

“A new commandment I give you that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” John 13:34 NRSV

Dear Disciples,

What follows are my most comforting words. This has been a difficult message to share with you following the tragic events in Buffalo and Laguana Woods last weekend. It is important for me to say that this is not normal. This cannot be our new normal: a gun culture where guns outnumber the people, race-based hate crimes, and targeted violence against non-white people. When we see news coverage of a person carrying a gun into a grocery store and another person carrying a gun into a church with the intent to murder and traumatize Black and Asian communities, we are tempted to suppress our legitimate fear and anger. Many of us fall silent. We desperately want to accept the narrative and media tropes that frame these atrocities as isolated incidents. These stories depict the perpetrators as lone wolves - isolated individuals who neglected the appropriate interventions. Truthfully, our collective past and current reality do not confirm this narrative to be true.

As Christians ironically, we accept a narrative of a God who is a disrupter of evil, including supremacist narratives and behavior. Similar to our habits on social media, we even follow him. We take his name and call ourselves Christian. When Jesus gave his disciples his final guidance, it seemed normal. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”¹ Jesus presents the command to love one another as a ‘new commandment.’ Did they forget the old one? It sounds the strikingly similar. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.”² It is possible that Jesus knew his Disciples were soon to witness a callous, senseless, tragic murder – a crucifixion, if you will. It is possible he knew they were going to have gut-wrenching fear and grief in the aftermath. Jesus wanted the Disciples to know that when confronted with peril and evil, the dark side of the human condition, they will need to deepen their commitment to actualize this command. It is not a one and done work, loving one another. Jesus goes on in the last verse of that text to encourage the disciples saying, “By this they will know that you are my disciples.”

A teacher friend shared this story with me. She told me that she recommended the book Caste by Isabel Wilkerson to her all-white member book club. At the end of the study, she asked them, what were they willing to do after reading about the reality of systemic racism that is embedded in our institutions. At the next meeting, one member reported that as a President of a local bank, she created a loan program for low wage earners in predominantly Black and Brown communities. You may not be a president of a bank, but you can change the conditions that normalize racism where you live, work, and worship. It is discomforting work, but it cannot happen without you, Christ’s Disciples.

¹ John 13:34-35

² Luke 10:27

I commend to you these suggestions and resources to support you in deepening your commitment as an Anti-Racist and Pro-Reconciling Church.

Commit:

- 1) Create space for grief and repentance. It is helpful to regularize this practice.
 - a. Consider offering a moment of silence in your worship liturgy, for example, following the sermon.
 - b. Allow members and leaders in your congregation or your work environment an opportunity to caucus during staff meetings, planning meetings, or educational opportunities. The goal here is to acknowledge that we come with culturally different needs to process grief.
 - c. Incorporate lament as part of your gathering and worship. See here some examples of litanies for repentance of the sin of oppression:
<https://www.gracealex.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Litany-of-Repentance.pdf>
- 2) Consider becoming an anti-racist congregation. Contact reconciliation@disciples.org for information.

Collaborate:

- 3) Seek mentorship from BIPOC leaders and agencies to effect community change and resources allocation.
 - a. Policy change is the goal. Consider joining a local community organizing affiliate or network.
 - b. See here a list of racial justice organizations:
<https://racialequity.org/racial-justice-organizations-and-resources/>
- 4) Develop and utilize preaching resources as well as Bible studies to advance anti-racism advocacy and equity.
 - a. The Working Preacher offers video and sermon starters. Podcasts for the coming week: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/home-narrative-lectionary>
 - b. This week's lectionary readings are ideal for activating our Christian call for 'welcome', partnership versus isolation in ministry, and "greatness" as a metaphor for disrupting internalized superiority in the realm of God. The readings are: Luke: 9:46 – 48 and Philippians 1:1-18

Contribute:

- 5) ***Give to Reconciliation Ministry.*** www.reconciliationministry.org/give Your gifts provide grants throughout our church to stand up against racism, to build transformative relationships, and to respond in racial and social justice crises.
- 6) Below is a list of regions that have anti-racism commissions and teams for your collaboration. Please support them.

Over 17 of our 30 Regional Ministries have anti-racism and pro-reconciliation commissions and/or teams. This is good news. These Regions and Teams need your support.

Email	Office Phone	Region	Region Name
www.alnwfldisciples.org	205-425-5245	AL-NWFL	Christian Chu
azdisciples.org	602-468-3815	AZ	Christian Chu
www.cccadisciples.org	301-942-8266	CCCA	Christian Chu
www.indianadisciples.org	317-926-6051	CCIN	Christian Chu
www.ccsww.org	817-926-4687	CCSW	Christian Chu
www.gadisciples.org	478-743-8649	GA	Christian Chu
www.kcdisciples.org	913-432-1414	GKC	Christian Chu
www.cciwdisciples.org	309-828-6293	IL/WI	Christian Chu
http://www.ccinky.org	859-233-1391	KY	Christian Chu
www.mid-america-disciples.org	314-462-0932	Mid-America	Christian Chu
https://ccncn.org/	925-556-9900	NC-NEV	Christian Chu
www.oidisciples.org	503-226-7648	Oregon/SW Idaho	Christian Chu
www.disciplespswr.org	626-296-0385	PSWR	Christian Chu
www.tndisciples.org	615-646-3705	TN	Christian Chu
www.uppermidwestcc.org	515-255-3168	UPW	Christian Chu
www.ccinva.org	434-846-3400	VA	Christian Chu