



CARL SPAIN CENTER
RACE STUDIES & SPIRITUAL ACTION

Letters of Conscience to the Churches in America

A Courageous Christian Response
to White Supremacy



FOREWORD



Dearly beloved,

It gives me great joy to share Letters of Conscience to the Churches in America. These are courageous voices calling for peace in an hour of boiling hostility. We join together to express the hope of seeing soon the disappearance of the crying clouds of hatred that are raining acid chaos upon the uncovered head of a dis-United States of America.

We as Christians boldly assert that political right-wing extremists should not be given the authority to force Christians into a timid posture of cowardly silence. Despite white supremacists' clamoring for a race war, as committed disciples we strongly believe that God's vision still calls for us to be peacemakers in the world. Because of this conviction, we are compelled to speak and to write!





We proclaim that the demonic gates of hell shall not prevail against Christ's church.

Evil will face certain defeat, and the false prophets of politics that collude with the spirit of Antichrist will be revealed as the sons and daughters of perdition.

Soon God's angels shall roll up the skies as a divine manuscript being put away after a significant speech. The divine logic of justice and peace since the beginning of time will have been spoken into the entire fabric of the universe. Therefore, stand firmly until faith shall become sight.





The letters of conscience call for the churches in America to be the prophetic voice the nation desperately needs in this moment of social disorientation. Let us keep hoping in love until every unjust scale is forced into balance, and until every oppressive grave is reopened conceding victory to the liberating King!

Blessings with Love,

Jerry Taylor

Executive Director of the Carl Spain Center on Race
Studies and Spiritual Action





Friends,

These letters of conscience announce what our national intelligence agencies have clearly been saying: our enemies intend to sow discord in our midst. They aim to disrupt our country, tearing at its moral fabric by stoking racist ideologies and contempt.

Tragically, systemic racism has deeply scarred our world, and the truth is we are not well. With little effort, our enemies can inflame passions through websites, social media, demonstrations, and gossip. Individuals are now so defensive and fragile that they close their eyes to any facts presented, any case that is made. This non-rational, unreasonable position represents a seared conscience that is prey to the Evil One. Christians are always to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (James 1:19).





To my white friends who are reading, I would ask these questions: have you thought deeply about your privilege, the advantages that have come your way? Have you talked about privilege with a person of color? When was the last time you had a long, two-way conversation with someone from another race about racism? Have you heard about mass incarceration and what it means? Has someone informed you about the present inequities in health-care as they relate to race? If this is all unfamiliar to you, receive these letters, and keep listening.

My prayer for the church is that we find courage and endurance. We need these to hear the cry of the hurting in this hour of need. We all know that the easiest and most effective way to promote public health and stop the spread of a disease is to limit our contact with the source.





For over one hundred years, serious crises like the Spanish flu of old have been beaten by social distancing. What I would ask you to consider in the present moment is keeping your distance from those who would promote hate and violence, either in word and deed.

Keep on praying my friends. The Lord is near.

Jason Fikes,
Director, Abilene Christian University Press





Family,

I join my voice to the chorus of others standing with Dr. Jerry Taylor and other leaders among us. No more. No more. It is so far past time. No more.

We are called into relationship with a God in whose image we are all made. Let us have eyes to see every attempt by the powers of evil to use this pandemic to further any racist divisions in our land. Let us believe the stories of people of color even when our experience may be different. Let us call each other to speech and behavior that honors the other. Let us walk in courage and use our voices to advocate. Free us from fear. May the veil that shrouds our eyes be lifted. May our sensitivity and offense be laid down at the altar. Stir in us confession and conviction.





Holy Spirit destroy the agenda of white supremacists. Tear down the plots of nations who would encourage such evil. Bring light. Raise up your people to stand against it.

Make us into an army of structural disassembly and restorative renovation. Help us tear down the structures that enslave and perpetuate poverty, illness, lack of access, crisis, hopelessness, fear, and anger. Embolden us to join you in the restoration of all things. Help us hear the voices of those unlike us. Help us to see the pain and not turn our eyes away. May the anguish move us to action. And may we pray. Not social media thoughts and prayers. The prayers that flow from an interior life so attuned to who you are that we can't help but pray and work.





"Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves. Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is...Life is good when you are happy; but much better when others are happy because of you." Pope Francis

Arlene Kasselmann





Sisters and Brothers,

I join Dr. Jerry Taylor in concern that racial divisions, violent white nationalist groups, and hate groups are on the rise in the United States. It is my conviction that people of faith must rise up to shine the light of love, model radical acceptance, and lead in respecting human dignity. For followers of Jesus, this is at the very center of the calling to love God and love our neighbors.

While political polarization makes it challenging for clergy and lay leaders to speak out against nationalist ideologies, let us pray for the courage and imagination required to lead our faith communities in practicing love of neighbor, a bipartisan call. May we unite around love of every neighbor and against hate of every kind.

Prayerfully,
Sara Barton



To Whom It May Concern,



I am a black Haitian woman. I spent my adolescent years in a Catholic High School in Princeton. I attended a predominantly white Christian private university with the hopes of becoming a missionary who could contribute to healing in Haiti. In my journey, I attended seminary and worked for multiple white churches for my ministry training. In seminary and these churches, I learned and whole-heartedly came to believe that Christianity offered humanity the opportunity to reach its full potential through death, love, powerlessness, grace, and forgiveness; rather than through power, self-serving acts, and wealth. In Christianity, in the life of Jesus, in the incomparable God of Israel, and in the lives of the saints, we witness this wholesome and restorative work of God through the most unassuming people. People who live through dying, who heal through forgiveness, find power through powerlessness and defeat hatred through love. I was taught that God worked to bring wholeness through such unassuming people





and that God's eyes were first and foremost on the marginalized people of the world.

Nevertheless, I am ashamed to say that while my education has allowed me to glimpse the beauty of the unassuming Gospel, I have yet to experience the fullness of this Gospel among many of our white Christian institutions.

Where are the unassuming Christ-followers, who are called to challenge the powerful Herods, the Sadducees, and religious experts of our day and to welcome the forgotten and outcasts of our society? Where is the Church, the alternative institution not easily influenced or bribed by the government, which is called to be a source of refuge for these Christ-followers? I've been asking these questions since my time in seminary. Amidst the rise of mass incarceration, the criminalization of black, brown, and poor people, where is the church and where are the unassuming Christians?





Amidst the increase of police brutality against people of color, where is the church and where are the Christians? Amidst the disparity between the public school system in lower-income communities and affluent communities where is the church and where are the Christians? Amidst the gentrification of poor communities where is the church and where are the Christians?

Where are the Christ-followers, the unassuming Christians? They have been lulled to sleep by the individualistic capitalist lullaby of American culture.

American Christians believe in living comfortable and secure lives, we strive to acquire more wealth, power, and prestige, we encourage individualism, we reduce following Christ to the change of one's heart, and thus we believe that we must work with the government and the religious elites not against them, we want the best for our children, our





parents, our grandchildren, and ourselves (while not considering the best for others and their children, parents, and grandchildren).

We American Christians have forsaken the implications of having a transformed heart. If a transformed heart does not lead to a wholly transformed counter-cultural life that cares for and actively defends the weak, then was the heart really transformed? We have mistaken counter-cultural to mean sending our children to private Christian schools, going to church on Sunday, not cursing, being good stewards of our finances, having a monogamous relationship, taking mission trips to gain a spiritual high, and volunteering at the shelter to validate our own "selflessness". We do this as a self-congratulatory aside but few allow the plight of the vulnerable to consume their lives.





Now more than ever, I ask where is the Church and where are the Christians? COVID-19 is more than just a virus. COVID-19 has heightened the disparity between the elites and the poor. It has viciously attacked black communities and it has taken away several jobs.

Finally, COVID-19 has served as a catalyst for the rising number of hate groups in our country. The despair caused by our unjust capitalist society and heightened by this pandemic, I fear, is preparing us for something much worse. How will the church respond? How will we, Christians, respond? Will we continue to live our secluded lives? Will we continue to seek our own well-being? Will we continue to blindly support a government that intentionally neglects and exploits the poor and the minorities of our society?





I am urging us to wake up! To become unassuming in our beliefs. To stand with the poor and the marginalized just like Christ stood with the poor and the marginalized and to challenge the political and religious elites just like Christ challenged the political and religious elites. Now more than ever, I urge the church to be an alternative and counter-cultural institution that serves as a refuge for the powerless, the broken, the marginalized, and the forgotten.

In Christ,
Gloria Hagood



To Whom It May Concern,



I am a white Christian committed to standing with my African American brothers and sisters—and all fellow citizens of color—against any system or condition that deprives them of human dignity and equity. As a historian I have spent the last three decades studying how the belief that white people were superior to all others shaped the ways we organized society in this country since its beginning.

Belief in white superiority has taken on different forms in different periods. When slavery was abolished, the idea took the form of forced segregation and discriminatory laws. With the coming of the Civil Rights movement, most white citizens assumed that outlawing certain discriminatory practices automatically equalized access to good employment and housing, equal treatment in the criminal justice system, and healthcare for everyone. In reality, a wide gap still exists between Black and white Americans in every category.*





The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened visibility of the disparity between Black and white citizens' access to preventive measures and good healthcare. The overall health of African Americans is significantly worse than that of whites even when adjusted for education and wealth. Because Black and Latinx workers occupy jobs that are not suitable to working from home at a higher rate than white citizens (food workers, janitorial staff, hotel workers, etc.), they are having to continue to go into work or are losing their jobs because of shutdowns in proportionately greater numbers. None of this is new. The reasons behind these disparities are deeply rooted in the ways people of color have always been allowed to participate in American life by those who controlled political power.

And now, reports indicate that some white supremacists are talking of using the COVID-19 virus to target people of color and law enforcement officials.





White Christians must not and cannot minimize the threat felt by our brothers and sisters of color posed by such reports nor by the long-standing systems that harm them as a whole every day. As followers of Christ, it is not an option to refuse to see and oppose injustice. We must be vocal and active in our support. I urge you and your church to make this support public in this time of great need. "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. (Isaiah 1:17).

In Christ,
Douglas A. Foster





To All Who Call Upon the Name of Christ Jesus,

An ever present condition of the human journey has been the internal struggles of fear, pride and selfishness manifested in the external struggles between ethnic, religious and national identities. These enemies of faith and peace continue to afflict the world at every turn. Today, our nation is torn by the emerging racism that has lain only partially camouflaged these past few decades. A deep self-centeredness lies at the root of most of these prejudices, for fear, group selfishness and jaded religious values only mask what lies in the hearts of many- self-preservation above all. All this happens, even in the most evil forms of white supremacy movements, and most Christians say nothing. Racial, ethnic and social unity should be one of the strongest defining characteristic of God's church today, bridge building in times of crisis.





He who taught us to love at all costs, sacrifice the self for others, bring the marginalized to the center of our concerns, lose our own identities in the deeper realities of faith in the Cosmic God, and regard all humanity as one, This One, the Lord Christ, has shown us a better way, a narrow way that leads to life. We must not surrender to the broader ways of tribalism, dominance, privilege and power, for these lead to death—death of our own better being, death of a better way of life, death of our sensitivities to what is right and good. This Jesus who sought out the weak, poor, vulnerable and sick has demonstrated the eternal nature of the God we worship, and He has taught us to lose the fears that bind and master us, especially the fear of losing our self-appraised worth.

We must lose what we think we are to gain who we really are in relationship to the Almighty. And this covenant relationship with God must be





expressed in covenantal relationship with all around us- we must love the brothers and sisters whom we can see.

Jesus never identified with the ruling powers. He never used administrative rights or political agendas to project or define the values of the Kingdom of God. We should be ever wary of political methods of manipulation, on all sides. Power, privilege and prosperity are not signatory rights or even basic values of the Kingdom of Heaven. Movements like those we see in American history that base their agendas and hopes on racial, monetary or political identities and/or goals do not represent the Spirit of Christ. Being the least of all, servant to all, denying self, humbling ourselves, forgiving others, selling our goods for others, seeking the benefit of others, loving all with no conditions- these are the hallmarks of Christ's Gospel.





Why do we hide behind our tribal, political, regional, ethnic perceived needs rather than bowing to the Lord of all? Justice cannot flow down from mountains into streams of life when we build dams of prejudice, hatred and selfishness. Fear is the cement holding together the stones of these dams of prejudice. Fear. Fear of what? Do not fear, He says, over and over again.

God's called ones must be better. We must do better. Immediate contexts and struggles will fade with time. Where will we be when all the dust clears and time reveals who was standing with Christ? Who stood for righteousness and love?

9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew,





circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.... Colossians 3.9-12 (NASV)

Christ IS ALL, even the barbarians and Scythian pagans; Christ IS IN ALL, even the lowest of the low and highest of the high. How can we refuse the eyes of Christ? How can we deafen ourselves to the witness of apostolic scripture?

I challenge each and every one to pray in this manner. Try it. Do not be afraid.

"Lord, help me to lose myself and see what you see. Lord have mercy."

With Hope that Christ will be formed in us,
Dan McVey

Educator, Pilgrim and Grandfather who wants his loved ones to see a better world





Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Renowned novelist, William Faulkner, once said:
"The past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past."

In 1857, U. S. Supreme Court Chief Justice, Roger B. Taney, stated in the Dred Scott Case that black people had "no rights which the white man was bound to respect." On February 2, 1861, Texas state legislators chose to secede from the United States of America to maintain and protect the "institution known as negro slavery—the servitude of the African to the white race within her limits—a relation that had existed from the first settlement of her wilderness by the white race, and which her people intended to exist in all future time." Had their wishes prevailed, white slave-holders in Texas would have enslaved black in perpetuity. A month later, Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederate United States of America, asserted: "Our new government is founded upon the great truth...that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery,





subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition.”

The enslavement of black people in America and its attendant racist ideologies laid the groundwork for the unjust and inhumane treatment of African Americans that continues into the 21st century.

African Americans, in the words of one noted leader, are “free but not equal.” COVID-19 has sliced through the façade of political rhetoric and religious pretense; and it has exposed lingering disparities in economics, education, housing, legal justice, and access to health care.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the latest data show that nearly one-third of those who have died from COVID-19 in the United States are black people. This pandemic has compounded African Americans’ epidemic of poverty, diabetes, obesity, and asthma.





Healing will only begin in our land when Christians stand up and be counted. It is high time that our white brothers and sisters come to grips with the facts that all lives matter—yes, black lives, brown lives, red lives, yellow lives, and the like (James 2:9). Please stand and be counted among those who denounce and dethrone the spirit of white supremacy that continues to reign in our religious institutions and structural systems. Peter Marshall was right: “If you don’t stand for something you will fall for anything.”

Because He lives and loves forever,
Edward J. Robinson





As followers of Jesus, we find ourselves in times in which we must particularly be aware of any malice in our own hearts... as Dr. Taylor so profoundly reminded us. As we consider our fellow citizens of this country, I pray we will remind ourselves of the truth that each and every person is made in the image of God. Believing this to be so informs the ways we treat each person we encounter. I pray we might "take every thought and make it obedient to Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5)

Dr. Taylor reminded us of Dr. King's question... Where do we go from here? Are we moving toward community or chaos? How might we move toward community?

I pray each of us would resist the desire for dominance and power.

I pray we would seek first God's Kingdom over the kingdoms of this world.





I pray our eyes would be always open to the places where division is happening so that we might be peacemakers. I pray that we would respond to slander firmly with truth. I pray that we might have courage to stand against those who seek to elevate white supremacy. I pray that we would shine a light on inequities in our systemic structures that cause harm to our people of color.

I pray for those who are fighting sickness. Cover them with your hand of healing and comfort. I pray for those who are suffering financially during this very challenging time. I pray we would act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

In Christ,
Amy Boone





Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the day of our baptisms, each of us was baptized into an entirely new way of life-- something Paul makes clear in Romans 6:4. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death," Paul writes, "in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

It is Jesus-- his life, his teachings, his values, and his priorities -- who defines for us what that new life means. Even a casual reading of the gospels makes it clear that marginalized people -- poor people, hungry people, and oppressed people -- stood at the top of Jesus' concerns. His favorite topic was what he called "the kingdom of God" -- that kingdom in which the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, strangers are welcomed, and those who are sick and in prison are cared for. (Mt. 25:35-40 and Luke 18:18-25, among many other passages)





We live in a time when Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God have taken on a special urgency, for in times of crisis -- and everyone understands the seemingly boundless dimensions of the crisis we are in today -- the poor, the vulnerable, the sick, and the oppressed always suffer the most. That crisis, caused by the COVID-19 coronavirus, is compounded by hatred toward blacks, toward Latinx, toward gays, toward women, toward Jews--toward anyone, really, who can easily be cast as "the other." If you not only are poor, but also hated because of your race or some other defining characteristic, then you are doubly vulnerable in times like these.

This reality places on Christians-- people who are christ followers -- a special burden to protect, speak for, and care for the weak and vulnerable.

If we are serious about our baptisms and the commitments we made on that special day, then now is the time to renew that commitment and to





join with other brothers and sisters who share that commitment on behalf of those Jesus called "the least of these."

The dilemma we face is that much of popular American religion -- much of evangelical Christianity -- has obscured the call of Jesus. Millions of American Christians believe the Christian faith is a private affair that involves just Jesus and me. And millions of those same American Christians also believe that the heart of the Christian religion has very little to do with the here and now but everything to do with going to heaven when we die. If we allow ourselves to be seduced by this incredibly popular privatized and otherworldly brands of the Christian faith, then there is really no reason -- and no incentive -- to redouble our efforts on behalf of vulnerable people in the context of our current crisis.





But we know -- or at least we should know -- that the religion Jesus taught is neither private nor otherworldly but focused on the needs of our neighbors in the here and now, whether or not they look like us, behave like us, share our religious beliefs, or differ from us in any way at all. In this time of trial that will take such a toll on the most vulnerable among us, our job as Christ-followers is to find ways to care for those in greatest need. May God empower us to do what we know we must do as followers of Him.

Yours in Christ,
Richard T. Hughes



To My Fellow Sisters and
Brothers in Christ,



Allow me to begin my words to you by applauding the ways in which you are tirelessly guiding the Body of Christ through this unprecedented moment in our history. I spent twenty years as a Preaching Minister in Churches of Christ, and though I no longer minister within a local congregation, my thoughts and prayers have centered on you in recent weeks. I pray God continues to grant you stamina, courage, and wisdom as you seek to find new ways to shepherd the flock of Christ from a distance.

Though the Covid-19 virus offers unique and novel challenges to citizens of our world, it also brings to the surface age-old illnesses that attack our souls. One of those enduring illnesses is racism. I have spent most of my academic career researching and writing about the ways in which this plague has hindered the work of Christ's church. Regrettably, followers of Jesus have not always lent their voices and bodies to speak and work against racism; rather, they often have



participated and even led the efforts to subjugate and demean “the other.”



Instead of following in the footsteps of biblical prophets, openly confronting instigators of injustice, people of God have followed the crowds led by politicians and political parties. Indeed, one of the most significant contagions effecting the church today is the degree to which Christians display more allegiance to political parties or platforms than they do to the ethics of Jesus Christ. Social media platforms alone provide ample evidence of this idolatry.

Our present crisis surely has impacted all of us, but it offers specific and additional hardships upon people of color in our neighborhoods. Magic Johnson, the NBA Hall of Fame basketball player recently discussed how lack of adequate healthcare has put many African American communities at a significant disadvantage in the face of this disease. Additionally, many Asian Americans are enduring layers of prejudice on top of the fear of sickness. In what ways is the Body of



Christ offering a corrective to these serious problems?



I am writing you during this present season to let you know that I am praying for your boldness and courage. I pray you will find the strength to follow Jesus rather than any politician, Republican or Democrat. I pray that when you hear political rhetoric that demeans people of color you will recognize those words for what they are—the powerful tool of Satan used to discredit beautiful creations of God. I pray that you will use your positions of service and leadership within the Church of God to quiet any speech dedicated to scapegoating Covid-19 or any other societal ill upon people of color. As Paul writes in II Corinthians 5, we are Christ’s ambassadors. Our character, our words, our actions, and our ministries display the image of God to this broken, divided, and racist world. May God give you the full power of the Holy Spirit to allow the beauty of Christ to be seen through you.

In Christ,
Wes Crawford



To Whom It May Concern:



I will never forget the day when my brother came home after being attacked by a hate group in our town. With the erratic stride of a soldier plummeting menacing fields without a kind face, he paraded through our front door. Like a stilled mannequin, he stood motionless. His face became the glossy moon, peeking through the jagged branches of a cloudless night. He couldn't speak. He couldn't say a word. He couldn't utter a sound. While stripping his tattered shirt, fragments of beer bottles assaulted our floors, the floors that my mother spent hours making clean, making faultless, making pure. The sobs echoed throughout the house. The tears flowed down our cheeks. The blood trickled onto the floors. I was forever changed. My heart was pierced.

What outraged me the most about my brother's racial incident, as well as the countless incidents that I faced while growing up, was not the actions of those who tormented us because of the color of our skin. Instead, I was and still am haunted by





the faces of my white Christian brothers and sisters in my community who witnessed what happened and did nothing.

I join the chorus of voices who urge enlightened individuals, especially white Christians, to help the people who are being oppressed right now. The overwhelming number of minorities who are grossly mistreated in this country is heartbreaking. The horrific pandemic highlights this mistreatment yet again.

I urge you to act now. Use your influence, your position, your gifts, and your talents to boldly speak out against racism. You must use your mind, your body, and your spirit to "...do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed" (Isaiah 1:17). History will record what you did or did not do today. How do you want to be remembered?

In Christ,
Steven T. Moore



To my Sisters and Brothers in Christ,



At least two horizons are important for this moment in history. One horizon is the heart of God, which is displayed throughout God's story given to us in the Bible. The other horizon is the moment in which we live with its historical baggage, situated complexities, and systemic practices.

God created one humanity. Though it—as God intended—grew in diversity and culture as human beings spread across the globe, we are all one blood from one ancestor (Acts 17:28). Every human being is invested with dignity, honor, and glory as the image of God. Moreover, in the new creation—the body of Christ—we are one genus (1 Peter 2:9), a community bound together by the Spirit of God. We are a new race—a family of sisters and brothers in Christ. This new creation participates in the reality gathered around the throne of God where all languages, tribes, and peoples stand before the throne of God and the Lamb (Revelation 7:9).





The body of Christ—expressed in our common human dignity, our shared life in the Spirit, and our future home together—ought to rise above all divisions in this evil age (Galatians 1:4) and cry out with one voice to proclaim the reconciling gospel of Jesus the Messiah.

But this evil age has a history. It is filled with slavery, violence, and discrimination. This history has a formative effect on people, families, and nations. Just as Israel could not escape the cumulative effect of its sins against the poor and its injustices, so no nation can escape them now. The evils in our history are a powerful debilitating presence, and they shape us in ways we do not even know. That history grounds and empowers the systemic evils of our nation's laws, courts, and economic practices.

African Americans have experienced these evils over and over again. From slavery through Jim Crow segregation, from Jim Crow segregation to





Redlining economic exclusion, and from Redlining to mass incarceration, the system—in all its facets—has oppressed African Americans economically, judicially, and relationally. The system created an atmosphere of suspicion, hostility, and prejudice.

White nationalism produced that system. White privilege maintains it.

The present times give new evidence of this evil age and its systemic hostility to African Americans in the United States. Armed white groups protest when African Americans cannot even kneel in protest at a football game. The Coronavirus is killing African Americans at a higher rate due, in large part, to years of neglect and poverty. Hate crimes are increasing. Racist language and practices are given space in the public square and in our government policies.





I suppose it is not much different than it has ever been, but its prominence, public expression, and prideful arrogance has leavened our public discourse with hate, bickering, and self-interest.

Sisters and brothers, hatred, violence, and unjust practices are not the prayer of Christ. We seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness. We pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is heaven. We give greater weight to faith, mercy, and justice. We follow Jesus to the cross in obedience to the will of God rather than seeking our own interests and ambitions.

Our politic is neither Republican nor Democrat. Our politic is the kingdom of God. The reign of God calls us to treat every human being with dignity and honor, eschew all forms of violence against others, and call for economic and judicial justice for every human being.





This is the time—as it has always been the right time—to pay attention to the systemic evil that is now raising its ugly head. Too often our national consciousness receives this as normal. It is not, however, the way things are supposed to be.

When Christians do not raise their voice against racism, they betray their Messiah who unites all peoples in one community gathered around the throne of God. When we deflect and distract from the real problems and their systemic nature, we betray our Lord who confronted evil rather than making excuses for it. When we ignore the problem, we become part of the problem. We are called to be ministers of reconciliation rather than harbingers of evil. When we are silent, we are complicit; when we are complicit, we participate in the evil.

Let our churches pray for peace and reconciliation, but also let our churches act for peace and reconciliation. Let the White churches





make the first move! Let us humble ourselves, making ourselves nothing, and seek forgiveness and reconciliation with our African American sisters and brothers. Who will make the first move? Who will confess their sin? Who will love their neighbor without conditions?

The White church must make that first move, confess their sins, and lovingly listen to their black neighbors. Only then may the healing begin, and only then will our White eyes open to the realities of this evil age for our black sisters and brothers.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

John Mark Hicks



Dear Fellow Christians,



Jesus described the “good news” of his kingdom as freedom for prisoners, healing for the sick, and freedom for the oppressed. From the beginning to the end of Scripture and concentrated in Jesus’s teachings on the kingdom of God, God’s people are called to be in solidarity with the oppressed and vulnerable of society. To be with and for the oppressed and vulnerable is to work with the God of Moses for freedom against the oppression of cunning new Pharaohs of every age. The most insidious Pharaoh of American society, creating oppressed and vulnerable people at every historical turn, is the ideology of white supremacy.

White supremacy and the inequities the ideology has created in American society are monsters that white Christians took part in creating. The idea that white people are superior to other colors of people became prominent among “white” leaders of colonial America. The ideology was enshrined in the very laws of the United States of America,





ensuring people with lighter skin tones had access to freedom, voting power, legislative power, land, education, and wealth. People with darker skin tones either had no access or unequal access to these sources of power, wealth, and freedom. The racist ideology undergirding inequity and the institution of chattel slavery also served to legitimate “separate but equal” laws and the segregation of every aspect of American society, including the segregation of most Christian congregations for a century after the Civil War. Although packaged with new terminology and “color-blind” language since the 1960s, many laws and policies continue to perpetuate racial inequity in numerous areas of life, including education, jobs, housing, health care, and incarceration.

Perpetuation of these racial disparities does not require hard-hearted white supremacists; it only needs well-meaning people to continue making seemingly innocuous decisions that racialize society.





It is absolutely necessary to rehearse the well-known history of racially discriminatory policies and the racial disparities they created because recent studies show that most white people believe problems affecting communities of color are mostly those communities' own fault. Most white people think the real explanation of racial disparity is related to differences in work ethic and behavior. However, Ibram X. Kendi argues, "when you truly believe that the racial groups are equal, then you also believe that racial disparities must be the result of racial discrimination." For Christians, racial discrimination is sin, whether past or present, whether in society's policies or in human hearts. Racial discrimination that results in disproportionate death and disease for one racial group is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when Christians downplay or disregard the very real historical and present discrimination that gives rise to the oppression and devastation of racial groups, it is a disgrace to the name on





whom we call for the reconciliation of all things. White supremacy's legacy in creating today's racial inequities emerged again with crystal clarity over the last several weeks, as data demonstrates COVID-19 disproportionately devastates communities of color due to centuries of unfair policies. Pharaoh is at his work again. Will Christians join the God of Moses in the work of liberation? Will we take time to investigate, to name evil for evil, to work with the oppressed for freedom and equality?

To make matters worse in this time of crisis, intelligence agencies and watchdog organizations continue documenting the rise and sophisticated organization of hate groups, many of which seek to kill entire ethnic groups. Given this nation's appalling history with the ideology of white supremacy, one would assume leaders in government and the church would denounce these groups and their evil intentions immediately and with precision, yet this is not yet happening in





every case. We must do better ourselves and demand better of our leaders.

Now is the time for utter precision in our words and actions, my sisters and brothers. Let us join the God of liberation and his kingdom for reconciliation and wholeness. Whether the new Pharaohs work through twisted hearts or destructive policies or both, let us honestly speak truth to all oppressive powers. For we must find our identity with the God of the oppressed, always vigilant to identify and oppose crafty new Pharaohs. We must side with those hurt by vicious hearts and policies that discriminate, working for a world that looks more like the kingdom of God than the bondage of Pharaoh.

James L. Gorman





I awoke the morning of Nov. 9, 2016 to a CNN report that Trump was in the White House and America was in shock! I was fascinated to hear the declaration that Donald Trump had "... pulled off one of the most stunning upsets in political history!" The reporter went on to say it came as a "shock" that Donald Trump won this election while, at the same time, conceding that "the polls were wrong and the media was wrong.." as if no one expected him to win. Was I disappointed in the outcome of this election? Frankly, Yes. Was I shocked? No. I have to admit though that what did surprise me was the so-called experts' analysis of the voters who put Trump in the White House. We were told that many of the millennials didn't like either candidate so they didn't turn out in numbers anticipated. We were told that 30% of the Latino vote went to Trump. What I didn't hear in their earliest conclusions was a reference to the (according to exit polls) 78% of white male evangelicals who supported Trump.





A man whose rhetoric throughout his campaign was frequently, unabashedly, and unapologetically racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic and misogynistic (and that is just the short list) was overwhelmingly supported by Evangelicals; undoubtedly the new Christianity?

To be sure, racism did not begin with Donald Trump but his policies and actions certainly must be considered in any discussion designed to explore the racial divisions existing in this country today.

According to a report from the Brookings Institution, Aug 14, 2019, "There is a clear correlation between Trump campaign events and incidents of prejudiced violence. FBI data show that since Trump's election there has been an anomalous spike in hate crimes concentrated in counties where Trump won by larger margins. It was the second-largest uptick in hate crimes in the 25 years for which data are available, second only to the spike after September 11, 2001."





More recently, in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, there has been considerable discussion about the “surprisingly large number” of African Americans who have contracted the virus and many have blamed African Americans for spreading the disease, just as they have accused the Chinese of the same. While I cannot speak to the conditions of the Chinese, I can tell you about conditions among African Americans and offer one possible explanation as to why the number of African Americans who have contracted the virus is as high as it is.

According to recent data available from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, when compared with non-Hispanic white citizens in the US, African Americans are 60% more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, 20% more likely to die from heart disease, have the highest mortality rate of any racial and ethnic group for all cancers combined and for most major cancers, and represent 44% of the HIV positive population.





Furthermore, we are painfully aware that life expectancy and other health outcomes are affected by exposures to a wide range of social, economic, and biological risk factors during critical periods in life, such as the period imposed by the virus we now face. The sad news is that for us it begins at birth. Some African American writers have gone so far as to suggest that we are doomed from the cradle and that the miracle is that we, as a people, survive at all! Look at the most recent numbers that describe the fate of Black babies at birth:

- African Americans have 2.3 times the infant mortality rate as non-Hispanic whites.
- African American infants are 3.8 times as likely to die from complications related to low birthweight as compared to non-Hispanic white infants.
- African Americans had over twice the sudden infant death syndrome mortality rate as non-Hispanic whites, in 2017.





- In 2017, African American mothers were 2.3 times more likely than non-Hispanic white mothers to receive late or no prenatal care.

Source: CDC 2019. Infant Mortality Statistics

My point is this: Pandemics have always and, I dare say, will always find their most vulnerable victims among populations that are poor (crowding), less healthy than the general population due to dietary restraints and other social, economic and political issues not created by themselves, and among those who are otherwise underserved (little or no access to health care, typically because of their inability to pay for it).

Given that population (and that ,sadly, describes the state of health among African Americans and other people of color along with the poor and the disenfranchised in this country today- and always





has), the pandemic numbers being reported certainly can't come as a surprise to anyone who understands the socio-political history of Black people in particular, and people of color in general, in America. I would refer the reader to Edna Bonhomme's excellent opinion piece published in AL Jazeera on April 16, 2020 entitled, "Racism: The most dangerous "pre-existing condition."

So what, then, is the solution? Many years ago I read a quote that asked the question, "Are we courageous enough to allow ourselves to see ourselves and be honest about what we see?" The word racism is, in itself, an ugly, vile and distasteful word. So much so that many are repelled by the use of the term. I have long noticed that we are so repelled by the word that we often seek to substitute softer, gentler, and more palatable words in order to keep from using the word "racism."





The word we most often choose to substitute for racism is "race." The two are not synonymous. "Race," if you believe in that construct, is something that happens to us as a consequence of our birth. There is nothing you can do about that. "Racism," on the other hand, is a negative response to others based on that particular consequence of their birth. Racism, therefore, first and foremost, is a choice.

Ibram X. Kendi, in his book, *How To Be An Antiracist*, offers insights into what it takes to begin to address the issues of racism. He argues, and I agree, that saying that you are not racist is not enough. "It is a claim that signifies neutrality: "I am not a racist, but neither am I aggressively against racism." He continues, "But there is no neutrality in the racism struggle. The opposite of "racist" is not "not racist," it is "antiracist." I like his view because I have long held that racism is so intricately woven into the very fabric of American culture (going all the way back to the country's





founding and the original Constitution), that it can be likened to the people-mover we see at the airports.

If you just stand there (on the people mover) it will take you to a final destination. Let us suppose that the final destination of the people-mover is racism. If all you do is stand there, then that is where you will end up. The point is you have to be actively antiracist. You can't even, in our example, just turn your back and walk in the opposite direction to overcome racism. Indeed, you can turn and walk in the opposite direction but if you do so at a speed that is slower than the speed at which the people-mover is moving you in its direction, (and I believe this is what happens to many of us with the best of intentions), you will still end up at the "racism" destiny. Therefore, to overcome racism you have to aggressively walk in the opposite direction at a speed which is faster than the speed at which the people-mover is moving. This, for me, is the essence of antiracism. It is how we get to antiracism.





To simply say, "I am not a racist" is not enough and will only serve to keep us all on the people-mover, headed to a continued destiny that knows neither love nor a willingness to see all as equals; neither compassion nor a willingness to care for those who are different; neither hope nor a spirit that fosters and builds upon a united effort to create a society dedicated to upholding the creed, "...That all men (and women) are created equal and endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights..."

Again, to say that you are not racist is not enough. Beverly Tatum Daniel, in her book, *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria?* reminds us that, *"To say that it is not our fault, (however) does not relieve us of responsibility. We may not have polluted the air but we need to take responsibility, along with others,*





cleaning it up." You may not feel that you are responsible for the racism that brings us to this point and I get that. That's ok, it really is. But join us and let's all take responsibility for cleaning it up.

Dr. Al Jumper



To Whom It May Concern:



My prayer is that any one reading this letter is safe and well during the current pandemic. I write in support of Dr. Jerry Taylor's prophetic message warning against malice, deceit and other ills that have infected our nation and, unfortunately, numbed the minds and consciences of many of our churches.

In his presentation, Dr. Taylor quotes warnings from 1 Peter and calls us to become the people that God has redeemed and made into "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation that we might proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light"(1 Peter 2:9). We must heed the warnings against evil in both our individual and collective lives if we are to truly be the people of God.

In the letter to the Ephesians, the writer further challenges believers not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God with which [we] were marked with a seal for the day of redemption." Followers are to "put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and





wrangling and slander together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven [us]" (Ephesians 4:30-32).

And yet, evidence of these evils is all around us, and it can be too easy to simply ignore them and go about our daily lives. We see malice, anger, hatred and such in the media, in our social interactions, in the undercurrents and overt actions of our country and our world. As Dr. Taylor warns, there are concentrated efforts to advance malicious causes that undermine, hurt and even destroy others.

We must take this message seriously and fight against these ills, but even as we do, we must also expect to receive pushback, prejudice, and even persecution. Recently I respectfully challenged someone on Facebook to refer to the Coronavirus as COVID19 instead of as the Chinese virus because of the hatred, backlash, and even violence that term has ignited.





Instead of being able to respond respectfully in kind, the individual resorted to name calling and vilification. This incident is just a minor example of how many fail to “have ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand” as they were in Jesus’ own time.

I began this letter with a prayer for physical safety and well-being. I will end it with a prayer for our spiritual safety and well-being. May God grant us the strength, courage and faith to speak truth to lies, peace to violence, hope/help to suffering and to stand for those who cannot stand for themselves.

Shalom,
Dr. Jeanene Reese





To Whom It May Concern:

The events of the past few months have just begun to reshape the landscape of human life around the world. Our on-going adjustments to the COVID-19 pandemic have created a truly historic moment in which all humans on the planet are affected by the fears, anxieties, vulnerabilities, and too often deadly consequences of this disease. Sadly, COVID-19 is also demonstrating the great gulf of inequity among us, not just economically, but in all of the ways humans too often use to vilify and stratify the people groups we count as "less than."

As an American-White-Male-Conservative-Christian, I know too well the power plays and privilege that even now protect me from the realities faced by other people groups. In this country we continue to witness the backlash toward everyone "not like me," from prejudice toward Asian-Americans because of the "Chinese disease," to hate directed toward African Americans or Latinx, or immigrants (however they



got here), or women, or those who identify as LGBTQ, or Jews or Muslims--or you name the group that needs to be thought of or treated as "less than." Nothing is more terrifying about COVID-19 than the disease itself being used to propagate more hate and more inequity and more fear, anxiety, and even death.



The current crisis is only raising the profiles, propaganda, and opportunities for hate groups to flourish in our country. And I am one of those people who has spent most of my life on the sidelines, too content with privilege, not enough of a Jesus follower to step forward and say, "No more!" No more use of the name of Jesus to defend the dehumanizing of others. No more use of Christian churches as havens of bigotry and racism and sexism. No participation in group dynamics that repeatedly find ways to demean and denounce perspectives other than my own.

The authentic Jesus story is rooted in the elimination of self-interest.





To be a disciple of Jesus in these times is to see the image of God in every human being—yes, even the hate mongers. But it also time to tell the truth about self-interest and power, and speak truth to power, and choose a better way. All authentic claims to love Creator God begin with loving my neighbor—ALL of my neighbors.

These days have also seen the very best of humanity; so many people standing in the gap and genuinely caring for others. I pray this nation will follow the path of our better angels as we move through COVID-19 and begin to emerge on the side of a better shared future for all, not just the privileged few—and certainly without the hate-filled protectionism of white supremacy.

Sincerely,
John York





To my Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the past few years, God has opened my eyes to see the racism that I had naively believed was a part of America's past. Recently, we have seen a rise in overt, explicit acts of violence, as evidenced by events like those in Charlottesville at the Unite the Right Rally, in their most extreme forms. Yet, what has led to my increasing awareness of racism's danger is the way implicit bias and racism perniciously create disparities in access to health care, child care, housing, and education, by design.

My City, Allen, TX, is a suburb of Dallas. My family has called Dallas home for four generations. Though Dallas survived the Civil Rights Movement without large-scale riots, Dallas is a racially divided city, by design. As of 2018, the Urban Institute ranked Dallas last out of 274 large cities when it comes to economic and racial inclusion. The city was designed this way with its history of redlining and other systemic injustices.





As I have grown to see these realities, I am coming to realize the importance of standing with all of my brothers and sisters of color to confront any system that deprives them of human dignity, equity, and justice. As I am coming to learn, speaking up is historically important during outbreaks and periods of economic instability for a few of reasons.

First, periods of economic hardship and epidemics have often created the atmosphere where racial hatred stokes xenophobia and violence against minority groups. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, racist threats and acts toward Asian-Americans have increased.

Second, the economic disparities already present in our cities disproportionately affect the poor. That reality will be seen in the weeks and months ahead. In the city of Dallas, testing is more available in north Dallas than in south Dallas. While the wealthy are able to access testing,





health care, education, and work-from-home jobs where they can remain quarantined. African-American and Latino workers, who occupy jobs that prevent them from staying at home, find themselves at greater risk. As the old saying goes, "When white America catches a cold, black America catches the flu." What might that mean in this era of COVID-19?

Finally, reports indicate that White Supremacist groups are planning to use the COVID-19 pandemic to expand their racist agendas. Federal investigators have alerted law enforcement members of extremist groups that are encouraging one another to spread the virus, if contracted, through bodily fluids and personal interactions with police, Jews, and all non-white people. These groups also see an opportunity to spread their agenda through online platforms where they can harness people's fear and distrust of government to recruit new members.





In this time of uncertainty and anxiety, many of us feel uncertain about what we can do to help. We find ourselves in a time when the body of Christ must serve our sick, poor, and vulnerable populations. It is also imperative that white Christians listen to and not minimize the warnings of brothers and sisters of color.

May we add our bold and courageous voices to speak up for our brothers and sisters of color who acutely experience the explicit and implicit racism that threatens to bring great harm to citizens of color.

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."
-Micah 6:8

Grace and Peace,
Collin Packer
Lead Minister
Greenville Oaks Church of Christ



Dear Brothers and Sisters,



I am the father of four African American children. Today I feel the same ache for my own children that my elders felt in their souls for me. They felt a restless need to habitually caution and mold my behavior toward minimizing the risk that I might be seen as a threat to the norms and rules of a dominant white culture, an ideology which we now see increasing numbers are preparing to defend violently.

As a young boy I can remember hearing the United States president speak often, and, with heroic optimism, about a nation that was destined for, what I think to many, sounded like a kind of economic immortality. The only thing that stood in the way however, so the nation was then told, were people like my great grandmother.

My Mamma Mattie had been a widow faithfully serving in her church and broader community for years prior to having her actual survival put at risk through association in the public consciousness



with the alleged fraud and abuses of fictional “welfare queens”. The repeated use of words and phrases such as income opportunity, welfare dependency and self-reliance, was a very subtle way of directing the public imagination toward images of poor people as lazy and fraudulent.



It also served to reinforce our collective cultural belief in the doctrine of individualism, which at its core teaches that the supreme values in life are associated with achieving personal contentment through material possessions.

One of the unspoken tenets of individualism is that those who cannot fend for themselves are written off as unworthy of acceptance into mainstream culture, and are seen at best as annoyances, and at worst obstacles to the mainstream culture’s drive toward achieving personal gain. Those who subscribe to this nation’s brand of individualism, which today is ubiquitous across the globe, must demonstrate their worthiness to belong to the culture through displays of having the best and the





most of everything. In a culture that is as materialistic as ours it is easy to see how even human life becomes reduced down to a level synonymous with things!

Information warfare has been used very effectively to trick large numbers of our society into acting against their own good, as anyone can observe in phenomenon surrounding the cult of Trump. Long before my own children were born there was a plot devised to intentionally use their likeness as a tool for infecting the minds of middle class white Americans with a spirit of fear and suspicion. In 2019 images of a migrant caravan flooded the news media. These images were misused to create the impression of a clear and present threat to the American dream that many white Americans today feel is under attack from outsiders. The use of such information warfare is being openly deployed today, just as it was against my grandmother, by this nation's elite population for the singular purpose of enabling them to continue





unchallenged in their insatiable quest for economic domination of the entire planet!

The fires of hate, fear and suspicion are being stoked in the American imagination in name of profit. And we Christians must not risk losing our likeness to the God of the marginalized and the oppressed by turning a blind eye to these acts.

In his book Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman discusses a condition psychiatrists call "alexithymia", a word describing a condition wherein a person suffers from a state of having no words for clearly communicating their emotions.

"Alexithymics rarely cry, for example, but if they do their tears are copious. Still, they are bewildered if asked what the tears are all about. One patient with alexithymia was so upset after seeing a movie about a woman with eight children who was dying of cancer that she cried herself to sleep.





When her therapist suggested that perhaps she was upset because the movie reminded her of her own mother, who was in actuality dying of cancer, the woman sat motionless, bewildered and silent. When her therapist then asked her how she felt at that moment, she said she felt "awful," but couldn't clarify her feelings beyond that. And, she added, from time to time she found herself crying, but never knew exactly what she was crying about."

I pray that God grant us as a church and as a nation - the wisdom, the courage and the healing words which will allow us to communicate our feelings about race with one another, so that we can be used in this day as an antidote to a mutating virus of hate spreading across our nation.

In Brotherly Love,
Javon Gibbs



To the Body of Christ,



God's great vision, from before our creation, was that we would experience union with him and with each other (Eph. 1:10). This union was made possible by the work of Jesus, who not only demolished the barrier separating us from God, but also the "dividing wall of hostility" that separated us from each other, especially those walls rooted in racial and/or ethnic prejudice (Eph. 2:14). Tragically, we continue to rebuild these dividing walls of hostility. This is even true during outbreaks. Disease has often been accompanied by discrimination ¹. This is happening right now during the Covid-19 crisis.

- Federal investigators have revealed that white supremacist groups are discussing plans to use Covid-19 as a bioweapon, targetting law enforcement, people of Jewish ethnicity and people of color.
- In addition, with millions now stuck at home, hate groups are drawing people into their





poorly regulated Internet forums where they identify marginalized and/or ethnic groups as the cause of this contamination.

- Further, since the outbreak, acts of racism toward Asian people have dramatically increased.

But we, the followers of the Crucified One, are called to something radically different. The cross is a place of solidarity and it calls us to stand with and fight for those who, in our day, are now suffering at the hands and hatred of others. M. Shawn Copeland, in *Knowing Christ Crucified*, writes that ...

To know and to follow Christ crucified is to know and love those children, women, and men who are poor, excluded, and despised, made different and unwelcome, lynched and crucified in our world." As discrimination rises in the wake of the corona disease, we who follow Jesus must now side with those who are treated as despised. We must





awaken and take action against the ailments of alienation and animosity.

All around us right now there is a revolution taking place in medical labs, hospitals, and scientific communities as the resources of the world are used to purge this pandemic. Jesus has come to enact a similarly robust revolution in the hearts of people and in the halls of power. A revolution that would incite us to bring to bear every resource for the eradication of the epidemic of racism.

I publicly support efforts to do this, and I urge you and your congregation to do the same.

Grace and peace,
Chris Altrock



Dear Lovers of the American Dream,



As a military kid, I sang a list of patriotic songs and believed every word. I sang This is My Country, This Land is Your Land, God Bless America, Fifty-Nifty, America, and You're a Grand Old Flag. With my father's retirement in my 8th year, I started becoming acclimated to life outside of the imposed civility of the US Military Code of Ethics. Coming out of childhood into adolescence, the music continued to abound even as the discord of American race, economic, and sexual strife blasted into my idealism. Did racial slurs, later false arrests, and the stress of living in a society so conflicted over race topple my ideals and stop the music?

No. It just showed me that America is also the land where the blues began. A land that brings on a kind of blues by its inability to work through arguably its most persistent spiritual problem: the color line. Into the 21st century this problem remains, fueled by the money of sinister people whose vision of America never included others holding places of power and influence.





Still, I believe we Americans are largely kind, naïve, and lazy about Democracy, hankering after stuff, and storing the stuff we hanker after (see toilet paper), while the Devil finds work in destroying anything resembling cooperation and commonweal. Sadly, so often in American life, the hustle for money and the things it buys often supersedes the will to stand in the way of evil acts and the humans who commit them. As so-called Christians, we must stand in the way. Those who stoke the irrational fire of race madness and fear and prey on the primitive impulses of the economically insecure and morally fatigued must stop. We must make them.

It is time to show a very Serpent-Wise Love that can listen and interrogate, strip down, and destroy the Devil of racial hatred. Democracy is hard work, and I am only optimistic about my lost American idealism by identifying its dreamy childish moorings.





Nostalgia for a storybook past is what drove me on, seeking a billowing red, white, and blue flag hovering over us all. This nostalgia had to die so that I could work.

The myth of American Exceptionalism buttressed by distributing pain for gain at home and abroad—from the imposed free work of slavery to the support of cruel dictatorships (part of my own childhood having been spent in Franco’s Spain)—had to die.

The myth of My Land and the implied ownership of a part of this majestic landscape met the realities of tainted water supplies, properties appropriated by the victors of race riots, redlining, and restrictive covenants—and had to die.

The myth of My Fellow Americans—and its implication that I can go unmolested through city streets, towns, and country hamlets met the realities of spree shootings, gang banging, and stand your ground laws—and it had to die.





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The myth of My Fellow Americans—and its implication that I can go unmolested through city streets, towns, and country hamlets met the realities of spree shootings, gang banging, and stand your ground laws—and it had to die.

The myth of God Shed His Grace On Thee, and its suggestion that this nation strives for Right, collided with a political system outfitted with politicians who despise the poor, who acknowledge corporations as people, favoring corporate investors over average Americans, and bombs over food, health, and housing—it too had to die.





So where am I without my nostalgic songs and their ideals? What music will revive my hope in a triumph of the American dream? Like the disciples after having seen Jesus transported from their number, my nostalgia had to go, and into the clouds my nostalgic eyes went. Until the angels queried, "Why stand ye gazing into heaven?" The work of sacrificial love, fully responsible, aware of the realities of existence with nothing but faith, began for the disciples the moment they realized they had to become the Jesus they worshipped. So, too, we must do the work of Democracy and become the Fannie Lou Hamer we so respect. Off with the myth of America, on with its making. And the music? It will come. It will come.

In Jesus' name,
Greg Johnson





Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In these times when we see a resurgence in the numbers and vehemence of groups advocating white supremacy, I am writing to remind you of the gospel and to invite you to renew your commitment to proclaim it.

When God called Abram, God promised, first, to make of him a great nation; second, to bless him; and third, that, “through you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). This third promise is the one Paul calls “the gospel” when he quotes it in Galatians 3:6.

Later, when God reaffirmed those promises, God changed Abram’s name from “Abram” (exalted father) to “Abraham” (father of a multitude), which God explains, “for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:5). God spoke not only the nations descended from Isaac and Ishmael, but a multitude of nations. Paul quoted this verse to argue that the promise of God was being fulfilled in his own time as people from





many ethnicities became “descendants of Abraham” by faith (Romans 4:17).

Still later, Isaiah sang about God’s chosen servant who would be “a light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). So, when Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple, Luke reported that the prophet Simeon took the infant in his arms and blessed him, saying, among other things, that he would be “a light for revelation to the nations” (Luke 2:32). Likewise, Paul took his marching orders from Isaiah, when he left the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch to preach to the gospel to gentiles, “to be a light to the nations...to bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 13:47; quoting Isaiah 49:6).

Again, Isaiah anticipated a time when all nations would turn to the LORD, the God of Israel: “It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the LORD’s house will be established as the highest of the mountains, ...and all nations shall flow to it...” (Isaiah 2:2). This image is





recapitulated in John's vision of the Lamb, in the lyrics of the New Song: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10). This is the vision of what happens when God finally gets what God wants.

I am writing to remind you that from the time God called Abram, God had in mind using Abram's family to reach all nations. And the vision of God's glorious future throughout the Bible, from beginning to end, is a vision of God welcoming and blessing all nations.

I am writing to encourage you to stand up and object whenever you see anyone who claims to follow the Bible, who tries to argue that God





favors any nation or ethnic group over any others. Such people are pushing you away from God. I encourage you to take heed to the stories of Abraham and Simeon and Paul, to the visions of Isaiah and Revelation, and to join hands with people from “every tribe and language and people and nation” and to march boldly toward “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

Let us work to realize the biblical vision of God’s glorious future and renounce all who say otherwise.

In the name of the Lamb who was slain,
Christopher R. Hutson





To the people called by Christ and those
who have accepted His Calling,

Matthew 16: 18- And I say also unto thee, That
thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my
church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail
against it. -KJV

As we experience this time, that is unlike any other
we have experienced, I find myself reminiscing to
my childhood. I remember going to my Grandma's
house, in "the country" as we called it. There was
little to do in terms of prearranged entertainment,
and so we found ways to pass the time. One of the
common pastimes that my brother and I would
undertake was throwing rocks into the gorge-like
area that was down the hill from the house. We
would not be aiming at anything specific, just
trying to throw with the hope that it would create
some fun. During this quarantine, I have longed
for a field and rocks, except now I think I would
pick clear targets and aim to hit them.





It is interesting, as I reminisce on these experiences as a young child, a flash will cross my phone or Tv screen with an update on the coronavirus and how it has further infiltrated the American reality. But as my mind rushes to catch up with the present so I can make sense of the new information received, I mentally pass several historical landmarks. I remember James Byrd Jr. being dragged to death, to the treatment of the Jena Six, to the death of Sandra Bland, and most recently, the murder and response of Botham Shem Jean. As my mind returns to the current situation, I see more of the same.

Hell's Gates:

Our current reality emphasizes every systemic racial disparity that existed before COVID-19. The disparity in housing is evident in the spread of the virus through the Black and Brown communities, especially in urban areas. The inability to social-distance in housing projects and cramped living conditions has an evident disproportionate effect on Black people.





The policing of social-distancing and the apparent racial bias of fining the young Black people at a park for not social distancing, but allowing rallies in front of capital buildings and governors mansions by openly defiant armed White people, exposes this racist reality in which we live. The disparity in access to health care and the bias-driven care that is targeted toward people of color is on full display. The preexisting health conditions that find their roots in environmental injustice are concentrated in communities of color. And our government just passed 2.2 trillion dollar CARES Act as a stimulus plan, but still has not taken care of the water crisis in Flint, a majority Black city in Michigan.

Without a doubt, racism in America is the purest form of evil that severs to protect the satanic stronghold in the American reality. The demonic presence of racism is so vibrant within the American context that it has spilled directly from the tanker of injustice and has found its way into





America's consciousness. Somehow, we have been fooled into allowing the chief demonic presence to be a part of the constitutional conversations of our country. And to be emboldened to the point that we begin such conversations with "we hold these truths to be self-evident." While we call this the "land of the free, and the home of the brave," liberty is often presented with a luxury tax that a limited number of people can afford.

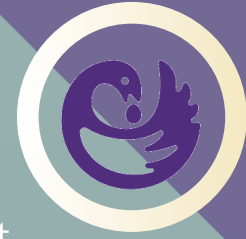
While many wait for the "enchanted" and highly debated physical wall along the southern border, which has been slow to come to fruition, the spiritual gates of Hell have been set up in the American story for some time. We are beset on every side with the gates of strife, envy, jealousy, debauchery, greed, violence, murder, and, most of all, racism and hatred of all forms that we bear witness to daily.



The Rock:

In the text from the Gospel, according to Matthew, this famous statement is made by the Apostle Peter, when he claims that "Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God." Jesus goes on to affirm the importance of this statement by assuring the believers that this statement was a rock that the gates of Hell would not be able to prevail against. For many years, Christians have taken the construct of the gates of Hell not prevailing against this rock to mean that the rock was immovable and that the gates were acting against the rock. However, I have never seen gates move in my life. This must mean it is the calling of Christ Church to move against the strongholds of evil in this world to reflect the kingdom of God on earth. As God's people, we have been throwing the rock of our faith into the gorge of society without a specific target. The result of this action has been that the demonic stronghold that we are called to battle against has enslaved many in the body of Christ. We must remember that gates are not only meant to keep





This Stockholm seeded reality has convinced many of the churches of Christ to form unhealthy alliances with the powers of this world, which includes the bonds with racism and White supremacy. However, we can reclaim ourselves, our churches, and our communities for Christ's vision of his beloved church.

The Plan:

How does this reality become true? How do we break the chains of sins that have enslaved behind the gates of Hell? How do those who are free begin to liberate our enslaved brothers and sisters? We must remember that we still have the rock of our salvation in Christ, the living son of God. Whether enslaved or free as God's children, we still have access to the rock on which his church is built. This love without limits and peace that surpasses all understanding is the greatest weapon we have, but we must use it correctly. Stop throwing the rock into the fields of society without any production, but instead aim it directly





at the gates of hatred, racism, scarcity, and White Supremacy and bust Hell wide open. Here are the steps to executing this plan.

Step 1. Use time alone with God to see where you have been or currently are complicit with racist and White supremacist ideas, behaviors, and systems.

Step 2. As a Christian community, divest from structures that uphold racist values and practices.

Step 3. Invest in time together with the beloved community of Christ for collective discernment and accountability to tearing down the strongholds.

Step 4. Work to make sure your church is reflective demographically of the community it sits in, and that the community is demographically reflective of the kingdom of God.



Examples:



Idea: America was built on Christian Values. This idea creates an inaccurate and unhealthy association between the "Founding Fathers" of America and their actions being entirely in line with Christ's view of a beloved community.

Behaviors: There are communities you choose not to go to, minister in, and connect with because they are considered "bad" neighborhoods?

This behavior implicitly asserts that there are people that do not deserve to engage with God's love, or they cannot accept the love of Christ. This also fuels the mentality that someone else will do it.

Systems: Are you banking with a company that does not have a track record of granting loans to all people regardless of the community they are from? This system, like many others, perpetuates the disparities that are already in place. By banking with such an institution, we affirm and financially support these disparities.





Solution: Confess individually and communally. Then create a plan for correcting the transgressions and place accountability measures with a fellow brother, sister, or congregation.

I genuinely believe that to counteract the unhealthy alliances that have been made by God's Church, we must turn to the greatest weapon, which is the rock on which we were created. The only way for us to break the bonds of sin, hate, and racism is for Christ church to return to the call that Christ affirmed in it in Matthew 16. We must continuously be in the process of deconstructing this systemic and expansive demonic presence of racism in the world.

With Love and Concern,
Byron R. Martin



To Whom It May Concern,



As Program Director for the ENGAGE Youth Theology Initiative at Lipscomb University, I work with racially diverse high school students each summer to explore the urgent and contemporary call to racial justice and unity; the histories of both the church and the U.S. Civil Rights movement (1954-68); and what it means to live a life of Christian leadership and service. We believe that young people today want to be part of something much bigger than themselves, and to that end, we invite them to use their God-given talents to become the “change they wish to see in the world.”

However, I echo Dr. Taylor’s deep concern that even as we seek to encourage values like peace and equality in our young students, there are other dark forces in society—like white supremacy, white nationalism, and racism—that are competing for the better angels of their nature. These forces of darkness, which have taken up residence at all levels of power in American society, have likewise found a home in



some sectors of the American church. Moreover, the rhetoric of hate, which used to be the hallmark of particular fringe groups, seems to be making its way into the mainstream. I call upon faith leaders and those with power in both the public and private sector to wake up to the profound harm that current polarizing and racially divisive speech is having upon our nation, and in particular our children. I challenge leaders to use their power and influence to put a stop to noxious efforts made by external and domestic enemies—efforts that are designed to exploit the racial divisions existing in this country.

May we all seek to live into the “dream” that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. so clearly articulated—the dream of a beloved, non-violent, and just community—for “it is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends.”

Prayerfully,

Claire Davidson Frederick, M.Div.

Nashville, Tennessee



A CLARION CALL TO JUSTICE, LOVE, & TRUTH



The past six to seven months have brought disturbing realities to light in our nation. Late in 2019 the Department of Homeland Security director Kevin K. McAleenan declared that violent white supremacy was a major issue of our time, after decades of DHS downplaying such issues.

Earlier this year David Porter, a top agent on the F.B.I.'s Foreign Influence Task Force, warned of Russian efforts to inflame racial divisions in the U.S. ahead of our national elections. These few months dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted continued white supremacy in the forms violent acts against persons of Asian descent, the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on African-American communities, and economic disparities as African-Americans and Latin@s lose jobs at a greater rate than white people because African-Americans and Latin@s are trapped in service-industry jobs at a much greater rate than the white population in the U.S. How should we respond to these realities?





We call on the church to speak up for the voiceless and to ensure the poor and needy get justice in the courts (Prov. 31:8-9). We recognize that those communities most under threat by white supremacy are not “voiceless,” but we also know that their voices are too easily ignored, in the church and outside of the church, in the halls of congress as well as in our own homes. We refuse to let their voices be silenced but amplify them so the justice they cry out for is finally delivered.

We call on the church to seek first the kingdom of God and its justice and to quit giving ourselves over to the god of Mammon (Matt 6:19-34).

Jesus lived out the justice of the kingdom so that “the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matt. 11:5). The good news, according to the gospels, is that the kingdom of heaven has come near, that God expresses





God's eternal agape in the here-and-now, wherever humanity is in need. We call on the church to stop building our own little kingdoms, to quit being allured by measures of success that reflect the god of Mammon—how big our churches are, how much we pay our pastors, the size of our church budgets—and measure our success by whether our work in the world reflects the love and justice embodied in Emmanuel, God with us.

We call on our President and national, state, and local officials to exercise leadership in a way that reflects the concern of God for all people and especially takes up the cause of the poor and the oppressed that works for justice in the marketplace and in the courts (see Ps. 72). Like our leaders, we too desire to see our land flourish and our cities bear fruits that all may enjoy. But we want all people who reside in this land to flourish, including the alien who lives among us, not just the 1% or the 10%.





We want our government leaders to fight for those so long left on the margins and consigned to the slums, not just for the giants of industry and for those who support their political campaigns.

And we call on our President and national, state, and local officials to be committed to the truth in the public square, which is the foundation of justice in the streets and in the courts (Isa. 59:14-15). The tired trope of “fake news” does not cover over a litany of lies and misinformation. We are weary of feeling that the one thing we can count on from our leadership is that they will deceive us. We call on our leaders to show a commitment to truth and integrity that is the soil in which liberty and justice for all grows.

Our Scripture teaches us that today, if we hear God’s voice, we should not harden our hearts as others did in previous generations (Ps. 95:7-11).





If we long to enter to the rest of God and to experience the peace of God in our land, it will require a commitment to justice, to love, to truth. We pray that it may be so, in our churches, in our halls of governments, in our streets, and in our homes. Amen.

In Christ,
Robert L. Foster





To the body of Christ,

I want to join Dr. Jerry Taylor and the others who have voiced their concerns for the racial divisions, violence, and discrimination that have become a part of the culture of the United States.

It has become increasingly clear that there is a division between the teachings of the church and the actions taken by those supported by the church. This dissonance is detrimental to the church and to the future of those who call themselves Christians.

I would implore anyone who calls themselves a Christian to do what we have been called to do and to stand up for the least of those around us. All of them.

In biblical times, Jesus modeled the need for protecting the poor, women, and everyone who lived on the margins of society.





Today, the margins of society are divided by the boundaries of our nation-state. People who are coming to the United States to seek asylum are instead separated from their children, and sent back to the most deplorable conditions; while their children are kept in cages by a government that treats them as less than human.

And somehow, members of the church defend these policies openly. This is not what we have been called to defend. Jesus called us to defend the children and immigrants.

In our own country, groups of militants have upheld the Second Amendment as a "God-given" right, and many in the church have encouraged them to do so. Then they use that "right" to threaten the lives of thousands of men, women, and children because they are Black, or Latino, or otherwise "different." This is a direct violation of the teachings of Jesus, and yet churches stand by and do nothing. This cannot continue.





Today, the margins of society are divided by the boundaries of our nation-state.

I pray that the church finds its way back to the teachings of Jesus. Back to stopping injustice.

Back to protecting the least of these.

Until then, the church will continue to lose its place in American society. And it has no one to blame but itself.

Prayerfully,
Kristina Campos-Davis





Father,

I desperately cry out to you for your Divine intervention. I pray that you open up the eyes and hearts of the oppressors of those who desperately seek refuge here in this country. You said to your people in your holy word not to mistreat or oppress foreigners because we ourselves were once foreigners. Help us as a people in this country to see that you would have us to welcome and support immigrants and empathize with their plight.

I pray that we understand that nothing belongs to us, it is yours alone and that you have given us things and resources to aide us to have better lives. You have loaned us these things not to replace you as all sovereign in our hearts, but unfortunately, we have, in many cases, done so. I pray that we see the blessedness in possessing nothing so that things don't rule and guide our decisions but only you do.





I pray that the oppressors, the White supremacists' hearts are softened to feel the pain of foreigners, of immigrants who are vulnerable people, who are disconnected from their homeland, are very discouraged and in desperate need of our help. Dear Lord, I pray that White supremacists see that no one has a right to take away a person's basic human dignity because they have advantages over them.

I pray that our nation recognizes the grace that you have given to us and our responsibility to be kind enough to extend that grace to immigrants, their children, undocumented workers, along with all who seek refuge here. I can only imagine the pain and suffering as they journey through the rough terrain, the elements, and the many dangerous conditions that they endure only to reach the U. S. and endure even more resistance by being rejected.



Help us all to see that we have been foreigners too, spiritual immigrants, spiritual foreigners, defenseless sinners looking for a place of refuge. We too were impoverished, spiritually impoverished. God, we also have and still are running to you for hope and protection. And you, God, have given us refuge, hope, a cloak of comfort, a covering for our sins, the only way of forgiveness, your son Jesus. We were spiritually defenseless. You came and continue to come to our aide.



I pray that you open up the hearts of those who wish to do harm through mass shootings and destruction of the lives of people, the tearing apart of families, of families like they themselves have. That they don't create more widows and orphans. Because you said those who take advantage of them will themselves create fatherless and widows in their own families through your aroused anger. Help them to see that they are required by you to love immigrants, as we all love our own families, and demonstrate that love and reject hatred.





I pray that opportunities are provided for and accepted by white supremacists to renounce and denounce the devil, whom they serve, and become adopted by Jesus and follow him. That they renounce everything and everyone in their lives that have taken the place in which only you belong. I ask that you heal our land as we ask for forgiveness for all of our sins and for the pain that has been unmercifully inflicted upon the innocent. Please bless, heal, and restore our great state of Texas along with our great nation in which you have granted us the privilege to live. Restore our former willingness and practice to always accept immigrants onto this land, your land, with open arms just as many of our own ancestors and the very ancestors of white supremacists who continue these disgraceful acts have been. I beg your mercy, dear God, through the precious name of Jesus. Amen!

Betty Jacobs





As I sit down to compose my reflection on the 2019 Racial Unity Leadership Summit Prayer Retreat in El Paso, my phone's notifications are reminding me of the big news of the day. The President of the United States has been impeached by the House a vote that nearly went entirely down party lines.

We are a country divided in every way imaginable, and yet, the kingdom quietly advances its march on enemy territory. Earlier this month, incredible things occurred.

Several months before our retreat, Patrick Crusius drove 650+ miles from Allen, TX to El Paso, TX. When he arrived at the Wal-Mart overlooking the border between the United States and Mexico, he killed 22 people and injured another 24.

I am a minister from Allen, TX. Patrick lived in my neighborhood. His house was less than a ½ mile from the house I live in. He grew up attending school with my Executive Minister's children.





I am a minister from Allen, TX. Patrick lived in my neighborhood. His house was less than a ½ mile from the house I live in. He grew up attending school with my Executive Minister's children. I entered the weekend feeling the burden of leading a church in a city where White Supremacy had intentionally formed a young man to put violently halt what his manifesto called "the Hispanic invasion of Texas."

As we gathered around the memorial built in honor of those killed by a young man from our city, I felt a sense of grief and sadness. We offered prayers to God on behalf of the victims, confessing the sin of White Supremacy, and petitioning God for an end to the violence that steals years from the lives of people created in the image of God. But as we began to leave the memorial, we met the father of Javier Amir Rodriguez, the youngest victim of the shooting. Our prayers were meant to be a blessing to him, but they were equally healing to me as a minister from Allen, TX. It was a great blessing!





The following day, we had the opportunity to cross the border into Ciudad Juarez. We walked through the refugee camps full of Mexican refugees fleeing dangerous situations in cities throughout the country. Most had been waiting for multiple months for an interview with immigration officials to receive entry into the United States. One of the men we talked to was named Jesus. He and his family had fled danger in the southern part of the country after being threatened by a drug cartel. As we talked to Jesus, it became clear the power that propaganda has had on my imagination about the situation near the border. Several of us admitted to fearing what we would find on the other side of the wall. Instead, we peered into the eyes of individuals who desire the same things we desire for our families.

In addition, to these visits to Wal-Mart and Ciudad Juarez, our group spent time in prayer reflecting on A. W. Tozer's *The Pursuit of God*, watching a film about Oscar Romero, and listening to God's





call on Christian leaders who are pursuing Jesus in a time of racial division, fearmongering about immigrants and refugees, and an all-too-common trust in guns and the myth of redemptive violence.

I'm grateful to God for our time together in El Paso and I'm very excited to see how God will continue to move Christians to unite and seek action as participants in God's growing kingdom.

Prayer

O God, who sought us before we ever had a mere thought of seeking you,

We gather in El Paso to seek your face, to hear your voice, to know your will.

We gather and we must begin with confession. We confess that we gather for righteous reasons and unrighteous reasons.

We confess that we gather with a misplaced anger about particular people with flesh and blood rather than singling out the unseen powers and principalities that have possessed them.





We confess that we gather subconsciously seeking to be powerful, spectacular, and relevant. We confess that we gather believing that we are alone in our pursuit of justice when, in reality, there are 7,000 others who have not bowed their knee to Baal.

We confess that we gather seeking your favor for being "the good ones." And yet, not one of us is good.

We are sinful, imperfect people who need your mercy and grace.

I thank you for the reminders of your servant, A. W. Tozer.

For he reminds of what we so often forget.

Many of us have traded our birthright for a bowl of stew.

We have traded our lifelong pursuit of you and accepted the mere gift of salvation in the afterlife. We have traded knowing you deeply for reading a list of books about you.





We have traded an endless relationship
with you for cold, lifeless religious rituals.

We have become suspicious of people who seem
too emotional in their love for you.

We cynically believe they will grow out of that
phase eventually.

At some point, without intending to, we became
satisfied with less than you offered to us.

We're not even quite sure how to stoke the
glowing embers of our relationship with you.

Has the fire gone out completely?

Do you still speak?

Do you still hear the prayers of the righteous?

Do you still hear the cry of refugees a few miles
from us?

Do you hear the cry of Atatiana Jefferson's
family?

Do you hear the cry of Botham Jean's family?

Do you hear the cry of Dreamers who want a path
to safely stay in this country?

Do you hear the cry that still echoes from the
Wal-Mart nearby?





We gather in El Paso to seek your will
in a time of trouble in our nation.

Trouble among the nations is not "Breaking News"
to you.

Violence within a nation is not "Breaking News" to
you.

Inequality within a nation is not "Breaking News"
to you.

The exclusion of refugees and immigrants is not
"Breaking News" to you.

Growing disparity between the "haves" and "have
nots" is not "Breaking News" to you.

You are well acquainted with suffering, injustice,
and inequality.

You are well acquainted with the ways we have
used the beautiful gift of our skin color to justify
our mistreatment of others.

You are well acquainted with how kings come to
believe they do not have to answer to anyone.

You are well acquainted with how the wealthy
weaponize their money to demand all kinds of evil
things.





You are well acquainted with false prophets who fawn over kings and justify their evil ways.

But before we seek to listen to your will regarding the violence, injustice, and racial division in our country, we choose to begin where many are not looking for solutions.

We begin by seeking you.

We begin by confessing our sin.

We begin by confessing our impure motives.

We begin by confessing that our hearts have wandered from you.

We begin by petitioning to see your glory.

We begin by seeking your face.

We begin desiring to taste your goodness.

We begin needing to be satisfied by you.

O God, you are our God, earnestly we seek you.
We thirst for you, our whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land where there is no water.





We have seen you in the sanctuary and
behold your power and your glory.

Because your love is better than life, our lips will
glorify you.

We will praise you as long as we live, and in your
name we will lift up our hands.

This weekend, we anticipate being fully satisfied as
with the richest of foods; with singing lips our
mouths will praise you.

Because you are our help, we sing in the shadow
of your wings.

We cling to you; your right hand upholds us.

O God, you are our God, earnestly we seek you.

It's in the name of Jesus that we pray this prayer,
Amen!

Collin Packer



Dear God,



Your word speaks of the women of Bethlehem when Herod killed the male infants and toddlers: A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more. So we pray for the Rachel's and for the men who are seeing their children ripped from their arms.

We pray you hear as we weep with the mothers who do not know if they will ever see their sons and daughters again. We pray you hear us as we weep with the fathers who do not know if they will ever see their children again. We pray you hear us as we weep with the children who are separated from love and exposed to abuse, as families and communities cry out "We are human." We pray your supernatural healing to those who have faced such trauma. Draw them close to you and comfort them.

How long dear God will such policies persist? We pray you move quickly to defend.





We now pray dear God for Tania Martinez of El Salvador and for the countless people that she represents. You were there when she and her husband Oscar Alberto Martinez, and her 23 month old daughter Angie Valeria Martinez attempted to cross the Rio Grande from Mexico into the United States. You saw Tania watch Oscar and Angie get swept away to drown. The media shared the picture of the father and daughter face down in the water. To us, they were a news story. To Tania, they were family - a family in search of better only to be met by tragedy. They were seeking political asylum. God we lift up our voices and plead for rescue.

As migrants, documented or not, seeking a better life, they are numbered with the countless people that attempt to enter the United States from the South. As migrants seeking a better life, they are numbered with Abraham, and with Jacob, and with Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Ever remind us that you are close to the brokenhearted. We pray for the hearts of the privileged who sit in far away



places and sign papers that translate into human suffering. We pray you transform the hearts of those who make the laws to hurt the people. Light a fire in their hearts of unexpected compassion. Let them for a moment think if it were them pulled away from their children or if it were long ago and they were a child pulled away from their parents. Let them look beyond faces and see hearts and souls and the image of you, dear God, when they watch the news in the comfort of their homes. We pray this prayer not only for them, but for us who stand here as well that we may be willing vessels fit for your use in whatever way you may bid us to respond.

We pray also dear God for the terror that hovers in our world as more people have the heart and the means to carry out mass shootings. We recognize the spirit of the Egyptian fear wherein Pharaoh declared that the Israelites had become too numerous. And while many are not in a position to use the same oppressive techniques as the Pharaoh had at his disposal, we see actions



that echo his sentiments.



They take up arms and slay the innocent, turning a blind eye to the humanity of others and going deeply into tribalism. So we pray dear God for your divine intervention in this nation. We pray you are with law makers that wisdom and compassion prevail over fear, we pray for your body that we may be a catalyst to infuse love in the narrative of the nation, we pray dear God for courage among leaders, black and white and brown to speak truth and act truth to power. We know that this is beyond our strength, but we know that with you all things are possible.

Dear God we come, not to point the finger, but to outstretch our hands to you and say, "we stand as willing vessels to be used by you and we kneel as praying souls to seek your mercies and your guidance." Thy will be done. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Curtis King



A PRAYER FOR THE UNIVERSAL PRESENCE OF GOD



God...

As we stand beside a memorial of 22 people who were murdered... we can't help but be grateful for being alive.

I thank you for waking us up this morning.
For opening our eyes, for blessing us with the breath of life, for creating our hearts that are pumping blood through our veins and our lungs at work giving us breath and for giving us feet and legs to gather here today.

Thank you God for gifting us the opportunity to convene, to converge here in El Paso today for the Racial Unity Leadership prayer retreat from all over the United States, with the purpose of setting our collective gaze toward the coming of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven and a fresh manifestation where justice, reconciliation, and love reign





We pause to acknowledge the
TRUTH of your Divine Immanence
God...you are here in this moment and in this
place
You are not strange or foreign
The whole universe is alive because of your light
and life
As the Psalmist says...
Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

You are HERE.. you have never NOT been here
you have always been present in your creation.
You were there when we were knitting us in our
mother's wombs, and you'll be present for
eternity.





But we must CONFESS today...
individually and collectively.

That although you have ALWAYS been here,
sometimes we haven't seen you, we haven't
realized it.

We confess to being asleep as individuals, as a
collective, as a state, as a nation.

We confess to being blind...and not
acknowledging your presence in all things and all
people.

It's Like when Jacob awoke from his sleep, and
said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was
not aware of it."

We ask for repentance and an AWAKENING.

To echo Tozers prayer today...

we repent that our sinful preoccupation with
physical things of the world has been too much,
and that you, God have been here and we didn't
know it, We have been blind to your presence.
Open our eyes that We may behold thee in and
around us.





We pray for a greater understanding
of your Universal Presence God

In this room, but also in this city, our state, nation
open our eyes and heighten our spiritual
receptivity

May we see you!

May we see you in the magnificent, the incredible,
the brilliant, and the outstanding

- In the sunsets, when the sky is painted and the sun hangs low in the west
- Mountains, that are majestic and tall and were created
- Oceans
- Miracles of healing
- Moments of excitement
- New births when we hold a new born baby for the first time





May we also see you in the ordinary, the mundane, normal, the day to day

- In our breath
- In the silence
- In the food we eat
- The dishes we wash
- Our day to day Work
- In the Excel spreadsheets
- In the routine drive to and from where we live and work

May we see you in the good times

- When there is Reconciliation
- When times are good

May we see you in times of tragedy

- Uncertainty
- May we realize You are beside us and have not abandoned us

May we see you when we look in the eyes and see the sweet, pure smiles of our children and grandchildren, may we be amazed at your creation





May we see you in those that are close
to us..our friends and family those in our
neighborhood, in our churches

And God...

May we see you in those that are different

- The immigrant
- The other
- The oppressed
- The marginalized
- People that are different from us

May we see you in all people

May we remember that the same spirit working in
us is the same spirit working in them. That in
reality there is no US and THEM, but because we
are all your creation and come from one source
there is only US.

Because God.... if we don't see You in all, IT IS
HARD TO SEE You at all.

We pray for racial reconciliation.



Remove the veil... so that we can SEE
the absurdity and stupidity of HATE,
RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA.



We "cry" and we "yearn" from the depths of our
hearts for Divine Intervention in regards to mass
shootings motivated by white supremacy across
the state of Texas and across the nation.

We know that when we pray.. YOU work
SO we pray that You work to end racism and
white supremacy.

Shift our hearts, in a way that only you can, to
allow all to SEE you in all.

God, we boldly proclaim the truth that there is
nowhere and no one that is removed from your
presence?

If we go up to the heavens, you are there;
if we make our bed in the depths, you are there.

If we look into the eyes of the other...you are there
If we live and work and accomplish our day to day
tasks...you are there





If we have an ordinary conversation...
you are there

If we see some magnificent...you are there

If we see a sunset in the West Texas sky or over
an ocean horizon...you are there

If we rise on the wings of the dawn,
if we settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide us,
your right hand will hold us fast.

Surely, God you are in this place,

May we all see,

In the name of Jesus I pray.
Amen

John Mark Davidson



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*In a recent publication with extensive documentation, I demonstrate how the belief in white supremacy created the discriminatory caste system that operates in the United States. For an electronic copy of this study, please email foster@acu.edu





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