



Thursday, May 14, 2020

Council of Bishops' statement of the killing of Ahmaud Arbery

The February killing of an unarmed Black man, Ahmaud Arbery, in Brunswick, Georgia, continues to fill the news cycle and our hearts. The Council of Bishops joins the General Commission on Religion and Race and the General Board of Church and Society in condemning this senseless killing, and racism and white supremacy in every form.

The list of innocent Black lives who have been needlessly killed grows each day: Eric Garner, Terrence Crutcher, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Samuel DuBose, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, LaQuan McDonald, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott and now Ahmaud Arbery. These are just some of the ones we know. We are saddened that there are many more names that could be added to this list.

Parents of Black children live in fear each and every day that they themselves or a member of their family will be the next victim as the pervasive culture of racism and white supremacy grows each day. In fact, voices inciting racism and white supremacy have been given a greater place within our political government. While there are laws against racial discrimination in the United States, in practice, little has changed. It is time for The United Methodist Church to take a stand and to join our prayers and our actions and denounce our complicity.

It is time for us to reclaim The United Methodist Social Principles that name racism as sin and states that it is antithetical to the gospel itself.

As bishops of the church, we sound the clarion call for the eradication of racism and white supremacy. Racism is real and it must no longer exist in our communities. The recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disparities in our system that have been fed by racism in cities across America.

We affirm the 1976 General Conference Statement of *The United Methodist Church and Race* that states unequivocally: "By biblical and theological precept, by the law of the church, by General Conference pronouncement, and by Episcopal expression, the matter is clear. With respect to race, the aim of The United Methodist Church is nothing less than an inclusive church in an inclusive society. The United Methodist Church, therefore, calls upon all its people to perform those faithful deeds of love and justice in both the church and community that will bring this aim into reality.

“Because we believe:

1. That God is the Creator of all people and all are God’s children in one family;
2. That racism is a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ;
3. That racism denies the redemption and reconciliation of Jesus Christ;
4. That racism robs all human beings of their wholeness and is used as a justification for social, economic, environmental, and political exploitation;
5. That we must declare before God and before one another that we have sinned against our sisters and brothers of other races in thought, in word, and in deed;
6. That in our common humanity in creation all women and men are made in God’s image and all persons are equally valuable in the sight of God;
7. That our strength lies in our racial and cultural diversity and that we must work toward a world in which each person’s value is respected and nurtured;
8. That our struggle for justice must be based on new attitudes, new understandings, and new relationships and must be reflected in the laws, policies, structures, and practices of both church and state. [Therefore,] we commit ourselves as individuals and as a community to follow Jesus Christ in word and in deed and to struggle for the rights and the self-determination of every person and group of persons.” [2016 Book of Resolutions, #3371]

While arrests have been made, we call for justice to prevail.

May God’s grace and peace be with the Arbery Family and the many families who live each day in fear and continue to be torchbearers for justice and peace.

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cynthia Fierro Harvey". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey
Resident Bishop, Louisiana Conference
President, Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church