

Presbyterians scrap ad campaign deemed offensive to minorities

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

January 23, 2015

c. 2015 Religion News Service

(RNS) The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is scrapping an ad campaign for the needy after it was blasted for being culturally and socially insensitive.

The One Great Hour of Sharing campaign originally included an image of an Asian girl with the words “Needs help with her drinking problem” and, in smaller lettering: “She can’t find water.” Another image featured a man with the words “Needs help getting high,” followed in smaller lettering with: “Above the flood waters.”

Linda Valentine, executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, said a redesign has begun and the new campaign should appear in February.

“We made a great misstep,” she said. “We acknowledged that the materials not only perpetuated offensive racial stereotypes but were insensitive to struggles with addiction that are real struggles and many of our churches and many of our ministries are working with those very people.”

Among those objecting to the original plans was Bruce Reyes-Chow, who is of Chinese/Filipino descent and served as moderator of the denomination, which is about 90 percent white.

“I am all for creativity, playfulness, and even well-placed snark, but, I’m sorry, this misses the mark—big time,” he wrote in the comments about the online announcement. “While we do some very good things, I am really disappointed that my denomination is going through with this offering campaign.”

The PCUSA controversy follows other cases where religious publishing decisions have caused offense.

In 2013, LifeWay Christian Resources apologized for publishing “Rickshaw Rally” vacation Bible school materials a decade earlier that “used racial stereotypes that offended many in the Asian American community.”

In 2009, evangelical publisher Zondervan pulled a leadership book featuring a kung fu theme after Asian-American Christian leaders led an online protest against its images.

In a formal apology last week, Samuel Locke, director of special offerings, said a “variety of Presbyterians” would be involved in the redesign: “You spoke. We are listening. We plan to revise the campaign.”

It cost \$65,000 to design and print the original ads and will cost the same to do it again.

In an open letter to the agency, Reyes-Chow and hundreds of others thanked the agency for revamping the campaign but called for more steps to be taken, including staff education on addiction, anti-racism, and cultural sensitivity.

“We feel deeply sorry and pained by what’s happened,” Valentine said. “When one of us hurt, we all hurt. This has been a very painful experience that we’re working very hard to acknowledge, repent, correct and move forward.”