

Comment

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Fifty years ago, one year after Dr. King's assassination, the Black Manifesto originated at the National Black Economic Development Conference that met in Detroit, April 25–27, 1969. The Manifesto assessed the harm black Americans had endured and demanded from white American churches and synagogues \$500 million as reparation for their complicity in the historical and ongoing economic exploitation of black Americans. The Black Manifesto was aggressively circulated nationwide, within congregations and denominations. The Evangelical Covenant Church of America was presented with the Manifesto's demands by Herman Holmes Jr., director of the Midwest chapter of the Black Economic Development Conference, at its 1969 Annual Meeting.

This issue explores the origins of the Manifesto, the Covenant's response to its demands, and the shifting nature of our denominational identity in the summer of 1969. It begins with an article by Hauna Ondrey, assistant professor of church history at North Park Theological Seminary, that surveys the Covenant in 1969 and how its response to the Black Manifesto illuminates its position within the landscape of American Christianity at that time. The Covenant's response to the Black Manifesto offers insight into a denomination in transition, within a nation that was still lamenting, reeling from, and finding its way after the loss of one of its most esteemed leaders. Ondrey's article is followed by commentary on the Black Manifesto, written in 1969 by Worth V. Hodgkin, director of urban ministries for the Central Conference; Robert L. Sloan Jr., chairperson of Community Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Wesley W. Nelson, professor of pastoral care

at North Park Seminary and director of evangelism for the Covenant; and Milton B. Engebretson, Covenant president. Originally published as the cover story of the August 1, 1969, *Covenant Companion*, they are reprinted here and annotated for contemporary readers.

Fifty years later, how do we reflect on this watershed moment in our nation's history, on the Black Manifesto, and on the Covenant's response to it? Are there lessons we can glean from this season in our denominational history and apply today, given the rising tide of racial animus? The issue concludes with the responses of nine denominational leaders, interpreting this history and its contemporary significance: Craig E. Anderson, retired Covenant pastor who attended the 1969 Covenant Annual Meeting as pastor of Oakdale Covenant Church in Chicago; Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, professor of theology and ethics at North Park Theological Seminary, director of the School of Restorative Arts, and co-author of the Resolution on Antiracism adopted by the Covenant Ministerium in June 2019; Donn Engebretson, Covenant executive vice-president under President Glenn Palmberg, current major gifts officer, and son of Milton B. Engebretson, who served as Covenant president in 1969; Catherine Gilliard, superintendent of the Southeast Conference; Dominique DuBois Gilliard, director of racial righteousness and reconciliation for Love Mercy Do Justice; Jerome Nelson, retired superintendent of the Central Conference and the first African American to serve as a superintendent; Mary Miller, Covenant Living chaplain and the first female vice-president of the Covenant; David Swanson, pastor of New Community Covenant Church in Chicago, CEO of New Community Outreach, and co-author of the Resolution on Antiracism; and Lenore Three Stars, community leader for racial reconciliation.

We hope this issue contributes to our collective discernment as mission friends who have grown to become a multiethnic mosaic that is prioritizing practicing solidarity with our neighbors and striving to function as one interconnected body of Christ.