

[Episcopal News Service, June 1, 2020] Episcopalians and leaders across The Episcopal Church are amplifying the church's call for an end to racial injustice as they join some of the vigils and demonstrations that have become widespread across the country in response to the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Floyd, an unarmed black man, died May 25 after being pinned to the ground for several minutes by [a Minneapolis officer with his knee on Floyd's neck](#). The officer was fired and has been [charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter](#). Video of the incident, including Floyd's last words, "I can't breathe," sparked outrage and protests last week in Minnesota's Twin Cities before spreading to dozens of cities in other states.

Episcopal leaders in Minnesota have expressed anger at Floyd's killing and [have joined peaceful protests there](#). They are leading online vigils and attending in-person tributes to Floyd. They are helping their neighbors and local business owners clean up after vandalism, looting and fires caused by some demonstrators.

"We are so grateful for the ways in which clergy and lay leaders have been bearing witness to the love of Jesus in these painful days for the people of the Twin Cities, the rest of Minnesota, and indeed our whole nation," Minnesota Bishop Brian Prior and Bishop-elect Craig Loya [said in a May 30 Facebook post](#). "Your prayers and presence are sending the clear message that the church, like the savior we proclaim, always stands on the side of the marginalized."

Church leaders also are decrying the systemic racism that they say connects Floyd's death to a growing number of high-profile cases of deadly violence against people of color by police or by white vigilantes. The most recent such cases include Ahmaud Arbery, [a black jogger killed in February](#) by two white men, a father and son, in Glynn County, Georgia, and Breonna Taylor, [a black woman who was shot and killed](#) in March by police during a raid of her home in Louisville, Kentucky.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry referenced those two earlier killings in [his May 30 message to the church](#), in which he tied the collective pain of such violence to its historic and unrelenting presence within "the fabric of American life."

"But we need not be paralyzed by our past or our present," Curry said. "We are not slaves to fate but people of faith. Our long-term commitment to racial justice and reconciliation is embedded in our identity as baptized followers of Jesus. ... That work of racial reconciliation and justice – what we know as Becoming Beloved Community – is happening across our Episcopal Church."

[May 30, 2020] A word to the Episcopal Church from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry:

“Our long-term commitment to racial justice and reconciliation is embedded in our identity as baptized followers of Jesus. We will still be doing it when the news cameras are long gone.”

In the midst of COVID-19 and the pressure cooker of a society in turmoil, a Minnesota man named George Floyd was brutally killed. His basic human dignity was stripped by someone charged to protect our common humanity.

Perhaps the deeper pain is the fact that this was not an isolated incident. It happened to Breonna Taylor on March 13 in Kentucky. It happened to Ahmaud Arbery on February 23 in Georgia. Racial terror in this form occurred when I was a teenager growing up black in Buffalo, New York. It extends back to the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955 and well before that. It’s not just our present or our history. It is part of the fabric of American life.

But we need not be paralyzed by our past or our present. We are not slaves to fate but people of faith. Our long-term commitment to racial justice and reconciliation is embedded in our identity as baptized followers of Jesus. We will still be doing it when the news cameras are long gone.

That work of racial reconciliation and justice – what we know as Becoming Beloved Community – is happening across our Episcopal Church. It is happening in Minnesota and in the Dioceses of Kentucky, Georgia and Atlanta, across America and around the world. That mission matters now more than ever, and it is work that belongs to all of us.

It must go on when racist violence and police brutality are no longer front-page news. It must go on when the work is not fashionable, and the way seems hard, and we feel utterly alone. It is the difficult labor of picking up the cross of Jesus like Simon of Cyrene, and carrying it until no one – no matter their color, no matter their class, no matter their caste – until no child of God is degraded and disrespected by anybody. That is God’s dream, this is our work, and we shall not cease until God’s dream is realized.

Is this hopelessly naïve? No, the vision of God’s dream is no idealistic utopia. It is our only real hope. And, St. Paul says, “hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5). Real love is the dogged commitment to live my life in the most unselfish, even sacrificial ways; to love God, love my neighbor, love the earth and truly love myself. Perhaps most difficult in times like this, it is even love for my enemy. That is why we cannot condone violence. Violence against any person – conducted by some police officers or by some protesters – is violence against a child of God created in God’s image. No, as followers of Christ, we do not condone violence.

Neither do we condone our nation’s collective, complicit silence in the face of injustice and violent death. The anger of so many on our streets is born out of the accumulated frustration that so few seem to care when another black, brown or native life is snuffed out.

But there is another way. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, a broken man lay on the side of the road. The religious leaders who passed were largely indifferent. Only the Samaritan saw the wounded stranger and acted. He provided medical care and housing. He made provision for this stranger’s well-being. He helped and healed a fellow child of God.

Love, as Jesus teaches, is action like this as well as attitude. It seeks the good, the well-being, and the welfare of others as well as one's self. That way of real love is the only way there is.

Accompanying this statement is a card describing ways to practice the Way of Love in the midst of pandemic, uncertainty and loss. In addition, you will find online a set of resources to help Episcopalians to LEARN, PRAY & ACT in response to racist violence and police brutality. That resource set includes faithful tools for listening to and learning from communities too often ignored or suppressed, for incorporating God's vision of justice into your personal and community prayer life, and for positively and constructively engaging in advocacy and public witness.

Opening and changing hearts does not happen overnight. The Christian race is not a sprint; it is a marathon. Our prayers and our work for justice, healing and truth-telling must be unceasing. Let us recommit ourselves to following in the footsteps of Jesus, the way that leads to healing, justice and love.

[Additional Resources for Responding to Racist Violence and Police Brutality](#)