tradition and storied history by best equipping us to doing similar and greater work in the future. Our burning hope and desire is that whatever name we discern God is calling us into will be one that is deeply rooted in our

Congregational identity, rooted in the relationships we have forged over time, rooted in the impulse to serve our neighbors no matter who or where they are.

### **What happens if we do not change the name?**

The decision to not change our name would place a significant barrier in front of our community's desire to grow and develop. Retaining a name that is so easily associated with a history with which almost no one either in our community or beyond would want to be associated, places a profound limitation on our ability to capitalize on our current momentum of renewed ministries, reimagined spaces, and commitment to doing good work for the next 75 years and beyond. Our community will bear a significant burden as the need to explain why we have kept the name "Colonial", even after we have deliberated on it, will only grow over time, especially given our stated desire to be a wholeheartedly good neighbor and witness of God's redemptive love. This burden extends to our ministry partners, some of whom already hold reservations regarding our church's name, as well as the potential to have new ministry partners, especially among those groups that are actively working for justice in our neighborhoods.

Finally, in a similar way that changing our name has the potential of losing members, not changing our name may also result in the loss of current members. This fact, added to the clear disadvantage the name presents for new growth, portends a difficult future for our congregation.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus has long been in the business of building bridges and we believe that we are called to follow this Jesus in being bridge builders of hope, reconciliation, justice, kindness, peace, freedom, and love. And as we do this work, we are reminded that we are not alone on the Jesus

way. We are traveling together with God, with one another, and with potentially many, many other partners, communities, and individuals. This truth, and the call to be a people who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with the God of justice and mercy, places before us the solemn task of considering whether a different name for our community would not better communicate our Core Values, open more doors for ministry, and signal to the wider world that we want to be a healing presence in a hurting world.

We pray for God's guidance, wisdom, presence, and energizing love to lead us into the new future which God is preparing for our congregation, our community, and the wider world.