White Chicagoans, I want to invite you to a conversation just for you: A racial healing circle for White people. It’s time for you to come together and talk about racism with the help of trained facilitators. Let’s face it: You’re not doing so well making this happen on your own.

Let me give you some background on why this must happen now.

For years, Black and Brown and Native Chicagoans have provided policy recommendations that would decrease the wealth and death gaps in our communities. Most have been ignored. The result? Growing inequities over the past 30 years. The COVID-19 pandemic reveals how vulnerable these communities are to death and how inept public and economic policies are to protect them.

But it’s the persistent virus of RACISM-1619 that our city and nation are forced to reckon with, -- a virus we all suffer from...a virus that brutally takes the lives of African Americans in the forms of police lynching, mass incarceration and sub-humane living conditions...a virus whose intended target is the Black body.

We may not have the same technical and epidemiological tools to treat the virus of RACISM-1619, however we do know that the viral causes are whiteness and institutionalization of white supremacy. Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation of Greater Chicago recently hosted the National Day of Racial Healing and is ready to provide our racial healing practice and support so we can confront and heal from racism. The Racial Healing Circles can provide the tools for White Chicagoans to face some hard truths. You must confront your investment in a system that is designed to increase inequities in order to maintain and increase your privilege. We need you to learn and practice anti-racists behaviors, especially if you claim to support people of color. The vast majority of Chicagoans, which are Black, Brown and Native people, support policies that call for increased resources for health, housing, neighborhood investment, business ownership, and political power. The challenge is that it will require you to sacrifice your privilege and resources to make life more equitable for people of color.

In essence, I’m asking White civic leaders to be consistent in their support for a diverse and inclusive workforce and vibrant, healthy neighborhoods for all. Now is the time to lead with your values and make real, right-size commitments to Chicagoans that match the rhetoric you share in your foundations, corporations and board reports and newsletters.
Now is the time to lead with your heart and to have the courage to support public and corporate policies and practices that will save many lives and save many Chicagoans from leaving.

Many of our neighbors are protesting the injustice that has been ignored for far too long. The rebellion that we are witnessing is due to years of frustration because whiteness is valued over our humanity. Black people are tired, hurt, angered, disappointed and numb.

We must show up in solidarity with the Black community and continue to support their healing and rebuilding. We also need time to breathe, heal, repair and build our relationships so we can not be divided by the divide and offer concessions tactics. We must build Black, Brown and Native solidarity because we know that our neighborhoods are interrelated and our communities will prosper when we practice interdependence.

When White Chicagoans confront their whiteness, make a commitment to provide needed investments in our neighborhoods, and commit to policies that dismantle white supremacy, then we can come together. Yes, Black, Brown and Native people will continue to advocate and fight for just policies for us all -- but White people need to confront their allegiance to a social and economic system that benefits them at the detriment of us all. We are ALL watching to see how YOU respond to the virus that keeps Black, Brown and Native communities under a racial hierarchy.

José A. Rico and Pilar Audain Reed, Executive director, Associate director | Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) Greater Chicago

A version of this letter was published in the June 3, 2020 issue of the Chicago Sun-Times.