

## **“A Legacy of Love”**

When my only niece was born, some 30 years ago, I pulled out my Smith-Corona typewriter, typed the words of the poem by Dorothy Law Nolte [“Children Learn What They Live,”](#) burned the edges of the paper to effect a vintage look, squirted Elmer’s glue on the back of the paper, and attached it to a stained pine block with Mod Podge. It was intended to hang in her room as a reminder to her and to me of all the good I wanted to infuse into her precious life. I wanted her to be safe, secure, smart, and honest among other good outcomes listed in the poem. This homemade plaque was to be a sign of my investment in the legacy she would inherit from me.

Imagine my incredulity as I watched evil have free reign and almost unfettered access in the United States Capitol Building as a result of a false narrative of entitlement, intolerance, hate, and white supremacy. Children learn what they live. The narrative that criticizes otherness, other lives, other perspectives, and other skin tones teaches condemnation and hostility. On these days following an historical breach of our national witness to democracy, we are left to wonder, what is the legacy of this event for our children? Will it catalyze good or will it serve to prolong a sustained narrative of racist oppression for non-white citizens?

For over 54 years, Reconciliation Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has persisted in creating a legacy of dignity and freedom for all of God’s beloved children. There have been numerous opportunities to stop, throw in the towel, and lay down the mantle of confronting structural and systemic racism. Transparently, due to the unpopularity of a ministry focused on the sin of racism in a predominantly white denomination, the Church has faced the difficult decision to abandon this mission more than once. While there were many reasons that have been raised to walk away, Disciples persisted opting to stay the course of embodying an anti-racist and pro-reconciling identity as a faithful witness of our mission in the world.

It is my contention that this is our legacy as Disciples of Christ. The commitment to own our identity as pro-reconciling and anti-racist Church is a process. It is a process of accountability and of truth-telling. It is undergirded by our faith and our strong desire to witness to Christ unfailing love. The gospel according to John reminds us of Jesus’ final commandment to his disciples, *“that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

If we have love for one another, as Christ disciples, we are committed to a painful truth-telling process that causes us to examine and identify the practices and policies where we have not been faithful to Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) in our Church and the

communities we are called to serve. If we have love for one another, we cannot not fear pushback from our congregants or our donors that the message of anti-racism is a non-starter and an offering-killer. If we have love for one another, as Christ has loved us, we will study together the reasons why it is that all of us have learned and live out a narrative of white supremacy<sup>1</sup>. As well, we would be helped to examine how we might pivot in order to change course to disrupt this harmful narrative. Love is less of an emotion as it is more inclined to the hard work of transforming ourselves, our families, our churches and the communities where we live and serve in order that no one group of people are valued greater than another. It is in this way that with a clear conscious we condemn the riotous and death-dealing behavior of the siege of the nation's Capitol building in an attempt to preserve white supremacy. (Click [here](#) to locate a list of study resources.)

As a faith body, we have learned from what we lived and are committed to the transformation process of preserving the dignity of all God's children. What occurred at the Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup>, the day of Epiphany and Dia de Reyes, is a reminder of the awful legacy of white supremacy that is embedded in our nation's founding principles, practices, and documents. As a nation, we have since pivoted to correct those oppressive statutes. Those corrections were made law in the halls of the Capitol. Yet, there are many laws to protect BIPOC citizens, their access to voting, their access to education, and equal treatment by law enforcement that still need to be passed expeditiously. They need your advocacy and support to become a reality. It is my belief that we, Disciples of Christ, are uniquely equipped to frame a narrative of anti-racism and inclusion for such a time as this. Reconciliation Ministry is your partner to educate, to advocate, and to live 'love' as an action word as we bear witness to Christ, as his namesake and for the sake of Christ beloved.

Yours in Christ,  
April G. Johnson  
Minister of Reconciliation

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<sup>1</sup> National Council of Churches Advocacy and Justice Convening Table joint definition of White Supremacy: *“Through colonization and slavery, the United States of America helped to create and embrace a system of valuing and devaluing people based on skin color and ethnic identity. The name for this system is white supremacy. Through this system, people of color and Indigenous people were subjugated for the purpose of material, political, and social advantage. White supremacy creates, sustains and protects a culture that structurally and ideologically privileges whiteness in virtually all facets of society. Racism is the continuing legacy of white supremacy. It is counter to the Gospel and anathema to core tenets of all major religions and people of good will. Racism is a sin that we must confess and seek to dismantle in our own lives and institutions.*