

## **A Pastoral Letter to the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area**

Nearly a year ago, in a community overwhelmed with anger, grief, frustration, and despair at the shocking video images of the shooting death of Philando Castile, and then at the roiling protests that have followed, we—the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area—joined our voices together with each other and with many others in a cry for comfort, for equality, for justice.

We committed ourselves to prayer for the family of Philando Castile, that they would know our God's deep and abiding presence, and for the many others so deeply grieved by these events. We prayed for our community, that amidst its deep divides and fractured relationships, amidst the fear and anger especially of our black community, we in the church might find words of comfort and challenge to speak into the yawning chasm of societal fractures and divides. We prayed for our police officers and all who daily place themselves in potential harm's way in order to protect us. And we said, firmly and unequivocally, that Black Lives Matter, and we committed ourselves as a Presbytery to the work of understanding white privilege and to anti-racism.

That work is not done. Today, we are compelled to revisit those prayers and commitments in the aftermath of the acquittal of police officer Jeronimo Yanez, a verdict that ripped open a family's overwhelming grief and further caused our African-American brothers and sisters to fear anew that their lives indeed do not matter in this country.

As followers of Jesus, our task is to listen, to hear, to act, in response to the call of God and the voices of the people. And so we again join our voices in prayer for the family of Mr. Castile. But we must not stop there. We must commit ourselves anew to work for end the perpetual sense of fear and suspicion under which our African American brothers and sisters constantly live. Whether we live in a community with very few people of color or with many, no one of us has the luxury of being detached and unaffected. Those of our society who feel suspect and vulnerable are our very sisters and brothers in Christ. As Christians, we must stand with them.

We are challenged to look anew into the imperfect structures of our society; and to speak our belief that every person is created in the image of God, even as we confess our denial of that very belief in the sin of institutional racism. We must speak our belief that "Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church," knowing that, too often, we have allowed our ideological differences to fracture our unity in the One Body. We must challenge ourselves anew to proclaim Christ's words, "that they may all be one," knowing the essential need for all Christians of privilege to seek deeper understanding when so many of our brothers and sisters cry out for a justice they do not know.

Our African American brothers and sisters have implored us to raise our voices on their behalf. Together, we in the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area re-commit our voices and our actions to better seek justice and work for the good of all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Give us the determination to build new or deeper relationships, as together we seek new ways to partner

in work for a just society. Give us courage, in all that we do, to be not simply speakers of peace, but peacemakers.

The Presbytery Leadership Team, Sue Rutford, chair  
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