



**COLLEGE OF REGIONAL MINISTERS
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A Call to Action: The Time is Now!

Dear Members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada,

Psalm 89:46-7 *"How long, O God, will you hide yourself from sight? ... Remember that I shall not live forever."*
These last few weeks the Psalmist's cry is heard in our land, "How long, O Lord?"

In the wake of the death of George Floyd, the latest African American to die by police violence, the people of the United States, indeed the entire world, moan in grief and burn with anger. George Floyd's name is added to a long list of unarmed Black and Brown people, including Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, who have died by actions taken by police officers or vigilantes in the past few decades and indeed centuries.

We are reminded that on July 17, 2014, Eric Garner was arrested in New York City where a chokehold smothered him. Hauntingly similar to George Floyd, Garner was heard to be saying, "I can't breathe" eleven times before losing consciousness and dying an hour later.

In 2015, the College of Regional Ministers wrote to you, the Church, about race and racism in America in the shadow of similar events, expressing our concerns and laying out a plan of action for our church to follow to move forward in our work of becoming a Pro-Reconciling/Anti-Racist Church. We ask ourselves if our words made any difference, if anything has changed?

Because on May 25, 2020, as we heard George Floyd on an 8 minute 46 second video gasping "I can't breathe" as a police officer knelt on his neck, we know we must speak to you again with our hearts broken and our resolve strengthened.

This must stop. Black Lives Matter!

Race is a created construct; an idea meant to oppress People of Color and give privilege to people of European descent. Race prejudice, combined with power, creates systems that dictate racist norms and practices. Racism is the force that cements those systems in place.

As people who follow Jesus, the One who sought out and empowered those pushed to the margins of power, we are called to confront the power of racism in our society. We are called to go to the roots of racism and dismantle its power to define, distort, and destroy all of us. While challenging these systems that have been in place for centuries is an enormous and daunting task, we are not without power to bring change to the core workings of this entrenched system.

In the Pentecost season, of all seasons, we know that the Holy Spirit can move in all people with fire and wind that wipe away obstacles of division and resistance to change. We believe in the Holy Spirit's power to remake our shared life as the Beloved Community. In that belief we declare that there is much that we can do, and need to do, in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

As a start we commit to and urge all Disciples of Christ to pledge to:

- ❖ Hear clearly the cries of our friends and neighbors who weep tears of lament and proclaim their anger at the same time that we all express our pain of racism to those in our circles of influence.
- ❖ Participate in non-violent actions and conversations/studies/learning opportunities that support Black Lives Matter.
- ❖ Hold ourselves and the systems, including police departments and other law enforcement agencies and judicial systems, accountable for the health and life of every person in their care.
- ❖ Speak clearly with the law enforcement leadership in our communities making it known that we believe the killing of People of Color as we have seen in these instances must stop, and we expect them to put into place accountability structures that clearly reinforce the training/practice of their officers to this expectation.
- ❖ Learn about community safety systems that offer alternatives to military like modalities for keeping communities safe, utilizing partnerships with other leadership functions in our communities.
- ❖ Wrestle openly with what it means to have a community defined by shared justice instead of enforced compliance.
- ❖ Study and learn the history of our states/provinces and communities and the relationships of the people that have lived in these areas historically and currently, so that we might understand our current community tensions in historical context.
- ❖ Strengthen the Anti-Racism committees/teams and training networks in our regional churches and make these resources more readily available throughout our regions with training available in multiple languages and modalities.
- ❖ When you consider a Bible study, what questions will you ask? Will you view the text from the dominant or oppressed cultures within the text? When you choose a book to read together, a topic for a sermon series, a way to decorate your worship space? Ask yourself to stretch beyond your own narrative and learn the story of someone different from yourself.
- ❖ Learn how to see the world from a perspective other than your own rather than to justify what you already believe and look only for stories that support that perspective
- ❖ Recommit to and vigorously promote the Reconciliation Offering which supports Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism work in our regions and throughout the entire Christian Church (Disciples Of Christ).

These actions are only a start. In the coming days we will be sharing more specific calls to action for individuals and communities of faith. Consider the healing balm that you can be as the Church by bringing the community together – healing the wounds that divide us, and being a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

We, as your Regional Ministers, cry out with those who mourn, take to the streets with those who march, and support those who seek to make changes in our world so that every beloved child of God will have the chance to breathe freely, and together pursue justice, equity, and dignity throughout the land. And, in doing so, may we see the face of God.

May it be so.

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