

## SF Presbytery Letter: In Solidarity with Black Lives

“... if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” - John 20:23

Beyond the Covid19 pandemic, as we watch what is unfolding before us in cities across the United States, we know that the sin of racism is alive and continues to be “retained” in our society. In the past week, we all have been witnesses, again of a Black man dying at the hands of those who are supposed to protect and serve, but misuse this as power instead. In the past few months, we have witnessed more Black lives taken from us at the hands of others in power. The ones we know about include George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. And there are more that we don't know about because they were not recorded by those who witnessed it. Every day Black Americans face spiritual, psychological and physical deaths at the hands of those in power. Racism is alive and it even exists here in the Bay Area, known as one of the most liberal places in America.

In our Presbytery, we have 68 churches and 10 New Worshipping Communities. A third of our congregations and missional communities are racial ethnic communities of which 8 are African American.

As the staff of the Presbytery of San Francisco, we stand in solidarity with all of our African American brothers and sisters. We promise to do our part to combat racism in all forms because we know that the sin of racism kills the souls of our brothers and sisters and prohibits the full flourishing of the life that God has created and given us. We strive to help co-create with you a world that is more just and loving and devoid of the sin of structural racism.

We invite you **To Break Our Hearts Open**; hear some of the Black voices of our Presbytery:

- **Michael Kim-Eubanks**, ministry co-leader from Bethel PC in San Leandro, who has expressed his voice through words and the creation of this song – [Video](#) and [Lyrics](#) to “**Just a Few**”
- **Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsley**, Honorably Retired, who shares his words of wisdom from his lived-experiences by letting us know “[What Should We Be Doing](#)”, and
- **Rev. Kamal Hassan** from Sojourner Truth PC who preached about the [Love Languages](#) and how the Holy Spirit comforts us as we lament; how the Holy Spirit advocates for us through affirmative justice; and how the Holy Spirit uses wind and fire to help us in our righteous struggle.

We will be sharing a few links with you that will capture more of these Black voices from our Presbytery and denomination. One of the voices is from J. Herbert Nelson, the Stated Clerk of the PCUSA. And there will be other voices shared on our website including the prophetic voice of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

*May God continue to provide wisdom and guidance during this time while we continue to pray without ceasing for you, our presbytery and our world.*

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# RAISING OUR VOICES

**Response from Mary Jane Gordon, Co-Moderator, Presbytery of San Francisco**

My initial reaction to the George Floyd killing was one of dismay. I couldn't believe that a man's life was snuffed out by an unmerciful policeman in spite of the man's cries for help. Then my mind flashed back to the mid-sixties when police dogs and firehoses were unleashed on peaceful protesters and I thought this can't still be happening over fifty years later.

Then, I became outraged and angry. As the protests began, with throngs of people, multigender, multiracial, and of various ages, I began to feel more hopeful that perhaps America would finally get a clue and see how racism affects not only Black and Brown people, but everyone.

As I watched the news, I was struck by the sharp contrast of our state and local leaders who displayed compassion for the plight of marginalized people with that of our president who set "his military" on peaceful protester with teargas and rubber bullets to clear them away so that he could have a photo opt. Where is the justice in this land?

We as followers of Christ must stand up for justice. As Jesus said "when you do to the least of these, you do unto me". I am encouraged by the swell of support for justice reform, not only in America but around the world. It feels like the Holy Spirit is sweeping through the hearts of some people. My sisters and brothers in Christ, we **CANNOT** and **SHOULD NOT** allow this moment in history to go without action. We as Christians must step to the forefront and demand **Positive and Radical** change. Let us as the church of Jesus Christ stand up for justice. Contact your local and federal officials and demand legislation to correct the centuries of police brutality and outright lawlessness under the cover of civil protection. Every citizen deserves equal protection and not selective abuse. **I have an eleven-year old great-grandson and I'm praying that he nor any other Black or Brown children will not fall victim to police brutality because of the color of their skin.**

Once again, I ask, "where is the justice in this land?"

*Mary Jane Gordon, Co-Moderator  
Presbytery of San Francisco*

## What's Going On?

by Rochelle R. Shaw, Stated Clerk, Presbytery of San Francisco

I want to share my feelings about what's going on.

I posted this on my Facebook page when I awoke the day after George Floyd's murder was revealed: *"Lord have mercy! Please! Please watch over and **PROTECT ALL** our African American sons, grandsons, brothers, nephews and family members. (To my sons) Eric and Daniel Shaw we taught you all your life what you must do to survive. Watch over and teach your sons how to protect themselves. This behavior is so wrong and frightening."*

Then I read a post from a friend I grew up with in Watts, CA where she reminded me that we went through this before in 1965 -- 55 years ago! I lived through the Watts riot -- the protests, the rioting, the looting, the curfew and the national guard's presence, when an unarmed Black man was killed as he raced down the streets to take his pregnant wife to the hospital. I recall the anger, frustration, helplessness and especially the fear. I recall hearing my grandmother, mother and aunts praying and saying that we needed to protect ourselves. Then I heard their pleas that I still hear today, "Somebody needs to do something!"

I AM SOMEBODY. YOU ARE SOMEBODY. Some bodies are speaking up. Some bodies have refused to be just angry and afraid and worried about when this will all end. Some bodies are responding with action, peacefully. And some bodies are responding with destruction because they don't know what else they can do to be in control of their own lives as Americans, who just happen to be Black.

I am Black. I am an American. And I am a Christian. As a Christian and believer in the radical ministry of Jesus Christ and the movement and advocacy of the Holy Spirit, I believe that when we combine our voices in action, something will be done. Something can be done Now. As a collective of Americans and Christians, we can direct our action toward today and tomorrow to make changes locally, statewide and in our country.

And yet, I am a mother, a wife and a grandmother who is still afraid and worried for her husband, her sons and daughter, and her grandsons and granddaughters. My immediate action is to continue to pray for them and warn them of how to be safe. Because they are still Blacks living in America.

Lord have mercy! Help me deal with What's Going On!

*Rochelle R. Shaw, Stated Clerk  
Presbytery of San Francisco*

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## **Sobre George Floyd: Letter from PSF Latino Brothers and Sisters.**

As leaders of churches, congregations and new communities of worship (NWC's), of the Presbytery of San Francisco, we stand in solidarity with you, our African American brothers and sisters from this presbytery and beyond. We join together with you as allies in your pain, sadness, mourning, despair and anger in this time of chaos and injustice. At the same time we condemn the brutal and disgusting murder of George Floyd (05/25/2020) and so many other people of African descent, at the hands of police officers in the service of an unjust, and clearly racist, criminal justice system.

We strongly believe that as God's people, we have a prophetic call to announce good news and hope to our communities. We also believe that the other equally essential part of our call is to denounce with faith, courage, and conviction all kinds of injustice and any human action that threatens the lives of our fellow human beings: actions that Scripture identifies as Sin.

We believe that it is impossible to remain silent in this time of crisis being experienced by this nation in which we all live. The inequity and loss of life caused by systemic racism has reached such a height that it is no longer possible to continue denying its reality at the foundation of our society. As people of faith, we pledge our unconditional support to our African American brothers and sisters. We will also stand with you to denounce and dismantle systematic racism in our political, social, and religious institutions.

Scripture invites us to consciously reflect on the posture of the Lord who is on the side of those most in need.

*"This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place." Jeremiah 22:3 (NIV)*

*"Let [the king to whom you give your justice, O God] do justice to the afflicted of the people, save the children of the poor, and crush the oppressor." Psalms 72: 4 (NIV)*

Brothers and sisters, in prayer, supplication and hope, we will continue fighting alongside you so that God's justice may prevail in the transformation of the unjust human systems of this world.

**Black & Latino Lives Matter!**

Rev. Pablo Morataya  
Pastor, Primera Iglesia Presbiteriana-Oakland

CLP-Claudia Reyes  
Pastor, Iglesia Presbiteriana de la Misión-SFO

José Bolaños  
Chair, Men's Organization CAUCUS Hispanic/Latino North Of California

CLP-Ricardo Vázquez  
Pastor, Mensajeros de Dios-San Leandro

CLP-Rosa López M  
Chair, CAUCUS Hispanic/Latino North of California

CLP-Angy Ortiz Morra  
Chair, Women's Group Latinos Unidos San Mateo, Women's Organization CAUCUS  
Hispanic/Latino North of California

Rev. Dr. George Abdala  
Pastor, LUEC & IPB San Mateo, CA

CLP-Mario Martínez  
Pastor, Hispanic Ministry Transfiguración, El Cerrito CA

CLP-Anita Espinoza MDiv  
Latinos Unidos San Mateo

## **In This Moment By Rev. Dr. Arlene W. Gordon**

I am a retired African American Presbyterian Pastor. In this time of pain and sadness over the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, and the state of our nation at this moment. The tears will not stop. The pain will not go away because it is a constant reminder of the many years I have been praying, striving and longing for justice for my people. My hearts aches. It is difficult to realize, having grown up in VA during the years of the Civil Rights Movement, that this moment feels like more of the same. I am angry! I am upset! I am sad! I am furious! I am disgusted! I feel helpless! My soul cries out in the words of the Psalmist: “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? . . .”How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” (*Psalm 13*)

This situation has been painfully emotional for me and especially as my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren are having to live through this experience of racism that I have tried to explain to them and prepare them for. It is hard to explain to them why I am crying. It is even harder to understand why I am still having to explain generations of injustice on my people. It is hard to explain that, in my ministry in the PC(USA), I often felt the pain of injustice. Yes, in the church that I love so much!

There are days when I cannot sleep and the mornings wake me praying for a better day ahead. When I think about what life must have been like for my parents, I wonder how they were able to teach me to be a respectable human being in the midst of all the prejudice against black people. It is more difficult to imagine what it must have been like for my grandparents, both slaves of the Kemper family. I often wonder how they explained things to my father so that he lived to be a kind and respectable human being, despite his plight in this life cycle.

In this moment, I cannot find words to express my grief over a pandemic that has proven devastating to so many of my people and the lack of concern for their lives and their well being. I am sad that my sister-in-law and several friends have died in this pandemic. At the same time, I am grateful that I survived it. Obviously, God has something more for me to do! I pray that, after almost 29 years in ministry, I can continue to fight and demand justice for my people. It is only because the COVID 19 virus sapped my energy that I am not on the streets protesting.

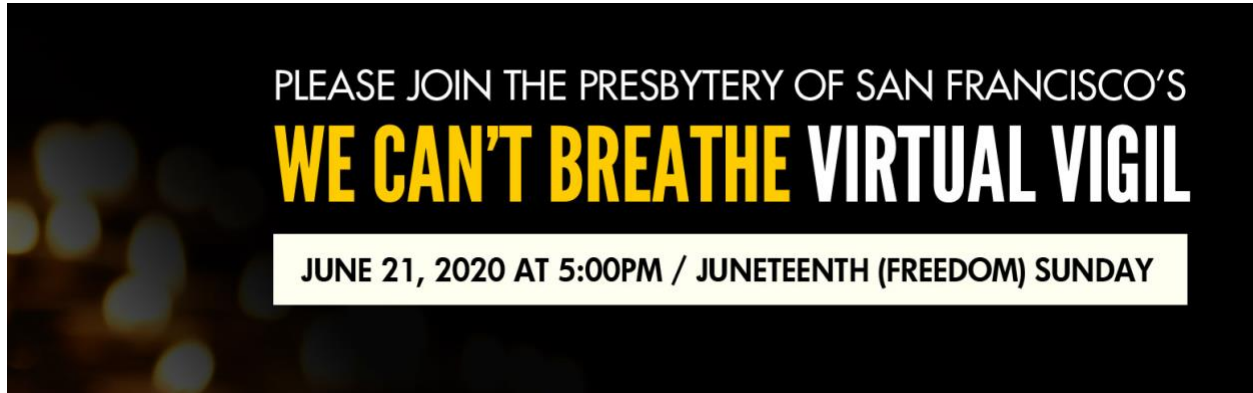
This is a moment to pause and give thanks, even in the midst of the pain. Even when video footage captured the murder of George Floyd and there were no immediate arrests. Even though “evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, God is our refuge.” (Psalm 43) I will sing and give praise to the Lord, for despite the catalog of misfortune that has been inflicted on my people, we know that we are God’s children, made in God’s image, black and beautiful!

I pray for our world, our country, our church and all people everywhere that this time will be one for healing, regretting, rethinking, remaking our world so that it can be a better place for all of us to live in peace and harmony.

*Rev. Dr. Arlene W. Gordon*  
*Honorably Retired*  
*Minister of Word and Sacrament*

Rev. John Adams, from Elmhurst PC in Oakland - [We Stand In Victory Together](#)  
Michael Kim-Eubanks of Bethel Presbyterian - ["Just a Few"](#)

## We Can't Breathe Virtual Vigil



We are grateful to Rev. Kamal Hassan and all who have gathered in this sacred time to share in *Lamentation, Learning, and Leading*. We encourage you to share and reflect on this work towards Racial Justice and Equity, and to use the resources that we will continue to have available for the work.

### We Can't Breathe Virtual Vigil Information:

- [We Can't Breathe Virtual Vigil Video](#)
- [PowerPoint Presentation](#)
- 3 Videos Shared during the Vigil:
  - [What is Juneteenth?](#)
  - [Tulsa Race Riot](#)