

CLERGYWOMEN'S CALL TO ACTION: SILENT NO LONGER

In light of the tragic deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and others, we, the United Methodist Clergywomen of Arkansas, can no longer remain silent about the racial disparities in our country. Many across our country were shocked and appalled that these tragedies occurred. However, we cannot ignore that these events do not shock the African American community but are part of an ever-present reality of racism in our cities, communities, annual conference, and churches.

As United Methodists, we affirm that God created all people in God's image and that in Christ's kingdom, all are one in Christ, regardless of our gender, ethnicity, or social status. Our Social Principles state that *"...we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life. We commit as the Church to move beyond symbolic expressions and representative models that do not challenge unjust systems of power and access."* Yet, as clergy in the United Methodist tradition, we acknowledge that the imbalance in our systems of power still exists.

We confess that our commitment to seek true equality and justice has often been lackluster.

We confess that too many of our white clergy have benefited from a privileged status without considering the economic and emotional violence it inflicts on our colleagues of color, the disservice it provides our congregations, and the harm it does to our own souls and ministries.

We repent of the times when we have remained silent in the face of systematic racism and of our own participation in it, however unwitting.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that one of the great tragedies of our time was *"not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."* We can no longer be passive observers of injustice. We can no longer ignore the social disease of racism and prejudice simply because it doesn't alter our daily lives. We believe that Black lives do matter; therefore we commit to name the sin of racism and call attention to it in powerful and redemptive ways. We will no longer ask the individuals and groups who are directly impacted by this social disease to bear the responsibility for change. We will support the rights of congregations and community members to nonviolently protest the atrocities against Black lives in our nation, and offer our help in physical, mental, and spiritual ways to those who are involved in demonstrations. We will join protests in the spirit of the prophetic nature of our role as clergy, which has a long history in the Christian movement. We will work with local agencies to initiate real and lasting change in the struggle for racial equality.

Therefore, as individuals called by God and serving in positions of moral and spiritual leadership, we covenant to do the following:

- We commit and call upon all ARUMC pastors to be a witness for Christ in the public square by working with Black Methodists for Church Renewal, the only nationally recognized advocacy group related to the United Methodist Church, as well as reach beyond UM organizations to partner with area churches and groups to work for racial justice.
- We commit and call upon all ARUMC pastors and churches to partner with local Black churches in mission and ministry by initiating intentional relationships in our communities. Additionally, we will advocate for more conference resources to be given to the UMC initiative Strengthening the Black Churches for the 21st Century.
- We commit and call upon all ARUMC pastors to do whatever we can to remove barriers of access to conference events, theological education, and leadership positions for Black and Brown and other persons of color within our annual conference.
- We call upon the Bishop and District Superintendents to appoint a Taskforce to provide anti-racist training opportunities on a conference, district, and local church level and to partner with the General and Conference Commissions on Religion and Race to track pastors' and churches' participation in these opportunities, so that we may hold one another accountable.
- We call upon local churches and pastors to amplify the voices, experiences, writings, and concerns of persons of color and women within our churches and to be intentional about including denominational and conference resources including GCORR, GBCS and UMW for our bible studies, sermon series, lectures, and guest preaching from persons of color.

United Methodist Clergywomen in Arkansas represent the beauty of God's diverse economy: old, young, multi-ethnic, theologically, and culturally diverse. We celebrate this diversity as evidence of God's Holy Spirit. But there is still much work to do, and we commit to doing the hard work and heavy lifting required so that God's kingdom of equality might begin to break in here on earth, as it is in heaven. So be it.*

*This statement has been endorsed by the Conference Board of Church and Society, the Conference Commission on Religion and Race, the Arkansas Black Methodists for Church Renewal, and the Arkansas Conference United Methodist Women.

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