

June 7, 2020

Mississippi Annual Conference Cabinet
Mississippi Annual Conference General Conference Delegation
Mississippi Black Methodists for Church Renewal
Mississippi Committee on Religion and Race
Southeastern Jurisdiction Conference Lay Leaders Association
Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

The Mississippi Board of Laity writes this letter as a call to action in response to the murder of 46-year-old George Floyd, an African-American, when white Minneapolis, Minnesota, police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes while Floyd was handcuffed and lying face down on the street.

Whereas we, the Board of Laity, are responsible in accordance with the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church for fostering awareness of the role of laity in the congregation and in the world;

Whereas the Book of Discipline requires that we, the Board of Laity, provide for the ministry of the laity related to the objectives of the General Board of Discipleship, including helping persons to grow in their understanding of God that they may respond in faith and love, to the end that they increasingly identify all people regardless of race as children of God and members of the Christian community;

Whereas the ministry of the laity includes the duty of every Christian to help people see and hear the core and heart of the problem of racism in our culture;

Whereas what happened in Minneapolis is a symptom of a larger problem – a cultural pandemic of racism -- and therefore, people continue protesting for change;

Whereas United Methodist Social Principles declare that racism, manifested as sin, plagues and hinders our relationship with Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself;

Whereas United Methodist Social Principles affirm that in our culture white persons are granted unearned privileges and benefits that are denied to persons of color;

Whereas United Methodist Social Principles echo that racism breeds disparate treatment and lack of full access and equity in resources, opportunities, and participation in the Church and in society based on race or ethnicity;

Whereas United Methodist Social Principles recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons;

Whereas United Methodist Social Principles compel that we commit as the Church to move beyond symbolic expressions and representative models that do not challenge unjust systems of power and access;

Whereas racism in our culture is as pervasive today as it ever was;

Whereas our silence sustains the problem and in our silence we have sinned;

Whereas the sin of our continued silence calls for confession, repentance and action;

Whereas we must speak up, stand together and call attention to injustices being done, or they will continue;

Whereas we have the right to be fearful;

Whereas we have the right to be angry;

Whereas the Church is called to condemn what took place in Minneapolis in word and deed in the strongest possible terms;

Whereas the damage is so deep and the image of the senseless murder of George Floyd is so engrained in our collective conscious;

THEREFORE, we urge our Church to unite in lifting in prayer both the oppressed and the oppressors. We also seek a commitment that you will join us in working to establish justice in our world, in part through taking a corporate and visible stand against injustice and racism and against inhumane treatment of our African-American brothers and sisters by supporting the move of the 2020 General Conference to a city other than the freshly blood-stained Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The Board of Laity of the Mississippi Annual Conference

LaToya Redd Thompson, Conference Lay Leader
Brookaven District Lay Leader, Ora Franklin
East Jackson District Lay Leader, Darlene Dotherow
East Jackson Associate District Lay Leader, Rodger Wasson
Greenwood District Lay Leader, John McClay
Hattiesburg District Lay Leader, Corey Proctor
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New Albany District Lay Leader, Buddy Wiltshire
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Senatobia District Lay Leader, Cristen Barnard
Starkville District Lay Leader, Hal Smith
Tupelo District Lay Leader, Tom Wicker
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United Methodist Youth Representative, Shelby Briggs
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