

Call to Action to the NEJ and The NEJ College of Bishops

We applaud, appreciate and fully support the College of Bishops opening challenge to us and to the church. The clear willingness of the College of Bishops to lead us toward the healing of the wounds of racism affirms and underscores the purpose and Call to Action in our original resolution/petition. We therefore stand in solidarity with the College of Bishops and those who stood together with our Bishops as their statement affirmed the value of all life and especially Black lives. What we've heard from our Bishops gives even more authenticity and purpose to the vision, goals and objectives found in Our Call to Action printed in the July 12, DCA.

However, after prayerful consideration and undeniable moving of the Holy Spirit in this the 2016 gathering of the NEJ we have re-written with greater specificity the original document. Following the slaughter and carnage of Black lives and officers of the law last week, several persons representing the following groups in the NEJ; Black United Methodist Pastors, (BUMP), and Black Leadership Forum, (BLF), (including several delegates) gathered for an emergency conference call Sunday evening. As a result of this conversation along with consultation with the Executive Director of the Multi-Ethnic Center for Ministry and the strong encouragement of NEJ-BMCR Coordinator/Chairperson, it is clear that the time to act is NOW. It was unanimously agreed that it is time to break our silence.

The people of faith called United Methodist have not mobilized nor been pro-active enough. While there have been pronouncements, calls to prayer, moments of silence and candlelight vigils, we have not moved from rhetoric to action. Racism, white privilege and white supremacy which are inconsistent with the kingdom of God, are still the order of the day. To those viewing from within and from outside, the Church appears to be complicit in perpetuating a culture of racism and white privilege. Therefore, in an effort to address, confront and otherwise demand systemic, fundamental and institutional change both within the church and the world we strongly encourage that the NEJ College of Bishops, the lay and clergy leadership of the NEJ and each Annual Conference to do the following:

1. To confront y/our racism, and affirm that, while all lives matter in God's eyes, in the current cultural and social context of this country, Black lives and all lives of color really do matter.
2. That the NEJ College of Bishops collectively and as individuals commit to lead the Church in healing the wounds caused by unchecked racism, white privilege and internalized oppression.
3. That District Superintendents and staff of all conferences comply with #1 above.
4. To initiate ongoing internal and external conversations on white privilege, white supremacy, racism and oppression, including internalized oppression on every district, sub-district and with in each local church. Realizing that viewing each other through the eyes of Christ and remaining at the table during the hard/ difficult discussion is the only way/path to new genuine relationships and partnerships. Out of this, new and more sustainable relationships and partnerships will emerge.
5. To initiate training in areas of racism, white privilege, white supremacy and racial equity for the entire College of Bishops, as well as the District Superintendents, Annual Conference staff and lay leadership within the NEJ. Furthermore, these areas shall also be a focus of all NEJ-sponsored leadership events and efforts, such as See Know Love. Those groups and agencies such as Volunteers in Mission, Association of Conference Lay Leaders, Young Adult Council, and NEJ Youth are urged to hear this call as well and to incorporate training and conversation around systemic racism and cross-racial and cross-cultural power dynamics into their gatherings and ministries.

6. To evaluate and address the impact of structural and institutional racism on people of color in the NEJ: particularly in response to the study in Section 4 of the next section, with regard to
 - a. The closing of Black churches, and
 - b. How current ordination processes in the Annual Conferences affect Black persons interested in ordained ministry.
7. That each Annual Conference provide an annual update on work in all of the above to the NEJ Committee on Episcopacy, the Vision Table and the Multi-Ethnic Center, and share experiences that may be helpful to others in the NEJ.
8. That each Annual Conference provide a written report to be included in the 2020 NEJ Advance Daily Christian Advocate. This report should include its (1) progress within the 2017-2020 Q and (2) plans for the 2021-2024 Q.
9. The College of Bishops, the Vision Table, the Multi-Ethnic Center for Ministry and each Annual Conference should identify and develop funding to support this proposal. In addition, we encourage the College of Bishops, the Vision Table and the Multi-Ethnic Center identify and provide seed funding for the implementation of the following goals to be accomplished by the end of the 2017-2020 Q.
 1. Those areas with a significant demographic of people from African descent should reflect a proportional number of Black leaders, both lay and clergy at every level of the Jurisdiction and Annual Conference.
 2. To establish at least one new faith community of African descent focused on engaging black children, youth and young adults in every Episcopal Area in the NEJ, which has a ten-mile radius with a Black population of 30,000 or more.
 3. To increase the number of viable and sustainable Black church's and ministries in the NEJ.
 4. To study the impact of structural and institutional racism on Black people in the NEJ, in particular:
 - a. Closing of Black churches
 - b. The impact of the ordination process on the number of black persons interested in ordained ministry.
 5. To encourage UM related seminaries within the NEJ to intentionally recruit and offer resources to more students of color, to offer an urban ministries track that is contextual to the Black Lives Matter movement and to initiate training for faculty in the areas of racism, white privilege and white supremacy. There have already been far too many Black lives taken at the hands of those who are charged to "protect and serve".

In the profound words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "...we are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now...". Finally, it is as true today as it was during the civil rights era that: "...In a real sense, all life is inter-related. All of human kind are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be, until you are what you ought to be; and you can never be what you ought to be, until I am what I ought to be..." (MLK, Jr.).