

# Racial Justice

## I Like it Like That

by Steve Marston

In the 1960s, America was burning - from New York to Los Angeles and places in between: Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Rochester, Newark, and elsewhere.

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, AKA the Kerner Commission, released its report on February 29, 1968 finding that the riots resulted from black frustration at lack of economic opportunity. The report berated federal and state governments for failed housing, education and social-service policies.

The report also aimed some of its sharpest criticism at the mainstream media. "The press has too long basked in a white world looking out of it, if at all, with white men's eyes and white perspective." The report's most famous passage warned, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white - separate and unequal."

Since then, the purchasing power of the minimum wage peaked in the late 1960s at \$9.22 an hour in 2012 dollars. Bill Clinton delivered on his promise to "end welfare as we have come to know it." The educational system has gone from bad to worse, from teaching to testing. Racist policies were ensconced in law and policy: "Stop and Frisk," "Broken Windows Policing," "Stand Your Ground," and voting requirements to combat non-existent fraud that diminishes access to the polls.

In New York City, low-level marijuana arrests were up tenfold and more than four out of five of those arrested were black and Latino. Mass incarceration and other means of keeping non-whites disenfranchised keeps them out of the job market, out of neighborhoods, and out of the voting booth.

One thing that's different now: in the '60s, when "stuff" happened there was no proof; now, there's a cell phone in nearly every pocket, and a camera in every cell phone to provide graphic evidence of wrong doing.

The present system serves the interests of the prison-industrial complex, big pharma, politicians, et al. A better educated populace earning a living wage would benefit everyone with more brain power, more buying power, and higher tax revenues. If federal, state, city, and local governments choose not to do this, then there has to be another operative here: "It's not enough for whites to win, people of color have to lose." Even if whites have to cut their nose to spite their face.

I've been accused of being a "conspiracy theorist" because I think the system is doing exactly what it was designed to do.

Do you really think we don't know how to educate people? (In NYC, the four-year high school graduation rate was 64.2 percent in the 2013-14 school year, but only 38 percent of graduates were considered college ready.)

Do you think [the United States] has to have the greatest rate of incarceration on the planet? (The US has 5 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of its prisoners.) Do you wonder why 52 countries have lower firearm-related death rates? Or why the US is the only developed country without national universal health care? Or why 33 countries have lower infant mortality rates? Or why the US ranks 29th in income equality out of 34 OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries? (The wealthiest 160,000 families own as much wealth as the poorest 145 million families; 22 percent of all children (39 percent of black children) in the US live in families that are considered officially poor.)

We have the means to make things right. But we don't.

I take that to mean that those in power like it like that, demonstrating that "every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets." Do not wonder why what's happening in Ferguson and Baltimore and elsewhere is happening. Wonder why it didn't happen sooner, or more often, or in more places. "Current events" are only the tip of the iceberg.

We are closer to our highest nature when we liberate ourselves and others from political, social, economic, and religious oppression and from all other forms of injustice; when we transform systems and structures that oppress into ones that empower.

Politicians and poverty pimps who want to tinker around the edges, spout pious platitudes, throw money at the symptoms, offer cheap grace, and leave the system essentially intact exacerbate rather than ameliorate the problem.

For those who want to do justice and love mercy, keep on keepin' on. ■

*—Steve Marston is a member of Judson Memorial Church in New York City (a BPFNA Partner Congregation). This article was originally printed in Judson's electronic newsletter Digital Fountain.*

## The Pigment of Our Imagination

by Lance Laird

*This article was written following the non-conviction of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin.*

"You are wonderful, beautiful, gifted and giving. God loves you, and so do we." This is what we tell our children: the milk chocolate, the caramel, and the vanilla colored one. We don't usually describe them in terms of color (or ice cream flavors), as their personalities, attitudes, dress styles, and rhythms of movement distinguish them more easily from each other in daily interaction—at least for people who get a chance to know them. But to our sons, Aidan and Naim, we also have to say, "There will be people out there who will judge you, fear you, suspect you, follow you, and possibly want to hurt you just because of the color of your skin or

the way you wear your clothes. It doesn't matter how smart you are or how well-spoken or well-behaved." As Trayvon Martin's mother said, the case is "sending a terrible message to other little black and brown boys -- that you can't walk fast, you can't walk slow. So what do they do? I mean, how do you get home without people knowing or assuming that you're doing something wrong? Trayvon wasn't doing anything wrong."

As "white" parents of "black" children through transracial adoption, we have become quite aware of our skin privilege, the ways in which the structures of our supposedly egalitarian, "color blind" society give more rights to us than to others. And these others we know; they are family.

It is because of the "pigment of our imagination," something that is deeply flawed within our vision of the world, the white racism that Jim Wallis labeled "America's original sin". We US Americans live in a country where browner bodies have less value than paler bodies, where a dark-skinned Marissa Alexander can be sentenced in Florida to 20 years in prison for firing a warning shot in front of her abusive ex-husband; while a lighter-skinned George Zimmerman can pursue an unarmed dark-skinned teenager, provoke a confrontation, and shoot him to death and be found "not guilty". This is the world into which we send our boys.

Actually, we don't have to send them anywhere. We're in the thick of it, and racism will find them. Dr. Miguel de la Torre spoke at the BPFNA gathering [in Spokane]. He joked about his white liberal activist friends who invite him to "go out and get arrested" for protesting; his witty reply went something like, "I'm Latino. I don't have to go anywhere to get arrested. The police come and find me."

We have tried to introduce our children to police as "community helpers" (and they have been for us in most circumstances), but we have also had to explain the hard truth that sometimes people who are empowered to help may use their power to hurt. Ashlee's cousin, an army chaplain's assistant who happens to be white and blonde, had a single car accident on a highway in Northern Virginia. State troopers invited her out of the car, pressed her to the hood of theirs, threw her on the ground, put a knee in her back and pinned her to the pavement. Despite her bruises, she was convicted of felony assault on a police officer and served 6 months in federal prison. Women of color in the prison explained to her, "You got hog-tied! It happens all the time." Such violence is a part of the system of justice for all in this land. And this time, it was not about the color of her skin.

As Trayvon Martin's mother wondered after the verdict, "Maybe they (jurors) didn't see Trayvon as their son. They didn't see Trayvon as a teenager. They didn't see Trayvon as just a human being that was minding his own business." According to CNN, Martin's father "said that his children had grown up in a diverse community, so he had never felt a need to have a conversation about how his sons should deal with race. Rather, he said he talked with his children about 'how we prepare them to become teenagers, to become upstanding citizens, to conduct themselves in public.'"

But how do we teach our kids that citizenship requires both respect for good laws (the ones MLK said "could keep people from lynching me") and disobedience to unjust laws (the ones Dr.

King said we have a moral responsibility to disobey). This is what de la Torre politely calls "screwing with the system." Glen Stassen's "transforming initiatives" interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount aims to do the same: to expose the violence and injustice with unexpected acts of "standing your ground" that demand recognition of one's own humanity and dignity. But the reality is that doing so could get you killed. Even buying snacks in a neighborhood where people don't know you could get you killed, because some people have "rights" to shoot the stranger in their midst.

Soon after Trayvon was killed there was a movement on the internet called "I am Trayvon Martin." Pictures of all kind of folks wearing hoodies popped up to show solidarity with this young man who lost his life. And while the "I am Trayvon Martin" movement had good intentions, the reality is that we are not all Trayvon Martin. I am a 6'2" 49 year old white man. The police will not profile me in a store, no one will assume I do not belong. I will most likely not be viewed with suspicion. My sons will not have the same experience. I am not Trayvon, but they are. The justice system works in my favor, not theirs. The system's "justice" is a product of a dominant culture with its collectively pigmented imagination.

I recognize that I am much more likely to be treated like George Zimmerman. Can I use the privilege and power I have, that I share with others, the love that we share as a family and the community we have with other families, to provoke creative transformations in lawmakers, neighborhood watch volunteers, jurors, and the collective structures within which we live? Will I recognize the next young black man I see as my son? Perhaps an angel with whom I might share some Skittles and some iced tea? I hope so. ■

## BPFNA Statement on Centering Black Lives in Pursuit of Racial Justice

from BPFNA ~ *Bautistas por la Paz*

It is with a profound sense of humility and obligation to "witness to the {lack of} peace rooted in justice" in the light of ongoing attacks on black bodies in the US, that the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America ~ *Bautistas por la Paz* (BPFNA) stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and all those struggling to resist the systemic forces bearing down on black bodies at this time.

It is past time for an acknowledgment of the systemic forces at play: forces refusing to acknowledge that white lives are valued more than black lives, forces refusing to acknowledge gross inequality imbedded in a system of white supremacy, forces refusing to acknowledge the colonial theft of land and abuse of bodies over centuries, forces refusing to acknowledge systemic mass incarceration of black bodies. White supremacy blinds, divides, silences, and kills. We must raise our voices to speak out against these evils, condemn unjust disparities based on race, and demand accountability for the oppression, discrimination, and killings that disproportionately impact black lives.

That accountability must begin with our own organization and so we humbly acknowledge BPFNA ~ *Bautistas por la Paz*'s

complicity in these structures of white supremacy and we publically commit to working to dismantle these structures in our midst. We have ignored black voices, adding hurt to hurt. We recognize and name this history and commit to move into a better future.

We pledge not to become “faint of heart”. We take on this work, rooted in radical love, committed to:

- Examine our lives, individually and corporately, through the lens of white supremacy, to see how we have supported evil and harmed those within our midst.
- Act on the understanding that it is not the job of people of color to teach white people how racism permeates our society and impacts all of us.
- Take responsibility for our own anti-racist education, connecting with other groups who prioritize transparent accountability.
- Do the work of centering black lives and decentering whiteness, following the lead of black leaders through relationships of accountability.
- Claim a stake in and a responsibility for reversing structures of racism, violence and oppression that are at the root of the systemic attack on black life and culture.
- Speak truth and break silences that harm.
- Recognize that dismantling other manifestations of white supremacy, violence, and oppression is equally urgent work, which will require a broad global unified effort that racism inherently undermines. The struggle is interconnected.
- Form meaningful, collaborative, long-term relationships with black clergy, theologians, activists, and groups who are focused on this work and committed to social justice, remaining aware that BPFNA ~ Bautistas por la Paz must do better in hearing and creating space for black voices so that just relationships can truly thrive and we can move forward together.

Despite the persistence of systems, coordinated resistance efforts like the Movement for Black Lives herald the humanity and beauty of black and brown persons and continue to challenge us with a vision of justice born out of community in struggle. Aboriginal activist Lilla Watson said, “If you have come here to help me, you



are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” BPFNA ~ Bautistas por la Paz stands firmly behind the conviction that, when centering the liberation of those most marginalized, every one of us will be liberated along the way. None of us is free until all of us are free. ■

## Actions you can take now to Center Black Lives

from BPFNA ~ Bautistas por la Paz

**Become active in groups involved in the Movement for Black Lives**, groups like local chapters of *Black Lives Matter*, *Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)*, and *European Dissent*. If none are near you, there is most likely another local group (or several) of a different name doing the work.

**Contact your legislators.** If you see that your local or state/regional governments are proposing legislation that would be particularly harmful to black peoples in your communities, speak up! Look for ways to change harmful policies already in place and be active around those issues. The toolkit *Building Momentum from the Ground Up: A Toolkit for Promoting Justice in Policing* discusses 15 policy reforms that could greatly impact the lives and freedoms of black people and people of color if enacted. The toolkit also gives examples of successful implementation, best practices, sample legislation, and more information around how this could be successful. *Campaign Zero* also has useful information regarding the problems that need addressing and goals and solutions in order to enact change. (See our **additional resources** section for links to both of these.)

**Invest in your communities and spend money wisely.** One of the most influential ways to hurt the unjust state is with your wallets. Stop supporting businesses that are a part of the problem, businesses that contribute to and benefit from systems of white supremacy. Instead, support local businesses, especially those owned by people of color. Keeping money in these communities helps to sustain these communities. Also, get to know your neighbors. Learn the history of where you live. Learn the history of marginalized groups that have been displaced or harmed. Do not see yourself as separate from the community around you. Community control, oversight, and sustainability are crucial.

**Donate to groups on the ground doing the work.** Many activists are burnt out and sleep deprived. Many experience trauma on a regular basis. Some are working themselves out of jobs or places to live. Yet they are putting their bodies on the line and risking arrest regularly, if not daily. Support bail fund requests and requests from black-led groups that are working to provide support for communities and activists. On the SURJ website, there is a list of black-led organizations that are in need of donations. Please consider contributing to one or several of these groups (See our **additional resources** section for a link to this page).

—Written for BPFNA ~ Bautistas por la Paz by members of its Working Group to Center Black Lives in Pursuit of Racial Justice. Go to <http://www.bpfna.org/cbl-about> for more information about the Working Group and why BPFNA ~ Bautistas por la Paz is focusing on this work. You can also go to <http://www.bpfna.org/mobilize/statements-main> to read other statements from BPFNA on this issue and more.

# Speaking God's Truth to People Hooked on Lies

by Wendell Griffen, pastor at New Millennium Church in Little Rock, AR

*A sermon written in the aftermath of the Mother Emanuel church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina.*

## Ezekiel 2:1-5

*2He said to me: O mortal,\* stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. 2And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. 3He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation\* of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. 4The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' 5Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.*

## Mark 6:1-13

*6He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. 2On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary\* and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offense\* at him. 4Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' 5And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6And he was amazed at their unbelief.*

*Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' 12So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

The lessons we ponder today from part of the call of the prophet Ezekiel and Mark's account of what Jesus experienced when he returned to his hometown of Nazareth present some interesting realities. Ezekiel and Jesus were commissioned by God. They were sent to present God's message to the people of their time and place.

In the lesson from Ezekiel, God described the people to whom he would be sent in very unfavorable terms using the words "rebels," "impudent," and "stubborn." Ezekiel was one of the Hebrew people who were captured and removed to Babylon at the start of the sixth century before the time of Jesus. Ezekiel, like his fellow exiles, had seen the horrors of war. He had lost loved ones. He was forced to leave his homeland. He was a priest of God who was forced to leave the temple where God was worshipped.

Ezekiel's challenge was to call his fellow Hebrews living in exile to accept exile as God's judgment on the systemic and prolonged wickedness of their society. It would not be easy to tell people what they didn't want to hear. They wouldn't want to believe that their plight was God's judgment on their national character! They would prefer to quickly get back to the way things were.

In the lesson from Mark's Gospel Jesus was amazed when the people of his hometown refused to believe his message of repentance, grace, and truth and openly doubted that God's power was operating through him. They didn't want to believe God would use someone they supposedly knew so well to do what Jesus was doing.

Ezekiel and Jesus show that God sends humans (Ezekiel is called "Mortal") as agents of divine truth. Yes, God sends people like us to do what people like Ezekiel and Jesus did.

- *God sends people like us to speak God's words of repentance, grace, and truth.*
- *God sends people like us to confront entrenched systems of oppression.*
- *God sends people like us to tell and show a hateful society and world what love means.*
- *God sends people like us to tell and show a greedy world about generosity.*
- *God sends people like us to tell and show a fearful world about welcoming strangers.*
- *God sends people like us to tell and show a despondent world the meaning of hope.*
- *God sends people like us to speak God's truth to people hooked on lies.*

Like Ezekiel and Jesus, we will find that being sent by God to say, be, and do something doesn't mean people will accept what we say, who were are trying to be, and what we are trying to do. The call to be God's people of grace and truth is a call to faithfulness, not fame. It is often a call to confront lies with divine truth.

This reminds us that we shouldn't be measure our effectiveness for God by ordinary standards of outcome of what we say and do for God. Ezekiel and Jesus show that the issue for us is faithfulness to what God has called us to be and do, not the results of our faithfulness.

Ezekiel and Jesus show that God calls us to be faithful gardeners. We are called to sow and cultivate God's love and truth in the world. Like Ezekiel and Jesus, we'll find that human hearts can be full of rocks, stumps, and weeds. Like Ezekiel and Jesus, we will confront and expose those rocks, stumps, and weeds of pride, greed, fear, hate, and unbelief. Like Ezekiel and Jesus, we'll find that people often would rather keep their rocks, stumps, and weeds than accept the cultivating influence of God's truth. We are called to plant, plow, and hoe. But God's call that we work the garden doesn't guarantee that the people to whom we present God's truth will accept it and produce a crop of love, truth, justice, and peace.

No matter how much you and I do to represent God's truth, people have the moral freedom to believe lies. People have the moral freedom to believe that God wants them to mistreat others. People have the moral freedom to believe that God wants them to fear strangers rather than welcome and help them. People have the moral freedom to believe that God doesn't want them to face the consequences of their persistent moral and ethical transgressions and derelictions.

In the United States people are hooked on lies about the supposed end of racism despite constant evidence of white supremacy and how it violates the gospel of God's love, truth, repentance, and restoration. A man massacred nine black people who were studying Scripture and praying at Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The alleged perpetrator of that event wrote a manifesto that explicitly expressed his desire to terrorize black people based on a doctrine of white



supremacy espoused by a group that calls itself the Council of Conservative Citizens.

The Council of Conservative Citizens was formed in 1985. Before that time it operated under a different name, the White Citizens Council. The White Citizens Council was a network of white supremacist groups that developed after the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed racial segregation in public education. Dylann Shock Roof, the man who allegedly massacred nine black worshippers at Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church on June 17, 2015, was radicalized by the successor organization to this white supremacist organization.

The White Citizens Council was largely responsible for the resurgence of the Confederate battle flag throughout the South. It was responsible for organized efforts to intimidate black people who registered to vote in Mississippi by denying them credit, refusing to do business with them, and firing them from jobs. It was responsible for newspaper advertisements that denounced the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as having “well known” ties to communism. It was made up of plantation owners, doctors, lawyers, and ministers. These men controlled political, economic, and social power in the South.

Let’s be clear. The Council of Conservative Citizens is merely the modern version of the racist White Citizens Council with its sordid history of economic, physical, and social violence against black people and anyone else working to promote social equality.

Sadly, President Obama and Attorney General Loretta Lynch have not named the Council of Conservative Citizens as a terrorist organization despite its vicious message and history of organized violence against black people. Sadly, no chair of any committee in Congress has called for hearings on the activities of the Council of Conservative Citizens. Sadly, Mr. Obama and other politicians have not reminded us that the Confederate battle flag was used by white supremacists determined to preserve segregation and intimidation of black people. Sadly, pundits insist on calling the alleged perpetrator of the massacre at Mother Emanuel as mentally deranged rather than purposely fed a deliberate message of hate, fear, and violence by the Council of Conservative Citizens.

We are seeing in our time what Ezekiel and Jesus experienced in their time. Intelligent people are refusing to accept the truth that Dr. Martin Luther King declared years ago in an essay titled *A Testament of Hope* published in January 1989, almost a year after he was murdered.

*... Why is the issue of equality still so far from solution in America, a nation that professes itself to be democratic, inventive, hospitable to new ideas, rich, productive and awesomely powerful? The problem is so tenacious because, despite its virtues and attributes, America is deeply racist and its democracy is flawed both economically and socially. All too many Americans believe justice will unfold painlessly or that its absence for black people will be tolerated tranquilly.*

*... White America must recognize that justice for black people cannot be achieved without radical changes in the structure of our society. The comfortable, the entrenched, the privileged cannot continue to tremble at the prospect of change in the status quo.*

*... If we look honestly at the realities of our national life, it is clear that we are not marching forward; we are groping and stumbling; we are divided and confused. Our moral values and our spiritual confidence sink, even as our*

*material wealth ascends. In these trying circumstances, the black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced.[1]*

*... Many whites hasten to congratulate themselves on what little progress we Negroes have made. I’m sure that most whites felt that with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, all race problems were automatically solved. Because most white people are so far removed from the life of the average Negro, there has been little to challenge this assumption. Yet Negroes continue to live with racism every day. It doesn’t matter where we are individually in the scheme of things, how near we may either to the top or to the bottom of society; the cold facts of racism slap each one of us in the face.[2]*

It is not enough for us to engage in masterful performances of political theater by singing “Amazing Grace” at the funeral of people massacred by hatemongers. We must name the root cause of the hate. We must call our society to admit its racism and repent from it. Then, and only then, we can correctly speak of “Amazing Grace.” To speak of grace without repentance is to cheapen and mock the love and justice of God! Grace is free, but never cheap!

It is not enough for Wal-Mart and other merchandisers to remove Confederate flags from their inventories. We must challenge the mindset that caused them to purchase and stock items associated with racism, white supremacy, and inequality in the first place. We must challenge the mindset that allows business owners to make money by selling instruments of hate and symbols of death that terrorize others. We must challenge the greedy mindset that allows Wal-Mart managers and corporate officials to justify welcoming Confederate sympathizers to set up a demonstration yesterday, the Fourth of July, at a Wal-Mart store in Searcy, Arkansas.

It is not enough for us to compliment the grieving relatives of the slain for their gentleness towards the person who is allegedly responsible for their sorrow. We should also ask hard questions about why this society continues to ignore how people of color are marginalized, profiled, despised, victimized, terrorized by law enforcement actors and self-appointed vigilantes, blamed for our oppression, and then told to not be angry about it. Prophetic people should never urge oppressed people to deny their moral right to be indignant about injustice.

All these things are part of what we should do as people called to proclaim and live out God’s love, truth, justice, peace, and hope. As we do so, let us remember what Jesus said. Prophetic people are not called to be popular. God calls us to be faithful. Whether the world believes us or not, our faithfulness to God’s love, truth, justice, peace, and hope is the best hope God has for saving the world from addiction to the lies responsible for oppression, pain, suffering, and death. Amen.

#### Endnotes:

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (edited by James Melvin Washington, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1989, p. 314-15.

[2] *A Testament of Hope*, supra, p. 321-22.

—This is a slightly edited version. To read the full version, go to [www.bpfna.org](http://www.bpfna.org)

# Flipping St. Francis

by Keith Menhinick

*This article was originally published on the Alliance of Baptist blog. Reprinted with permission from the author and original source.*

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love;*

*Where there is injury, pardon;*

*Where there is doubt, faith;*

*Where there is despair, hope;*

*Where there is darkness, light;*

*Where there is sadness, joy.*

## **-Prayer of St. Francis**

The average life expectancy of a black trans woman is 35; one in three black men will serve time in prison; a black person is murdered every 28 hours by law enforcement; 74 percent of black disabled people are unemployed; 60 percent of black girls are sexually assaulted before the age of 18; and movements that seek to end the state-sanctioned violence such as #BlackLivesMatter are immediately labeled “murder groups” by some in positions of power and privilege.\*

While at times beautiful, in the context of race relations in America, I worry that the prayer of St. Francis has become a complicit white man’s prayer, a prayer of insidious gradualism. Perhaps following Christ means flipping St. Francis’ prayer. I must stop sowing a false peace in a society that excuses the ruinous denial of human rights and the rampant destruction of black bodies.

## **Where there is love, let us sow hatred of violence.**

There is something worth hating about a society that allows a 12-year-old black child to be slaughtered in the park by the very authorities endowed with the power to protect him. “God’s soul hates the lover of violence,” says Psalm 11:5, and if we are to follow God’s spirit, our souls too must learn to hate violence.

**Where there is pardon, let us sow injury to white innocence.** There is no explanation or excuse for the generations of black bodies disenfranchised and murdered by the middle passage, the plantation, the ghetto, the prison. No more pardons for culpable or comfortable white America. The first finger points at us—we must own that we are the system—and the system will only crumble when we can accuse and indict ourselves.

**Where there is faith, let us sow doubt in the American dream.** No longer can we sit idly by as the masses put their faith in broken sociopolitical institutions. Let us doubt the ways of being, thinking, and knowing of dominant white culture, doubt the myth of equal access to opportunity and mobility, doubt the whole story of America.

**Where there is hope, let us sow despair for stolen lives and tragic deaths.** My own hopeful soul is tempted to think we’ve come so far from slavery and Jim Crow, and in many ways we have. However no amount of progress can redeem the black bodies that my predecessors tyrannized and murdered, and for that we despair.

**Where there is light, let us sow darkness as beautiful.** The dualistic trope of light and darkness in our language and literature manifests in our implicit biases against black people. Yet the spirit hovered over the dark water, guided in the dark cloud, and spoke in the dark sky. God is in the darkness. Let us embrace darkness and honor it as beautiful.

**Where there is joy, let us sow sadness for a collective trauma.** There is a holocaust against black people in American history, and we as a society need to name it and grieve it. The ghosts of every erased body hover over this land. We as a people must learn to lament in order to heal.

This is our struggle. We are only instruments of peace when we are agents of justice.

*\* Statistics pulled from the Black Lives Matter official website, [blacklivesmatter.com](http://blacklivesmatter.com).*

*—Keith A. Menhinick works as a Hospital Chaplain at Wake Forest Baptist Health in Winston-Salem, N.C. He also serves as a Minister for Young Adults at College Park Baptist in Greensboro, NC. He is a graduate of Gardner-Webb University and Wake Forest University School of Divinity. ■*

# Open Minds, Faithful Hearts, Working Hands

by Rev. Mary Wilson

I’m often reminded of my privilege in society simply based on my skin color.

I saw a graphic on Facebook indicating that twice as many white people had been killed by law enforcement than black people. The person posting it said, “why aren’t white people rioting?” implying a superiority of response simply because white people are more civilized.

As a mathematician, I saw those numbers and was appalled at their disproportionality. Why is that? In order for those numbers to be weighted according to percentage of population then there should be twice as many white people in our country as black people. Then it would be a “fair” distribution.

However, that’s not the case. According to the US Census bureau, white people comprise roughly 77 percent of the population and black people approximately 13 percent. In other words, there are almost 6 times as many white people than black people in our country; 6 times.

Do you see the problem? Law enforcement does not kill white people at 6 times the rate of black people. The disproportionality of deaths is why there is rioting in Ferguson, Baltimore, and other cities. Black people are targeted more frequently than white people and are killed at higher rates. This is wrong, very wrong.

So, what do we do? First, let’s get educated about the simple math. Second, listen, listen to the stories that trigger the uprisings. Third, be kind. Fourth, reserve judgment until we’ve done the first three. Fifth, love our neighbors as ourselves.

*—Rev. Mary Wilson is the pastor of Church of the Savior in Cedar Park, TX (a BPFNA Partner Congregation). This was originally printed in the Church of the Savior e-newsletter.*



# Let's Talk About White Privilege

## a curriculum from the United Church of Christ

*White Privilege: Let's Talk*, an adult education curriculum designed to invite members to engage in safe, meaningful, substantive and bold conversations on race, is written by five authors from different perspectives and walks of life. The Rev. John C. Dorhauer, one of the authors, noted that the “United Church of Christ, in its long history, has preached the hard truths about social justice to a world often unwilling and unready to hear those truths. When we preach the gospel faithfully, we often anger and disrupt the comfort people have grown accustomed to living with.”

Divided into four focused parts, each one introduces a different aspect of the dynamic of white privilege:

1. The Spiritual Autobiography Told Through the Lens of Race
2. Whiteness as the Norm: Five Loci of Insights on the Binary of Light/Dark and Black/White
3. The Cash Value of Whiteness or Whiteness as a Tax-Exempt Status
4. On Becoming an Ally

In all four parts, each author contributes a different view of the subject matter presented based on their unique personal experiences. The materials include questions for discussion and reflection.

The UCC white privilege curriculum is available for download, free of charge, here: <http://privilege.uccpages.org>.

## Additional Resources...

### Learn More

#BlackLivesMatter website <http://blacklivesmatter.com>

BPFNA Black Lives Matter resource page <http://www.bpfna.org>

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Racial Reconciliation Resources <http://www.cbf.net/race>

Read and use the *Faith Action Kit from Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)* [http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/faith\\_action\\_kit](http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/faith_action_kit)

Watch *Ferguson: A Report from Occupied Territory* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gq9pHONmaLc>

*Ferguson and Faith* by Leah Gunning Francis <http://www.chalicepress.com/Ferguson-and-Faith-P1541.aspx>

Read *Letters for Black Lives* (crowdsourced, multilingual, and culturally-aware resources aimed at creating a space for open and honest conversations about racial justice, police violence, and anti-Blackness) <https://lettersforblacklives.com>

*Movement for Black Lives* website <https://policy.m4bl.org>

*The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander: <http://newjimcrow.com>

*Readings on Decolonization* <https://decolonization.wordpress.com/decolonization-readings>

Learn about policies that could greatly impact the lives and freedoms of black people and people of color if enacted with the *Toolkit for promoting Justice in Policing*: <http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/JusticeInPolicing-9.pdf>

### Get Trained

BPFNA: Attend or plan a *Do Not Be Afraid* training through BPFNA (our Conflict Transformation training focused on race): <http://www.bpfna.org/equip/conflict-transformation-training>

Attend or plan an anti-racist training or workshop through the *Catalyst Project*: <http://collectiveliberation.org/our-work-2/political-education>

Attend or plan a racial equity training through the *Racial Equity Institute (REI)*: <https://www.racialequityinstitute.org>

### Take Action

Locate a #BlackLivesMatter chapter near you and see about joining an action or event: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/find-chapters>

Join *Campaign Zero* to learn more about the underlying problems of systemic racism that need addressing and what you can do to enact change: <http://www.joincampaignzero.org>

Present the five-week *Racial Reconciliation Curriculum* from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship NC to your congregation: [https://issuu.com/cbfnc/docs/cbfnc\\_racial\\_reconciliation\\_curricu](https://issuu.com/cbfnc/docs/cbfnc_racial_reconciliation_curricu)

Join or launch a campaign through the *Movement for Black Lives*: <https://campaigns.organizefor.org/efforts/m4bl>

Attend the *Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference* <http://sdpconference.info>

Get involved with a local *Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)* chapter: [http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/affiliated\\_groups\\_local\\_contacts](http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/affiliated_groups_local_contacts)

Keep track of local police policies through the *Use of Force Project* from *Campaign Zero* to help put an end to police violence in your community: <http://useofforceproject.org>

# A Litany for Those Who Aren't Ready For Healing

Rev. Dr. Yolanda Pierce, Princeton Theological Seminary

**Leader:** Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

*Response: God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

**Leader:** Let us not rush to offer a band-aid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

*Response: God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

**Leader:** Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

*Response: God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

**Leader:** Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss. Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child ... someone's beloved son.

*Response: God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

**Leader:** Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

*Response: God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

**Leader:** Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice. Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

*Response: God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

**Leader:** Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those hearts are being torn asunder.

*Response: God in your mercy, hear our prayer.*

**Instead...**

**Leader:** Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extra judicially every 28 hours. Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

*Response: Let it be so.*

**Leader:** Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

*Response: Let it be so.*

**Leader:** Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease, and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

*Response: Let it be so.*

**Leader:** Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.

*Response: Let it be so.*

**Leader:** Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends.

*Response: Let it be so.*

**Leader:** Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase. Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground.

*Response: Let it be so.*

**Leader:** Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

*Response: Let it be so.*

**So, God, in your mercy...**

*All: Show me my own complicity in injustice.*

*All: Convict me for my indifference.*

*All: Forgive me when I have remained silent.*

*All: Equip me with a zeal for righteousness.*

*All: Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.*

**Amen**

—Rev. Dr. Yolanda Pierce is the Elmer G. Homrighausen Associate Professor of African American Religion and Literature and the Director of the Black Church Studies Department at Princeton Theological Seminary; Learn more about her by visiting her website ([www.yolandapierce.com](http://www.yolandapierce.com)) and following her on Twitter (@YNPierce).