

“HOW LONG, HOW LONG? “

A Statement and Call from the Board of Durham Congregations In Action

Inviting endorsement and support from Durham area faith-communities and ministers.

How long, oh how long.

Our hearts are breaking. The pain seems everywhere. Frustration mounts and out of frustration people act in ways that cause more pain. Where is the healing? How can we help become the change we hope for?

As members of Durham’s diverse faith communities, we mourn the destruction and death being caused by Covid-19 and by racism. The sudden spread of this new virus has brought widespread death, suffering, and unemployment. The enduring presence of white supremacy has meant that people of color and especially Black people have been hit disproportionately hard by the disease both medically and economically.

And along with the pandemic came in shocking succession the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. This last killing of an unarmed Black man by police broke open the long-festering wounds of racism and surfaced again the ongoing experience of racial oppression in criminal justice systems.

In grief, solidarity and determination, we deplore and denounce White supremacy and systemic aggression against Black and Brown members of our society, along with the escalating violence that has resulted in their injury and murder. Institutions of authority that cannot solve and eradicate patterns of systemic injustice and abuse not only fail in their responsibility to the public they serve, but also risk losing their own legitimacy.

Many have grown frustrated with limits on behavior taken to control the spread of Covid-19. People need to get back to work. People want to be with friends and family. People want life to be “normal” again. But as the virus continues to spread, maintaining physical distance from other people remains the best way to reduce infections and limit deaths.

Many have grown frustrated with racism. People need to be respected and treated with dignity by others. People need an end to oppression by police and other public officials. People need opportunity and support to fulfill their humanity. But demonstrations also put people in danger of infection by the virus as some demonstrators are careless about wearing masks and rallies have often failed at social-distancing.

Witnessing the #ICantBreathe protests in Minneapolis, across North Carolina and the country, we share in the pain and passion for change of organizers. Alongside necessary reform of law and custom that are long overdue, it is vital that we hold and maintain safe spaces in which people may express grief and outrage, and work for transformative change with hope.

Witnessing police over-reactions and provocations in response to legitimate public protest in other communities, we recognize and appreciate the responsible conduct of law enforcement personnel in Durham during the past week's local public actions. We also recognize that some peaceful demonstrations in some communities have been used as occasions for violence and vandalism, often as a result of outside agitators who want to incite violence and property destruction in the community rather than protest racist police practices. As Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi did in their public actions for social transformation, we condemn such destructive action, as well as provocative threats and violence by police on the streets, as corrosive and poisonous toward democratic community and social change for greater shared justice.

We renew our call with advocates from the Durham FADE Coalition in 2014 that the Durham Civilian Police Review board be strengthened and reconstituted to conduct independent investigations with subpoena authority, as in San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington DC. We call on the NC Legislature to make the changes in state law necessary to permit municipal governments to institute this tool of accountability and reform. Systemic change such as this is required to root out the legitimization of racialized social violence by our criminal-justice institutions.

We also call on the City of Durham to invest additional resources and funding with the Durham Human Relations Commission for pursuing and advancing anti-racism work in our community.

Our faith commitment leads us to say: "behind every human face is the face of God." That means we weep with all those who weep. And we hope for an end to this pain. It also means that we commit ourselves to becoming healers: to work to limit the spread of Covid-19 and to struggle to end racism as it infects our own lives and the lives of our community.

We pray you will join us in that healing.

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