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June 1, 2020

To: TEs, Commissioned Pastors, Chaplains, Presbytery Stated Clerks, Committee Members
From: Jeff Jeremiah
Subject: EPC response to George Floyd killing and racial injustice

“How long, O Lord...” (Psalm 13:1).

Dear EPC colleague,

I hope you are as profoundly grieved as I am by the tragic events unfolding in our country in recent days. The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd—and countless others over the years—followed by protests, riots, and destruction have again exposed the vein of unequal justice that has existed for far too long in our society.

In response, the National Leadership Team (NLT) approved four items in a special called meeting on June 1:

1. Encouragement for you to address the crisis with your congregations this week;
2. A Call to Lament, Prayer, and Fasting on Monday, June 8;
3. Encouragement for you and your congregation to act and speak for justice and equality; and against racism, injustice, and inequality; and
4. A Zoom meeting “conversation event” that will include leaders of color in the EPC to address the appropriate ongoing response to this crisis.

First, the NLT encourages EPC Teaching Elders to address this week with the congregations they serve the tragic and senseless death of George Floyd and the extreme indifference to his life demonstrated by the police officers who have been disciplined and/or charged with his murder. Mr. Floyd's death is emblematic of a pervasive historical pattern of disproportionately aggressive policing in far too many communities of color.

Of course, you do not need permission and you have our full encouragement. Moderator Case Thorp issued an especially poignant plea on social media over the weekend. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words are just as applicable in our time as they were in his: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

Second, a *Call to Lament, Prayer, and Fasting for Monday, June 8*.

A key difference between this emphasis and our previous calls to prayer and fasting is the addition of "Lament." I encourage you to read two short articles which I believe are especially relevant to this time in our history:

- "Dare to Hope in God: How to Lament Well," available at www.desiringgod.org/articles/dare-to-hope-in-god
- "What Does Lament Mean? A Biblical Definition of Lament or Lamenting," available at www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/08/20/what-does-lament-mean-a-biblical-definition-of-lament-or-lamenting

The Call: All members of EPC churches set aside Monday, June 8 as a day of lament, fasting, and prayer to cry out to God for His help in the midst of this crisis in the United States.

As social unrest escalates, it is appropriate for the church to lament this crisis to the Lord, to fast, and to pray about how we as believers in Jesus Christ can be part of the solution to the racism, inequality, and injustice that violate the ideals enshrined in our Constitution and laws.

Please inform your congregation of this call to humble themselves and pray to almighty God for His grace, mercy, and love to heal the divisions in our country, and especially for God's people to repent of the sin of racism. We will provide some specific prayers and other resources on our website soon.

Third, in response to this crisis, the NLT encourages EPC Teaching Elders and congregations to consider acting, as the Lord Jesus Christ leads, to speak out for justice and equality; to speak against racism, injustice, and inequality; and to work to arrest the origins of civil unrest—namely, poverty, racial separation, immorality, and a lack of radical love.

I hope we all let Bonhoeffer's words move us: "Not to act is to act."

Fourth, a Zoom meeting designed for EPC Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders will be scheduled for after the June 8 Day of Lament, Fasting, and Prayer. This event will include leaders of color in the EPC, who will address the appropriate response to this crisis.

Perhaps you have difficulty relating to those who continue to experience unequal justice or aren't sure how to speak out against racial unrest. The goal of this discussion is to help provide insight to the questions you may have. We will provide more detail on this event soon.

May we be the voice of peace, love, and reconciliation that our communities, country, and world so desperately needs today. Now is not the time to be silent, but to speak out *for* justice and equality, and *against* racism, injustice, and inequality.

Thank you, and remember: He is risen!

Jeff, on behalf of the NLT:

Tom Werner, Chairman
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RE, Presbytery of the Gulf South

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