

An Invitation to Community
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Our community is currently living in a tsunami of trauma and terror. It reminds me of the words of the Black national anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*:

*God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light;
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.*

It is hard to stay on the path right now because of the trauma and terror we see and experience every day.

I'd like to invite you into my world for one typical Tuesday morning, June 20, 2020. When my husband Pastor Ralph Galloway and I woke up to gunshots at 6:15, the first words out of our mouths were, "God help us. Bless us to be a blessing." We began to pray Psalm 91, "And God will give his angels charge over you," and then we checked our phones.

6:30am. Both our phones ring. The terrified voice on the other end says, "My landlord refused to pay the water bill; by law, isn't he supposed to pay it?" We said yes. "Well, the water company is coming to disconnect the water and how am I going to bathe my children or cook?" We ask how much it is (\$376) and say we will call the water company together and negotiate. She says, "I tried that." We asked if she had the paperwork ("yes") and said we would pay it and then help find an attorney to help with her landlord. She says, "If I get an attorney, he has threatened to evict me."

7:15am. I washed my face and went into the kitchen, and watched three black trucks with confederate flags drive slowly down our street. Ralph went outside and checked the alley for incendiary devices; our neighbors have found them in alleys all over the Northside.

8:20am. My phone rings again. There is weeping and wailing. "...I can't sleep. My sons, my sons, my sons, they are afraid to leave the house, but if they don't go to work we won't have enough to pay the mortgage. It took a lot for us to get this house and we want to hang on but can't if everyone is not working." I asked Pastor Ralph to take this call; he greeted her and asked her what happened. She says "My sons, they are afraid to go to work because of the cops; they don't want to end up like Mr. Floyd. Can you talk to them?" Pastor Ralph says that he will be right over to talk and drive them to work.

10:00am I read an email from Sondra Samuels, Executive Director of the Northside Achievement Zone, asking us to write the Commissioners and advocate that they take time for community input before defunding the police. The letter is written and sent, signed by Ralph because he was born and raised on the Northside, and it is his home.

12:00noon. We received a joint text that said, “Pastors, as you know I have been protesting. And I wore a mask. I had to do it because there have been way too many deaths. I usually don’t protest, but enough is enough. So, with every step I took I called out, ‘George Floyd, Tamir Rice, Brianna Taylor, Jamar Clark, Philando Castile, and on and on.’ For 401 years our people have died brutally and violently. After the protest I started not feeling well; me, my mother, my three sons, and my husband have all tested positive for COVID19. Where is God in that?”

I’ve shared a typical morning with you. By now you have heard many facts and figures about unrelenting racialized oppression; the pandemic’s unrelenting impact on persons of color; the impact of police violence and murder; the cries from the community regarding defunding the Minneapolis Police Department; and the day-to-day grind of generational poverty and oppression. North Minneapolis is the hotbed of COVID-19 in the state of Minnesota. You know the facts AND know we are a Matthew 25 Presbytery. How that translates to our work today:

- *When I was hungry and thirsty....*Generational poverty, utilities shut off's and hunger;
- *I was a stranger and you invited me in.....*Housing and homelessness;
- *I was sick....*health disparities in the African-American community;
- *I was in prison...Mass incarceration including survival sex for women, men, and girls of color.*

I hope by now that many of you had heard the statistical data in relation to the disparities that we live in regarding African-Americans in Minnesota – and if you haven’t, here are a few:

Data from the 2018 SHAPE study in Hennepin County:

Hunger and Food: Data identifies a large disparity in hunger and food insecurity by race. Among African-American adults in Hennepin County, 51.2% said they sometimes or often worry about running out of food.

Rent/Mortgage: Data shows that 24.6% of Black people missed or delayed paying rent or mortgage because they didn’t have enough money, compared to only 7% of white people.

Unstable Housing: Data shows that 30.9% of Black people experienced unstable housing compared to only 2.5% of white people.

Physical and Mental Health: Data shows that 18.3% of black people said they experience frequent physical health distress compared to 8.3% of white people. Data shows that 25% of black people said they experience frequent mental distress compared to 11.9% of white people. Today more people of color are dying of COVID-19 than other ethnic group.

In prison (Mass Incarceration): Data from the Sentencing Project.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

According to the Sentencing Project, “There are 2.2 million people in the nation’s prisons and jails, a 500% increase over the last 40 years.” There is a large racial disparity within this growth of imprisonment, often called mass incarceration. According to the Sentencing Project, one in three black men born in 2001 have a lifetime likelihood of being imprisoned compared to only 1 in 17 white men.

This disparity is even greater for black women. One in 18 black women compared to 1 in 111 white women.

In a study of Minneapolis Police Department data from 2018, the ACLU found that “Black people in the city [Minneapolis] are 8.7 times more likely than white people to be arrested for low-level offenses, like trespassing, disorderly conduct, consuming in public, and lurking.” In a study of Minneapolis Police Department data from 2018, the ACLU found that “[...] in one year, 28 percent of the Black population could have been picked up for a low-level offense,” compared to only 3% of the white population.

I started this letter stating that this was my world, and it is true. But as a connectional Church, this is OUR world! And as the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated in 1968, “We are living at a time when we must choose chaos or community.” In the midst of this chaos, trauma and terror, I decided to share my truth with you in hopes that you choose community by connecting: connect with the hungry, connect with the sick, connect with the dying, connect with the incarcerated, connect with the homeless. Connect, connect through prayer, connect! It is through connection that we will find a way to move together into community.