



June 17, 2020

Dear St. Paul's Family Member:

Before His death on the cross, Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34). Jesus didn't say: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another unless the other person looks different than you, worships differently than you, or is from a different background." He said "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." There were no conditions.

As followers of Jesus, we are obligated to speak out when we see injustice, and in recent weeks there has been a reconsideration of the status of race relations in this country that we, as your vestry, feel we need to address as well.

We have not yet come close to fully addressing our nation's history of oppression and systemic racism. Recent events, including the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, are just a few examples that have brought racial injustice to the forefront of our consciousness. It seems obvious, upon reflection, that we as a society have fallen far short of living out Jesus' commandment to love one another unconditionally.

We need to do better!

We must begin to address it, both as a society and as a church.

As a faith-based community with people from different backgrounds, we must be committed to supporting people of color, standing against racism and injustice in our communities, and laying the groundwork for overdue change. This message is not inconsistent with our support and gratitude to the many courageous members of the law enforcement community who honorably risk their lives to protect and serve our communities.

While some may think that we are crossing a line and being "too political" by addressing this, at the end of the day God does not care about our political leaning. God, however, is passionate about whether we are seeking the justice and dignity of every human being, learning from and repenting of our sins and mistakes, and building a community of belonging and mercy.

Too often we see church life and life outside of church as two different things. However, as Christians and followers of the gospel of Jesus, our faith must guide how we live our lives, all the time, both inside and outside of church. If we segregate these two things, then Jesus' words and teachings become meaningless, or worse, irrelevant.

Some also may believe that racism doesn't exist anymore since they don't see or feel it in their lives. But not having experienced or seeing racism first hand does not mean it does not exist or is not a problem that many of our neighbors and friends experience every day, in ways large and small.

We are proud to say that Piney has a history of doing the right thing. Many years ago, Piney had a balcony like many churches of that time did - the balcony was where you sat if you were African American, and sitting elsewhere in the church wasn't an option. It was a way to keep blacks and whites segregated. Many in the parish did not feel this was right...and so a group literally tore the balcony down. This brave act put Piney on the path to justice.

Another sad part of our country's history was the segregation of schools. For most of that history, black children were educated separately in different schools from white children. This was supported by laws, and even by the Supreme Court, which ruled that separate facilities for blacks and whites were permissible provided that the facilities were of equal quality. The reality was usually dramatically different, as schools for blacks were typically significantly underfunded and of lesser quality. This was also the case for church-run schools, and even in Sunday schools across the country...including at St. Paul's. Two parishioners who taught Sunday school stood up and said, "No." They took a stand and asserted that all the kids will go to Sunday school together, or there will be no Sunday school for anyone.

So, what can we do now?

First, we need to be honest with ourselves. What biases do we have? How many times have we listened to someone say or do something racist and kept silent? How many times have we looked the other way because it was the easier choice? How many times have we done or said something that was racist, intentional or not? Why haven't we spoken up before now? Well, now is the time to stand up, grow up, and own up. Why? Because that is how we love one another as Jesus has loved us. It is the way of love.

What can we do as a church? To help answer that question we will be forming a committee to explore that very question. In the meantime, Cami Caudill is facilitating a discussion group on Ta-Nehisi Coates' book, *Between the World and Me*. You can email Cami (ccaudill13@gmail.com) for dates and to sign-up. If you would like to take part in the Becoming Beloved Community committee, contact one the wardens or Mother Maria. If you have found yourself saying "I want to help, but I don't know what to do," these are some ways you can begin.

We pray for God's wisdom and guidance that as a parish we are able to have difficult conversations without fear of judgment.

We pray that we will be able to tell much-needed truths, and to seek greater understanding of each other in the spirit of love.

We pray for a world where no one has to live with injustice and in constant fear because of the color of their skin.

God, we pray that Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Amen.

The St. Paul's Vestry

Sewell Truitte (Senior Warden)
Michael Fritz
Donna Maki

Tom Gryn (Junior Warden)
Phil Hamilton
Yvonne Mattison

Terrance Frierson
Laurie Jaffe