

Greetings to the Saints of Mission Presbytery!

When we were adopting our children, we finally chose to adopt from Russia because I'd had a very meaningful trip there in college, the children's godfather-to-be was on that same trip with me, and Paul and I planned on being able to share some Russian heritage with them. While in Russia, we told our host that we had been debating between Russia and Romania, and finally decided on Russia because of my college connection. Her response: "Oh, you don't want to adopt Romanians. They're gypsies."

Seriously?

In the prologue to his book *Stamped From the Beginning*, currently on the New York Times Bestseller list, author Ibram Kendi writes this: the definition of a racist idea is "any concept that regards one racial group as inferior or superior to another racial group in any way."

Seriously.

I'm writing you today on the fifth anniversary of the murders at the Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, in which our friend the Rev. Sharon Risher lost her mother, her pastor, cousins and friends. My heart continues to break for her, for that community, and for the inconceivable loss they have experienced - as well as the inconceivable losses of families who lose loved ones to needless and unjust violence every day.

I'm writing you a day after our staff meeting, where Caitlin Supcoff provided a powerful opening devotional from Ibram Kendi's book, and each of us shared stories of racism in our own lives as we passed the ceremonial box of kleenex.

I'm writing you as one who is shaken, convicted, and ready to "not waste a good crisis," but rather to use this time as an occasion for substantial change in the way that I live and move. And for me, that first step is going to require a deep dive into authentic relationship, conversation, and interaction with all of God's children.

Our own Carolyn Helsel writes in her book *Anxious to Talk About It*: "Love requires more from us than polite language or saying the right thing. Love requires that we learn about one another and care for one another even in the midst of our disagreements." (35) Sharon Risher writes in her book *For Such A Time as This*: "Let's just start talking! We need honest conversations about race, privilege and oppression. The more we get together in small groups, the more we can start to understand each other in a real way." (96) Risher quotes a sermon from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, delivered in the

National Cathedral on March 31, 1968: “Nothing will be done until people of good will put their bodies and their souls in motion. And it will be the kind of soul force brought into being as a result of this confrontation that I believe will make the difference.”

At the March Presbytery meeting, our presbytery joined several of our congregations in declaring ourselves to be a Matthew 25 Presbytery. The emphases of the Matthew 25 movement are building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty. Because of our participation in the Vital Congregations initiative, we have already taken a deep dive into the first one. I’m going to be working with our General Council and Staff to begin conversations about how we might work as a Presbytery on the other two as well. I hope that you, and your Session, and your congregation will join us on this biblical, difficult, timely and essential journey. Check out [this video](#) that you’re welcome to share with your congregation.

1 John 3:16-18, 23 (NRSV) -

We know love by this, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.....And this is [God’s] commandment: that we should believe in the name of [God’s] son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

Seriously.

Presbyter “Sightings” (as it were)

June 18 - meet with Committee on the Office of General Assembly and San Antonio Region pastors

June 19 - General Assembly begins with the election of the new Co-Moderators

June 21 - Happy Fathers Day! I’ll be worshipping with Paul at his church

June 23 - meet with Staff and individual staff members

June 24 - meet with Corpus Christi region leaders and Synod EP Forum

June 26-27 - meet with the first-ever Virtual General Assembly

June 28 - Preach for Kerrville First; ordination for Ezequiel Herrera in McAllen

June 30 - Post-GA meeting with Synod Presbyters and Stated Clerks; virtual gathering with the Victoria Region folks post-GA