



MAINE CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Anti-Racism Resource Team

Dear Maine Conference,

What does it mean to dismantle racism in a pandemic? The events of this past week have shown us once again that the national epidemic of racism is still going strong after 400 years and is still endangering the lives of black and brown people.

Already, it is clear that COVID-19 is doing greater damage to black and brown communities in our country. Already, black people are subjected to a higher level of danger in their everyday lives than white people. And, then, we see the internationally publicized racist incidents in Minneapolis, Georgia, New York, Kentucky, and Florida. Events happen like these every day without the same international coverage. The resulting protests are justifiable and holy responses to centuries of oppression. Our hearts hurt, and we are angry. George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, among many, should be alive today. Your grief is real and should not be ignored. If you are lamenting their murders and the fear that black and brown Americans live with every day, we would like to offer up this powerful sermon of lament. We are grateful for the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III and Trinity UCC for sharing this testimony with us: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6985UG0Z3k>

Even as we lament the lives that have been taken, that grief can become action rooted in love of God and love of neighbor. Here in Maine, it is common for some people, usually white, to say that “this place is not racist.” But, the same issues we see on the news are present here in Maine. It is part of our air and water, too. We are all called to do what we can, when we can, to follow the Gospel. God will help us stretch to do this next right thing. As we know, being Christian means loving our neighbors, being bold in the face of injustice, and speaking truth to power. It means examining our own sinfulness and repenting, turning back towards God. The discomfort we’re feeling right now is a symptom of where we need to continue treating, where racism has taken root.

This is one more moment when we face the reality of white power and privilege. How can we commit to do the work to end it? Even as many of us are still staying at home to protect our neighbors in the midst of the Pandemic, here are some actions to either help you continue the work you’ve been doing, or begin this part of your Christian journey for the first time.

Our goal is not just to do one thing to help us feel better right now but begin, or continue, making the changes in ourselves and our institutions. As you know, this will be work that takes a while. Long-lasting change always does. In this moment, we are Called to act on our faith. To love our neighbor as ourselves, including being willing to be uncomfortable and face issues we would rather not face. For those who are new to this work, we must remember that our call is to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God -especially when it means examining our privilege and letting go, so that others may be treated fairly.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

First, even in your grief, do not succumb to powerlessness. As Rev. Linette George said in her sermon this past Sunday, you are leaders. People are looking to you, as Christians, for leadership. Building God's Kingdom has always been done bit by bit. You are building with God right now. Then, try to do some of the following:

Become involved in local government.

Ask questions about the kinds of training your town and county's police force has received in de-escalation, implicit bias, and anti-racism. Ask about funds the department has been given for military-grade equipment. Ask about what community policing measures they are putting in place. Ask them to adopt the eight policies, proven to reduce police violence, described here: <https://8cantwait.org/>.

Tithe some of your time during the stay at home order to learning more about anti-racism.

Here is a good list of resources, both for kids and adults, to help us continue the holy work of dismantling racism. You could read them on your own or, if you're feeling like connecting with others at church about this, develop a long-distance study group to talk about what you're learning: <https://tinyurl.com/antiracismresourcealist>

Share your money: If you have some money to share, these programs in Minneapolis are doing great work and could use our support right now:

- Black Visions: blackvisionsmn.org
- Central Area Neighborhood Development Organization: <https://thecentralneighborhood.com/>
- Help rebuild this restaurant: <https://gf.me/u/x5iv2v>
- Help fund some frontline medics caring for people at the protests in Minnesota: <https://www.northstarhealthcollective.org/donate>

Bail out some protestors:

- For Us, By Us bail fund, being organized with BLM Portland: <https://fubufund.org/fiscal-sponsor/>
- To share with others arrested all over the country, this is a verified list of bail funds: <https://bailfunds.github.io/>

Here is the message from our UCC siblings in Minnesota. Pray over it and share it on your social media. Our siblings in Minnesota need to see our support.

- <https://www.uccmn.org/2020/05/27/in-memory-of-george-floyd-what-shall-we-say-as-church/>

Here are some programs and people that could use our time, money, and talents right here in Maine:

- Black Girl in Maine -- <https://blackgirlinmaine.com/> - Writings of Shay Stewart-Bouley, and colleagues, on issues related to racial justice in Maine.
- Green Memorial AME Zion Church in Portland - To donate - <https://giv.li/wqnacp> - An historic African American Church in Portland, Maine, supporting its members and community in the midst of the pandemic.
- Wabanaki REACH -- <http://www.mainewabanakireach.org/> - An important organization supporting Wabanaki people and culture in Maine.
- BLM Portland: <https://gf.me/u/x6mczd> - a local Black Lives Matter group (they have paused this GoFundMe right now, but will open it when it seems helpful)

Read about Black history in Maine (both available from the Conference Office to borrow)

- *Black Bangor* - <https://bookshop.org/books/black-bangor-african-americans-in-a-maine-community-1880-1950/9781584654995>
- *Maine's Visible Black History; the Chronicle of its People*
<https://bookshop.org/books/maine-s-visible-black-history-the-first-chronicle-of-its-people/9780884482758>

Watch Trevor Noah's video with an accessible explanation about racism and the social contract - <https://www.facebook.com/TrevorNoah/posts/10158351635592453>

When we join together with our siblings in faith of all kinds and with like-minded people who share our yearning for love and justice - we will surely make a difference. Please join together to unmask, dismantle and eradicate racism. We can do it.

In Christ's peace,

Rev. Deborah J. Blood, Conference Minister

On behalf of the Anti-Racism Resource Team of the Maine Conference:

Rev. Linette George, co-chair

Rev. Christina Cataldo, co-chair