

Amos on Canfield Drive

A Pastoral Letter Calling for Justice, Peace, and Hopeful Vision

*Do you know what I want? I want justice
– oceans of it. I want fairness – rivers of
it. – Amos 5:21-24 (MSG)*

Since August 9th our nation has felt angst, fear, and frustration surrounding the killing of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager not only proved to be a shocking incident, but exposed the unjust systems that are deep-seated in our society, and placed America's racial divide under a microscope. "Let justice flow like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," we often pray the words of Amos in times such as this.

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Ferguson, Missouri on Saturday, August 30th. As witnesses to this movement, we experience the unmistakable presence of injustice tugging at our sleeves, accompanying us along the roads where countless individuals and communities have marched to start a restorative flow on the broken terrains of systemic injustice. "We can't stop now," the people boldly proclaimed, calling for reform in race and law enforcement.

The aftermath of Ferguson revealed yet again disturbing realities and statistics on black-white inequality, and a chasm along racial lines in public opinion on whether the shooting of Michael Brown "raises important issues about race that need to be discussed."¹ America's socio-political ills leave us in grief, as these divisions are visible evidence to the "empirical validations of the broken communal covenant in church and society," perpetuated by racism, personal prejudice, and structural inequality.²

We grieve, but are held fast in hope as people of faith. The 211th General Assembly (1999) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a policy entitled "Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community." The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes racism as sin, a spiritual problem that denies the "gift of God's own life offered to all humanity" expressed in creation and redemption.³ It also asserts that the task of dismantling racism is a continuous struggle that "requires discernment, prayer, and worship based

¹ See Pew research <http://www.people-press.org/2014/08/18/stark-racial-divisions-in-reactions-to-ferguson-police-shooting/>

² *Minutes*, 211th General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1999, p. 277.

³ *Book of Order*, (2001-2002), Appendix 2, "Call to Christian Commitment and Action to Combat Racism", p. D-14.

action.”⁴ Given these points, to pray for “justice to flow like a river” calls us to proactively and strategically oppose the forces of racism with the help of the Holy Spirit.

In the wake of the shooting of Michael Brown, staff at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) came together for prayer and discussion on “What is the Church to do with Ferguson, Michael Brown, and Hands Up Don’t Shoot?” The format of this discussion has been developed into a conversation guide resource, which is available on the Racial Justice website.⁵ In addition to this event, national staff members are continuously striving to help Presbyterians engage in antiracism work in congregations, Mid Councils, and across the church.

The voice of Amos calls to us across the ages. We must not close our ears to the cry that challenges us with both the courage and tenacity to fight for peace and justice. In proactive solidarity with the marginalized and the oppressed, and with the community of Ferguson, we pray and work for *Healing* — for warmth to loosen the confines of our cold realities of racism and poverty; *Forgiveness* — for tacitly complying with systems that privilege some and deny the fullness of life to others; and *Conscientiousness* — for painstaking devotion and discipline to inform our sociopolitical realities with the Gospel significance of human worth.

Sera Chung
Associate for Gender and Racial Justice

⁴ The Initiative Team on Racism and Racial Violence, *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1999), p. 9.

⁵ <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/resource-hosting-racial-justice-conversation/>