

Opt-In: Engaging Faith for Racial Justice

In this Advent season, we celebrate the mystery of God becoming *Emmanuel*, God with us in the flesh. (Mt. 1:23). Through that wondrous gift we believe that God affirms the blessedness and dignity of all flesh and seeks to restore and reconcile a world that is broken by selfishness and sin.

The violent deaths of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner at the hands of white police officers—and much that has happened in the aftermath—highlight our human failure to treat all human flesh with dignity and equal care. We know that these deaths are only three among many. What we have witnessed over these past months reveals the deep brokenness of humanity and the long history and reality of racial oppression and tension in our land. Amidst the varieties of concerns raised about trends and practices in local police forces and about a justice system that too often doesn't seem "just," the reality of racism emerges as a critical factor.

Our hearts break for the families of those who have been killed. Our hearts break for the deep wound of racism upon which so much of our history as a nation has been built. Our hearts break for those who face daily indignities due to the color of their skin. Our hearts break for the ways that the Church has been a source and instrument of racial oppression. Our hearts break for the silence of so many Churches and people of faith on issues of racial justice and for the instances in which many White Christians have "opted out" of the work for justice in solidarity with our Black and Brown sisters and brothers.

Foundry United Methodist Church is recommitting to actively OPT-IN. We know that the historical, political, socio-economic, emotional, and spiritual issues involved are complex and that all who engage in this work become vulnerable in a variety of ways. Our commitment is to be a people of prayer, compassion, mutual respect, accountability, and humility as we seek to engage our faith for racial justice.

Engaging faith for racial justice begins with prayer and serious self-examination. Racism is not a black problem, it is a human problem that has deeply infected our culture, our systems, and our own ways of thinking and seeing. We need God to help us see and heal our brokenness.

Engaging faith for racial justice is not a "progressive" issue, but a Christian issue and an issue of conscience for all people of good will. Our work is with and for all marginalized, disenfranchised, and oppressed communities. We give thanks that there are persons of all faith traditions and none, civilians, law enforcement officers, and politicians, women and men, young and old, and persons of all races and cultures who are taking up the call to work for racial justice in mutually respectful and non-violent ways.

Engaging faith for racial justice is about systemic change which we know does not happen quickly. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will guide, confront, and inspire us as we continue to work for justice in the long-term. To “opt-in” is to engage in prayer, listening, study, and a process of consciousness raising, policy review and amendment, and the healing of relationships between communities where trust has been absent or broken.

Engaging faith for racial justice is about embodying God’s love in ways that honor the dignity and sacred worth of all people. To this work we pledge ourselves and pray that through our prayers and actions we may grow closer to the day when “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.” (Isaiah 40:5)



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