

A Call to Presbyterians to Stand in Solidarity with the People of Ferguson
By Landon Whitsitt, August 19, 2014

Sisters and Brothers of the Presbyterian Church (USA):

I write you today in my role as the Executive of the Synod of Mid-America regarding the past week's events in Ferguson, MO, a community in the Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery, one of our member presbyteries. I am appealing to you on behalf of those suffering in our own backyard.

For 10 days, the eyes of the world have been focused on the town of Ferguson, MO. We have watched as the family and friends of Michael Brown grieve the horrendous and senseless loss of life of this young man. We have watched as the Ferguson community and people throughout the nation and world have expressed outrage over the killing of yet another unarmed young black man. We have watched as law enforcement has repeatedly inflamed and aggravated the situation, arresting peaceful protesters and using tear gas on the crowds that include children and elderly, the use of which is a war crime under international law.

It is good that we have watched and not turned away. Many have come to believe that we have moved past Watts, that we have moved past LA. But we have not. The testimony of those who have lived through some of the worst moments of our nation's history has born witness that we have, again, arrived at a familiar place. We are, again, singing the same old song. We must not turn our faces away, we must force ourselves to acknowledge and admit that we continue to fail as a people. We must confess that we have not been the people that God has created and called us to be.

Today I call on the Presbyterian Church (USA) to do more than simply watch.

For several years, our denomination has engaged the words of the Belhar Confession as we have considered adding it to our official confessional standards. Whether or not that occurs, we can affirm the truth of its words:

We believe

that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;

that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged

that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;

that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;

that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;

that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;

that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;

that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;

that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

To this end, I call on the members and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (USA), over 90% of whom are White, to stand with the people of Ferguson and “witness against and strive against” systemic, institutionalize racial injustice.

We must “as the possession of God...stand where the Lord stands, namely against the injustice of the wronged.” Sisters and Brothers, we must stand arm in arm with the people of Ferguson. Black bodies matter and our white bodies will signify that the killing of black bodies is unacceptable.

If you live in or around St Louis please come and walk with the protestors. Listen to their cries, and join them in the call for justice.

If you live farther away, find the members of your own community who are standing against this injustice. Listen to *their* cries, and join them in *their own* call for justice.

The *Brief Statement of Faith* tells us that the Holy Spirit “gives us courage...to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.” So as we work, let us also pray.

Let us pray for:

an end to our warring madness

an end to racism, classism and the way we criminalize a whole generation of youth and young adults

peace officers, that they may keep the peace with justice and equity

mothers who have lost their children to gun violence

the courage to cross lines that we have never crossed, and to come to know those we have considered "other"

to see one another as those who are made in God's image

forgiveness for the ways in which we perpetuate fear and hatred

forgiveness for the silence of good people.

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