

JUSTICE & WITNESS MISSIONAL TEAM
“BLACK LIVES MATTER”

June 4, 2020

George Floyd. Ahmaud Arbery. Breonna Taylor. Eric Garner. Michael Brown. Atatiana Jefferson. Philando Castile. Botham Jean. Tamir Rice. Trayvon Martin. We speak their names to honor their precious lives while simultaneously adding them to a list of those whose lives have been claimed by a vicious disease that continues to plague the society in which we exist – racism and white supremacy. This list grows longer as it claims more and more innocent lives. Precious lives. BLACK LIVES.

Since May 25, 2020, we have watched again and again as a precious life – George Floyd – was taken so tragically and so senselessly. We watched in horror as a Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee against Mr. Floyd’s neck – for EIGHT MINUTES AND 46 SECONDS – whilst two other officers pinned his body to the ground and an additional officer stood by and watched. We hear his haunting pleas, “I can’t breathe,” “Please, the knee in my neck, I can’t breathe.”

In those traumatic scenes and haunting pleas, we are reminded that the occurrences of violence against black Americans are not isolated to the recent past. Instead, we are confronted with a centuries-long history of generational racism and trauma.

In recent days, we have seen peaceful protests joined by a far more vociferous response in cities and communities across the United States. And, while so many have assembled together to stand with our black brothers and sisters to affirm that their lives matter, many others – including those at the highest echelons of power – have raised their voices only to incite hatred and division; to dismiss legitimate rage and outrage; and, avoid demands for answers and justice by hiding in the shelter of privilege and ignorance.

For generations, we have persisted in ignorance. We have refused to acknowledge the dark and painful truth of our collective past; and, failed to walk the long and difficult path towards healing and reconciliation. We have delayed opportunities for meaningful, and yes, uncomfortable, dialogue. And, when others have stood up and put their very lives at risk to march, to raise their voice in chant or in song, or taken a knee, to bring awareness to racism, white supremacy, and the institutional injustices faced by people of color, they were mocked, threatened, attacked, called “thugs” and “violent criminals,” and told they were not American and do not belong here.

And, yet, we still feel we have the right to give commentary on what is and what is not an appropriate response to the senseless and tragic death of another precious black life?

The social context in which we live demonstrates that the lives of certain peoples do not matter – and, certainly, not black lives. But we who are called to be a people of Aloha, recognize God's sacred and divine breath of life in all of God's creation; affirm the worth of all persons; seek to break down systems of oppression and injustice; and, work together towards a world where black lives matter – and, then, all lives will truly matter.

In this moment in history, the Justice and Witness Missional Team of the Hawai'i Conference of the United Church of Christ joins our UCC Officers and UCC Board, and encourages our Conference, associations, local churches and covenantal partners, to stand up, speak up, and show up. For justice. In solidarity with our black brothers and sisters. To demonstrate that Black Lives Matter in the kingdom of God. To condemn racism, white supremacy, and systemic oppression. To begin breaking those systems down and undoing the damage they have caused. And, to commit to the work of justice, healing, and reconciliation – no matter how difficult it may be.

We seek peace, O God. But, we know that where there is no justice, there is no peace. And, so let your justice flow down like waters, and your righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. We seek change, O God. And, so grant us wisdom and courage, to be agents of change and emissaries of holy love. Amen.

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