



The
Episcopal Diocese
of New York

June 1, 2020

Our Dear Brothers and Sisters,

George Floyd was killed last Monday night by a police officer who knelt on his neck and, despite his protestations that he could not breathe, would not get off of him until he asphyxiated. That is what happened to Eric Garner on Staten Island in our city in 2014. In March, Breonna Taylor was shot and killed at night in her bedroom by a force of policemen who broke into her apartment unannounced on a “no knock” warrant. That is what happened to Deborah Danner, a communicant of this diocese, in the Bronx in our city in 2016. In February, Ahmaud Arbery was shot by two vigilantes under the guise of a “citizen’s arrest” while he jogged through a white neighborhood. That is what happened to Trayvon Martin in 2012. George, Breonna and Ahmaud join Eric, Deborah, Trayvon and countless others who have fallen victim to the fear and violence of racist America and the outrages of police officers across our country throughout this country’s history, and raised to high relief by the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri six years ago. And this week America has erupted.

At a time when pandemic has led everyone to be told to distance from one another, and to stay home, seeing so many clustered in the streets at personal risk in protest of these deaths is a testament to the exhaustion, frustration, shared grief, and anger of Americans across our country. This is not the first time. Michael Brown’s killing raised into high relief the threat under which black people live in this country and brought about the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Month after month, we made our witness, we marched and protested, we insisted on the value of African American lives, we named and called out the evil of White Supremacy. These recent killings are not only tragic and violent and abominable in their own right, they drive home the harsh truth that almost nothing has changed, and that the long, weary legacy of contempt by people of power toward people of color continues unabated. For too many people, black lives don’t matter, and hearts too filled with hate and fear refuse conversion. Until white people and people with privilege and power in this country face the reality of life in this country for people of color, and understand that their own souls are at stake, and that no one is fully human until everyone is fully human, the Beloved Community will remain an unattainable dream.

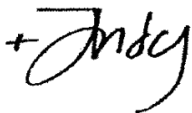
Over the months of the COVID pandemic we have watched as the wealthy have fled the city to weekend and summer homes while the poor have been left clustered in dense apartment buildings at the center of the epidemic. We have watched (and many of us have been) the privileged, working safely from home on full salary, while those who serve in hospitals and drive ambulances, and who pack and deliver groceries and pharmaceuticals, and who deliver for restaurants, and who care for old people in nursing homes, and drive subways and taxis, are forced day after day back into the public square and jobs which expose them to continual risk of disease. We have seen COVID claim a terrible harvest in black and Latino communities far beyond the losses of white people, and strike a hammer blow upon the very poor and the

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undocumented, as the ongoing injustices of entrenched poverty and poor diet and lack of access to health care have made disproportional pandemic death a new terrible price of our racial and economic injustice.

We are all of us participants in a culture and economy which fails now, and has always failed, since the inception of this country, to value people of color as the full human beings God created them and every person to be. White Supremacy exists on a long spectrum of attitudes and behaviors. At one extreme end is a police officer with his knee on the neck of a handcuffed man. But at the other end, and across that spectrum are the thousand thousand ways in which White Supremacy protects itself: the unexamined assumptions and willful blindnesses and rationalizations that train ordinary white people to turn their eyes from the evil of a racist culture, and from the racism within themselves. On the Feast of the Pentecost we celebrate that we are baptized disciples of Jesus Christ, and that we have been graced and gifted by the Holy Spirit into that New Creation heralded by Saint Paul. In our baptismal covenant we promise to “strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being.” This is of Christ. This is part of the transformation to a fuller and more glorious humanity before God. We are all of us participants in a culture and economy which dehumanizes people of color and counts their lives so cheap, so this striving for justice will require something sacrificial from every one of us. It will require every one of us to stand up. White Supremacy is written into the American character in ways that white people too often do not want to see, but as people of God we are also participants in a Beloved Community coming into being. At the center of that becoming is our insistence that black lives matter and are lived before the loving eyes of God. If our advocacy is to arise from our love, if we are to be agents of the change, it must also arise out of our humility and contrition and our resolve.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a plus sign followed by the name "Andrew" in a cursive script.

The Right Reverend Andrew ML Dietsche
Bishop of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a plus sign followed by the name "Allen" in a cursive script.

The Right Reverend Allen K. Shin
Bishop Suffragan

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a plus sign followed by the name "Mary" in a cursive script.

The Right Reverend Mary D. Glasspool
Bishop Assistant