



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

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***Following is Bishop Park's statement on the death of Mr. George Floyd and the expressions of protest and concern that followed. Please distribute this to your church and read it to your congregations this coming Sunday.***

June 2, 2020

“How long, O Lord, will you look on?  
Rescue me from their ravages,  
my life from the lions!”  
(Psalm 35:17)

Dear Beloved Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness, and Hope of the World!

My heart is breaking as I write this pastoral letter to you. My heart cries with the Psalmist, “How long, O Lord, will you look on?” My soul is restless and disturbed. I keep praying, “Show me the way I should go” (Psalm 143:8), as I pray for people in harm's way while violent clashes continue and escalate. Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy!

It is with deep anguish, sorrow, and then righteous anger that I watched in abject horror, along with millions of people, the slow death of Mr. George Floyd. We all heard him cry out, “I can't breathe.” We watched in stunned silence as he lay constrained and gasped his last breaths under the choking knee.

Today we are confronted by two killers who steal breath. The corona virus shortens the breath of its victims. Racism chokes the breath, both figuratively and literally, out of its victims and suffocates righteousness from society. Life requires breath. Is breathing not a basic right?

The breath of God, however, fills people with renewed life. We remember that Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). This past Sunday, we read in Acts 2 about the Pentecost experience of those early believers. While they were gathered in a house in Jerusalem, they heard the rush of a mighty wind and flames like tongues of fire rested upon each of them. People who had come to the city from many nations were able to hear, in their own languages, these Spirit-filled believers speak of God's good news in Jesus Christ.

This breath of God changed the direction of history. It inaugurated the coming of the realm of God, a focal message that Jesus frequently proclaimed. It's intriguing that the Risen Christ used his forty days between his resurrection and ascension to speak about the realm of God (Acts 1:3). We are reminded that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The work of building the realm of God continues. Now we must act with courage and conviction as God's breath of justice and righteousness in our time and place.

The miracle of Pentecost was one of both speaking and hearing. We must claim the miracle of speaking. Those of us who claim Christ's name cannot stand idly by and allow racism free rein. We must condemn, boldly and loudly, the sin of racism. God's people are to speak up that racism does not have a place in God's reign.

We must also claim the miracle of hearing. We must hear the stories and the truths of victims of racism to whom we have turned a deaf ear. We must learn their language of suffering, pain, frustration, anger, hope, and resilience. We must amplify their voices.

I invite you, my sisters and brothers, to a time of prayer for the Pentecost miracle of the tongues and ears and to repentance. We must fall on our knees and ask God to open our mouths and ears and ask for God's forgiveness for our silence when we should have spoken out and our speaking when we should have been listening.

We in the Susquehanna Conference are called in our vision and mission to embody the beloved community of Christ. Martin Luther King Jr. broadened the term "beloved community" to describe a society in which no one goes hungry or homeless, racism and bigotry would be overcome by an inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood, and love and trust would triumph over fear and hate.

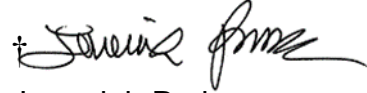
Beloved communities do not allow racism and prejudice to flourish. Beloved communities do not accept discrimination and violence against those who are different because of pigments of skin. Beloved communities do not, through silence, permit institutional racism. Beloved communities do not allow the cries of the oppressed to echo unanswered for generations.

As the believers at Pentecost told of God's deeds of power, so must we raise our voices to proclaim the good news of God's justice, righteousness, and promise of reconciliation and new life for those who turn from wicked ways. Let us as individuals and as a conference join together and rededicate ourselves to bringing the beloved community of Christ to fruition so that all may be free from the chains of hate and fear.

We are the season after Pentecost. It's about the fresh breath of God that creates the wind that changes the direction of human destiny toward justice, reconciliation, and peace. Let the hallowed wind of the Spirit ignite the holy fire of passion for and commitment and dedication to the vision of the Beloved Community of Christ, for such a time as this.

“How long, O Lord, will you look on?” As I utter those words, I must ask myself and each of you, How will we in church hasten the heralding of God’s reign? Indeed, we are in this together.

With You in Christ’s Ministry,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremiah Park". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross-like symbol at the beginning.

Jeremiah Park