



June 5, 2020

Dear Friends of the Rio Texas Conference,

Several people have asked if I would be releasing a statement about the killing of George Floyd. I've read helpful statements from other bishops, pastors, and community leaders, and I have had to ask myself why I feel such an inner reluctance to prepare one.

I served as bishop in Missouri when Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson. He died a couple of blocks from a United Methodist Church. I wrote a statement. A week later, I wrote another one as events unfolded. And another one after that. To be honest, I've lost count of the number of statements I have written about the killings of black people during the sixteen years that I have been a bishop, and it grieves my spirit to wonder whether those words have done any good.

Statements from leaders can be important in the moment but only go so far. Violence against black people and other people of color finds its roots in racism, systemic and profound, and forms such a continuing pattern that statements often sound weak, awkward, ineffective, empty, and utterly insufficient.

The continuous video coverage of frustration, anger, and grief in the streets of Minneapolis, New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC, can have the effect of making the current crisis appear far away, removed from where many of us live and work. Yet this coverage also puts the reality right before us, with graphic images, some of which come from our own communities. What is clear is that the dynamics of racism exist in varying degrees in every community served by the Rio Texas Conference as well as in our churches.

Conversations about race are difficult. They are hard work. They take courage, openness, listening, learning. Exploring issues of access, equality, and human dignity is work that requires humility and a willingness to explore assumptions and perceptions that deeply shape us in ways we usually are not even conscious of. This is kingdom work. It is work the Lord requires of us—to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

As the Holy Spirit descended upon the gathering at Pentecost, people of diverse nations, languages, and races suddenly understood one another as never before. How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this season to place ourselves in the most advantageous circumstances to learn what God would have us know?

This moment provides an opening for us to learn things that we do not now know and to see what ordinarily we do not see about how other people experience us, our churches, and our communities. We may not recognize how we play a role in perpetuating injustices that other people experience.

I pray that our conference, our churches, our pastors, and the everyday disciples that seek to faithfully live out the commission of Christ are willing to lean into the hard conversations rather than to turn away from them.

My heart breaks every time I think of Mr. Floyd and his final moments of life. May this season not merely break our hearts but *break open* our hearts so that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God.

Yours in Christ,

Robert Schnase, Bishop

The Rio Texas Conference  
of the United Methodist Church