



The death of George Floyd in the custody of Minneapolis law enforcement officers has become the tipping point for grief, outrage, and protest across our nation. Floyd's death, the most recent in a long line of suspicious deaths of black people at the hands of those sworn to protect, has galvanized the American social conscience and so requires reflection and concurrent action by people of faith.

For over 400 years we have wrestled with the scourge of white supremacy in North America which has enslaved, colonized, dehumanized, marginalized, abused, repressed, and murdered people of color and minorities solely due to the color of their skin. From the end of slavery to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, we hoped that progress would end systemic racism in the United States. Sadly, we have known—and bear witness to once again—the brutal treatment of Americans of color and minorities. At its core is an entrenched discriminatory system which disproportionately targets Americans of color and minorities, burdening them with oppression and violence, injustice in our legal system and by law enforcement. This in turn perpetuates poverty, loss of freedom, disadvantage, and systemic societal inequality. It has fostered a culture of fear against people of color. It has made African Americans, particularly males, fear for their lives every time they leave their homes and parents wonder if their children will safely return.

As members of the Bethlehem Interfaith Group (B.I.G.), we raise our voices in support of and solidarity with those who are peacefully demonstrating for racial justice, and commit ourselves to being partners and allies for systemic change. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, "In a free society, only some are guilty but all are responsible."

- We recognize and acknowledge the historic and contemporary silence and complicity of predominantly white faith communities and their leaders on issues of systemic racism, white supremacy, and racial injustice.
- We admit that we ourselves have been silent at times we should have spoken; we have been tentative or passive at times we should have taken action.
- We pledge our commitment to breaking that pattern, and to being held accountable if and when we fall short.
- We call on legislators at the national, state, and local levels to fundamentally change their approach to law enforcement and the justice system so that they serve and protect all Americans as equal before the law, regardless of race or ethnicity.
- We call on local law enforcement agencies to exercise appropriate evaluative methods to insure the highest mental health and ethical commitments of those they hire as law enforcement officers, as well as high standards of education and continuing training and evaluation for those persons. We urge all law enforcement agencies to follow the lead of those who have turned away from militarized policing models and towards methods that emphasize de-escalation and community partnership.
- We call upon all in society to examine and turn from the personal biases and prejudices that have contributed to systemic and personal racism, and to join in the work of disrupting and dismantling racism in all its expressions and structures.

We recognize the righteous anger of those targeted by systemic racism and the deep sense of pain among black people over the senseless murder of both George Floyd and all those who have been hurt and killed year after year. To that, we add our own outrage and tears. We know that those who are privileged seldom notice systemic injustice and the violence that accompanies it. But if we sow injustice and violence in our legal structures and cultural norms, we must not be surprised when we reap public outcries and actions of rage. When violence arises alongside peaceful protest, we must recall Martin

Luther King, Jr.'s assertion that "a riot is the language of the unheard." This tension between peace and violence burdens our hearts, for we are people who yearn for justice and peace for all. Yet racism itself is a violence against human beings and a sin against God who created every human being in God's image. Like all sin, racism will not readily give up its hold upon our national consciousness and requires heartfelt repentance and true change.

As the Bethlehem Interfaith Group (B.I.G.), we refuse to give up on our sacred values of justice and freedom for all, and will never relinquish our belief that the bonds of affection between and among us can be repaired and replenished. Bound by our trust in a God of steadfast faithfulness and unending compassion to all of humanity, we share God's vision of human flourishing which dwells beyond the boundaries of human hearts and cultural claims. This vision calls us to seek the well-being of all who are still enslaved by the failures of our nation. We know that "justice delayed is justice denied." For 400 years, every generation has failed our African American siblings. During this time of civil unrest, we must reflect and understand that to achieve positive change and an end to racism, we must act. Let us, in faith, become the generation that finds a way to transform the nightmare of racism into the dream of God.

The Bethlehem Interfaith Group includes:

Rev. JC Austin, First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem
Rev. Beth Goudy, Metropolitan Community Church of the Lehigh Valley
Rev. David Brown, Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran,
Rev. Dr. Pamela Payne, Trinity Episcopal Church Bethlehem
Rev. Melissa Johnson, Advent Moravian Church
Rabbi Michael Singer, Congregation Brith Sholom
Rabbi Allen Juda, Congregation Brith Sholom
M. Said Selmanlar, Lehigh Dialogue Center
Rev. Dr. Stephen A. Simmons, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Honorably Retired
Rev. Cynthia Simmons, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Honorably Retired
Sister Bonnie Kleinschuster, School Sisters of St. Francis Bethlehem
Sister Virginelle Makos, School Sisters of St. Francis Bethlehem
Rev. Jennika Borger, Moravian College
Rev. Dr. Deborah Appler, Moravian Seminary
Rt. Rev. Hopeton Clennon, Central Moravian Church
Rev. Anthony Mongiello, St. Anne's Catholic Church Bethlehem
Rev. Giuseppe Esposito, St. Anne's Catholic Church Bethlehem
Rev. Nina Patton-Semerod, Epworth United Methodist Church
Imam Beytullah Colak, Respect Graduate School
Rev. Candy LaBar, Wesley United Methodist Church
Rev. Jennifer Nichols, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Lehigh Valley Friends Meeting (Quakers)
Rev. Madelyn Campbell, Unitarian Universalist Church of the Lehigh Valley
Rev. Canon Dale Grandfield, Cathedral Church of the Nativity
Rev. Dan Miller, Edgeboro Moravian Church