

Dear Presbytery of Northern New England,

This letter is mainly to our white siblings, pastors and church members. Take a moment, and sit with these questions:

*How hard would you fight if there was a knee pressed into your neck, slowly crushing the life out of your lungs?*

*How deep would your devastation be if you were forced to watch the slow murder of your partner, child, family member, friend, neighbor, and the only thing you could do was bear painful witness?*

*How wide would your fury be if you learned that the ones with the power and authority to cut short a life without a second thought would walk free, protected by a system that has never protected you?*

*How would those emotions of fury and devastation be expressed in a country where the same people in power and authority also tell you to wait, change takes time, and it's just a few "bad apples?"*

We know the truth, deep down in our bones, that it is the very systems and structures of this country that lead to the murder of Black people on an almost daily basis. Because even though we know some names - George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray - there are so many others whose names do not rise to national awareness. National Public Radio reported in a story released on May 31 that the rate at which Black Americans are killed by police is more than twice as high as that of white Americans. You can read that story "A Decade of Watching Black People Die" here: <https://www.npr.org/2020/05/29/865261916/a-decade-of-watching-black-people-die>

We know the truth, and yet we are unwilling to confront the systems and structures whose very purpose is to ensure that nothing will change. And that makes us complicit partners in the death of Black people, in the marginalization of Latinx and other immigrant communities, in the poverty that every day is a knee bearing down on the necks of over 140 million people in this country.

This letter is mainly for our white siblings in the church, because it is past time for us to be moved to action. It is past time for us to stop worrying about "rocking the boat" or "making a scene" or "being political." It is past time for us to follow where Jesus led and confront the forces in this country that lead to death and destruction.

This is what the decision to be a Matthew 25 Presbytery means: we will do the work of building vital congregations who are committed to dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty. Though the invitation is to focus on one aspect of this work, we also know that Jesus leads us to strive for a world where justice rolls down like streams of living water and the last have become first.

This is unmistakably and unapologetically the work of the church, our work. Is it easy? Of course not. Will it happen quickly? We didn't get here in a day and we won't change the bedrock nature of racist structures overnight. Could I lose my job? Maybe. But while we as white people in a society designed to privilege us because of the color of our skin might run the risk of losing a job, our Black siblings run the risk every day of losing their lives just by trying to live them.

There are resources that can help us and help our congregations, regardless of where we are in the journey to understanding and action. That is part of the gift of being a connectional church: if we are just joining this work or if we've been involved in the struggle for justice, true justice, for our whole lifetime, there is a way for us to follow Jesus down this road today.

It is time for us, white siblings, to fight hard for the very breath in the lungs of our Black siblings. It is time for us, white siblings, to feel the devastation in our very bones for the destruction caused by our systems and structures every day. It is time for us, white siblings, white Christians, to be moved by righteous fury to decisive action. It is time for us to truly be the body of Christ, following where Jesus leads, living into the Matthew 25 vision, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and actively working so that God's kingdom may truly come on earth, on this earth, today.

In Christ,

T.J. and Cindy

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