A Letter to Western Pennsylvanians from United Methodists Who Love Them

“Shout loudly; don’t hold back;  
Raise your voice like a trumpet!  
Announce to my people their crime,  
To the house of Jacob their sins” (Isaiah 58:1, CEB).

Beloved friends in Christ,

The prophet’s cry to Israel addresses us where we are right now: we must shout out today, and announce to our own people our crime of racism. In our baptismal vows, each one of us promises to “accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.” We cannot deny the evil and injustice of the oppression Black and Brown people face every day. We must reflect seriously on biases we have, assumptions we hold, and privileges we enjoy related to systematic racism. During this season of Pentecost the Spirit calls us to lament, to repent, and to act.

LAMENT:

Friends, can we feel the anguish George Floyd felt with a knee being firmly pressed on his neck, crying out for his mother, gasping in vain for breath? Can we feel the terror Ahmaud Arbery felt as he was hunted down on the streets? Can we feel the astonished betrayal Breonna Taylor felt as she was shot down in her own home? Can we weep with their friends and families over these tragic killings? In Jesus’ name, we lament today for and with these, and many, many other victims of the racial injustice our sinful indifference perpetuates.

REPENT:

O God, we shout loudly and repent of the sin of racism in our lives. We invite our fellow believers to join us as together we attempt to put our preconceived notions aside. We must admit there is something called “white privilege.” According to the United Methodist Book of Resolutions (Paragraph 3376), “White, European Americans enjoy a wide range of privileges that are denied to persons of color in our society.” White privilege assumes that you can purchase a home wherever you choose; white privilege expects courteous service in stores and restaurants; white privilege has no fear of police. We cannot allow white privilege to blunt our awareness and concern that Black and Brown people cannot make these assumptions. How white Americans choose to
respond to racism can make a profound difference. We repent for being comfortable in positions of privilege, while people of color still experience racism every day.

**ACT:**
If we desire to be like Jesus, then we must not only lament and repent, but act in the world. Pray daily for justice. Pray about what you can do. Then let that prayer become action. Therefore, let us:

- Rise against police brutality in all forms; call on our government officials to institute policing reform and create County Civilian-Police Review Boards.
- Speak out against a criminal justice system that is often neither blind nor just.
- Follow Black leaders, activists, and community organizers on social media and share their content.
- Find and support Black-owned businesses in your community.
- Recognize the inequity of our educational system - does your school district have a designated equity director? Are your teachers offered racial-cultural sensitivity training? Have you reviewed your school district’s curriculum for accurate history and racial education?
- Participate in non-violent protests and marches that are taking place and open your ears and heart to hear the pain and anguish of your Black and Brown neighbors.
- Purchase and read books on racial justice and anti-racism by Black authors. Connect online for additional resources.

*This letter was written by clergy from the Pittsburgh District.*

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