

A Message of Hope from Hope United Church of Christ

Let me start by saying our hope is that everyone is managing as well as can be expected during this difficult time of the pandemic crisis and we wish good health for everyone, and relief and healing for those who are struggling with their own health issues or those of loved ones.

I wish I didn't have to write the words that follow, but a sense of duty to speak out about what's been happening all over our country has not allowed me to be silent any longer. I am a white male, Age 65, and I am ashamed of the systemic racism which still pervades our society and that so readily rears its head in unspeakable ways. It appalls and disgusts me in ways that I can't even describe.

What does it say about a society that allows an experienced, trained policeman to put his knee on a man's neck until that man, George Floyd, becomes unresponsive and dies... **Or** allows the police, executing a search warrant, to shoot an unarmed woman in her own home, as in the case of Breonna Taylor... **Or** allows vigilantes, acting under the auspices of a citizen's arrest, to murder an innocent, unarmed man and then shout a racial epithet over his lifeless body, as in the case of Ahmaud Arbery... **Or** allows a white woman, who didn't get her way while allowing her dog to go unleashed in a public area where signs clearly stated that dogs must be on a leash, to falsely accuse a man of threatening her life, as in the case of Christian Cooper. What do all of these cases have in common? They all happened in the past two months and the victims were all African Americans. Systemic racism, the police violence it gives rise to and the feeling of white privilege all allow these things to keep on happening.

So, to answer the question, of what it says about a society that allows these things to happen, is complicated. That doesn't mean we should allow people to protest for a while and hope it blows over so we can move on, as we have mostly done in the past. This is a reality that we cannot perpetuate or accept. We must do better!

In 1868 the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution established the illegality of slavery and forbid denial of any person's "life, liberty or property without due process of the law". Yet, here we are today. African Americans have their civil rights disproportionately violated by a society that, by and large, allows it to happen and then hopes it will all go away. We must do better!

Tens of thousands of people of good conscience have taken to the streets to protest and to demand that we live up to our values as people and the values our nation stands for. It is a reasonable, ethical and potentially unifying demand. It's a start, but we must do better!

We must truly believe that **everyone** has the right to live freely, no matter where they live or the color of their skin, without the fear of being targeted or victimized. We must demand racial justice. We need to boldly act together as individuals, as neighbors, as

communities, as organizations and as a government to compassionately erase the mistakes of the past and to affect real, lasting change. We **all** must do better!

At Hope United Church of Christ in Allentown, PA we are committed to creating a community that treats everyone equally and with dignity. "Our vision is to welcome and serve the community, create hope and boldly act as instruments for change by bringing people together, practicing compassion and advocating for equality". We do not tolerate discrimination, harassment or racism. When we see it, we will call it out and name it.

We are committed to creating lasting change by strategically partnering with non-profit organizations that make a positive impact in the community. To date we have donated \$50,000 each to Family Promise and Pinebrook Family Answers and are beginning to work with them to advance their mission which is to help all families and children live dignified lives.

As part of our commitment to affect change in making racial justice more than just a promise, we are committing to donate money to and strategically partner with additional organizations, specifically organizations that deal with social and racial injustice. We are currently researching organizations for possible partnerships. Our goal is to make a bold impact in our local communities. We want to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, and truly make a difference.

We realize this isn't enough, but if we all do our small part the world will become a better place, and some day we may realize the goal of eradicating social and racial injustice forever.

Respectfully,

Ron Smith

Hope UCC Council President