

**A Letter from the Diocese of Southeast Florida**

**on Racism in Church and Society**

*Celebrant* *Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?*

People *I will, with God’s help.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, p 305)

3 March 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Our Baptismal promise to respect the dignity of every human being is one that we take very seriously as members of The Episcopal Church. These are words we readily assent to proclaim, but do we truly live into our promise? What does dignity entail? How do we bring about justice and peace when we cannot readily agree on what justice is or looks like?

The pain that we see all around us right now is not new. That pain has been with black and brown people for countless generations. From the moment European settlers came to the Americas, systemic racism has been built into the fabric of our country. Native Americans were oppressed, displaced, and murdered. Human beings were kidnapped in Africa and brought in slavery to this land 400 years ago. Racism was knitted into the DNA of the United States of America before it even officially existed.

Sadly for hundreds of years Churches, including and especially The Episcopal Church, used the Scriptures to justify the dehumanization of anyone who was not white. Our Baptismal promise is not rooted only in the need to transform the world around us, but to also transform our Church and ourselves. As we are reminded in the First Letter of Peter, judgement begins with the household of God (I Pet. 4:17). As a Church, we have worked to address racism through education, relationship, and advocacy for those who suffer the deep and daily pain of a world that denies the Image of God in them because of their skin color. Clearly such work is not finished; the dehumanization of those who are not white continues.

The murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbrey and many others indicate the brutal force that police officers use towards people of color. Certainly, this is not new and has been the case for many years. However, as we watch continued protests by the Black Live Matter movement and others we may finally be moved to confront this sinful reality and begin the long overdue work to bring about racial justice, reconciliation and the building up of the Beloved Community.

As Episcopalans of the Diocese of Southeast Florida, we commit ourselves to this transforming work. We will

✞ Establish in our Diocese, including our congregations and schools, full and ongoing education, listening sessions, serious and respectful discussion, and prayer opportunities about racial injustice and ways of reconciliation.

✞ Engage in lament, confession, contrition, and repentance for the Church’s role in establishing and maintaining systemic racism and racial injustice.

✞ Explore the history of our individual churches and schools in our interaction with our neighborhoods and wider communities in regard to racism in housing, education, voting, and welcoming of people of color, focusing equally in our participation in racist structures and our actions in the face of them, and share our findings with our community and invite participation from those affected by the actions of our congregations.

✞ Guide our youth to recognize threads of systemic and institutional racism such that they too join us in fulfilling our Baptismal Covenant.

✞ Urge diocesan-wide intensive anti-racism training for clergy and lay leaders in all aspects of our common life.

✞ Actively engage with our local, statewide, and national leaders to advocate for legal and governmental reform of housing, education, healthcare, policing, and other societal structures that disadvantage people of color.

 ✞ Incorporate the biblical and practical application of Restorative Justice with regard to truth-telling and reconciliation towards a restoration of the soul of the nation.

✞ Respond prophetically to “numerous inexcusable deaths and intimidation of people of color at the hands of law enforcement personnel in communities all over the United States” as called for in General Convention resolution 2018-A299, “Acknowledge Police Violence and Confront Racism.”

✞ Advocate for reforms of policing at all levels and for the reallocation of financial resources to hire social workers, mental health care workers, and other professionals.

 ✞ Publicly and non-violently witness to the call of Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves.

✞ Strongly denounce white supremist groups and those who support them, especially

among the political leadership of our state and national representation.

This endeavor will not be swift. Hundreds of years of injustice cannot be healed overnight. Rather than be overwhelmed by this ministry, we step forward in faith that God’s justice and love are with us. *We will, with God’s help!*

We pray to our triune God, in the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick:

*Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,*

*for the facing of this hour.*

With prayers and encouragement in the Gospel,

The Bishop, Clergy, and Lay Leadership

The Diocese of Southeast Florida