



Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia

The Rt. Rev. W. Michie Klusmeyer
Bishop

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Dear Friends in Christ,

I write to you today in a continuation of my Pastoral Letter written on Martin Luther King Day, January 18, 2021. My subject again is the sin of racism.

I hope you are familiar with "The Letter from the Birmingham City Jail," written by Dr. King in 1963 (See the attached resource guide). And I ask you also to re-read our Baptismal Covenant from the Office of Baptism (see pages 304-5 in the **Book of Common Prayer** and the attached resource guide).

With the Covenant in mind, and as you read the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., please understand that he was writing to us – to the white church – and he was telling us that his fight is ours as well. At the time, we didn't see it, and in fact we opposed his work.

Are we better today? Really? Yes, our country has recently had a black President, and our church currently has a black Presiding Bishop, but our collective history as a country is one of slavery, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movement, and most recently high-profile unjustifiable killings of African Americans by white police officers. Have we progressed to the point we can declare victory over racism and rest on our laurels?

- Do you live in a country and worship in a church free from prejudice?
- Do you live and worship in places that show justice and peace to all?
- Is your congregation truly welcoming – have you demonstrated that?

There certainly have been some real and important advances toward recognizing, eradicating, and atoning for the sin of racism, but they have not been enough. We have taught the Baptismal Covenant to two generations of Episcopalians, yet racism is still a powerful force in the country. Black people still die.

As a church, we have said what we will do, and brothers and sisters in Christ, in all honesty, we have not done it. And so, as your bishop, I ask you to engage with me in committing to ending racial injustice. I ask each of you, and each church in the diocese, within the next twelve months to commit to the **Seven Steps to Justice** attached to this letter.

Know that I will ask about this during my visitations and at other times. I have instructed the Commission on Racism and Diversity and its chair, the Rev. Kim Webster, to reach out to assist. Make use of the resources they are providing.

We have been commanded to love one another. Love is more than just words, it is action. With God's help, we can make a positive difference as we live out that command. I believe with all my heart that we must do so.

I ask that we all join to do the hard work that is needed. Thoughts and prayers are not enough.

I welcome your comments even as I look for your actions.

Yours in Christ,



The Rt. Rev. W. Michie Klusmeyer
Bishop of West Virginia

Attachments:
Resource Guide
Seven Steps to Justice

Resources:

See Commission on Racism and Diversity website at <http://www.wvdiocese.org/pages/aa-racismcommission.html>

Letter From Birmingham Jail

Dr. King wrote in response to a letter from local religious leaders published a few days before in the Birmingham newspaper. The very first name in the list of those writing to Dr. King was that of the Bishop Diocesan of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, joined by other faith leaders. Catholic, Protestant, and Jew all spoke as one in asking Dr. King to stop supporting those demonstrating for their civil rights. See: <https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf> Letter from Birmingham Jail, August 1963.

Baptismal Covenant:

Celebrant Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People I will, with God's help.

Books:

“How to Be An Antiracist” Ibram X. Kendi, Random House, 2019.

“Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents” Isabel Wilkerson, Random House, 2020

Seven Steps to Justice

The vestry and members of _____ Episcopal Church in the Diocese of West Virginia who have signed their names below have pledged to take steps in the next 12 months to:

- Have an honest and informed conversation with your clergy and vestries as to ways your congregation can make a positive difference regarding race relations in your communities.
- Engage in individual or congregational study of racial bias and race relations to become better informed.
- Actively engage with local, state, and national leaders to advocate for legal and governmental reform to housing, education, healthcare, policing, and other societal structures that disadvantage people of color.
- Focus on exploring the impact of racial divide in your local community so that more people can identify the inherent bias that results in unfair and harmful relationships
- Publicly and non-violently witness to the call of Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves.
- Individually and collectively call out small insults and large acts of prejudice and white supremacy when we see them.
- Seek to form relationships with people who don't look like us and to actively interview, hire, train, mentor and give opportunity for leadership to people of color.

_____, 2021

_____ Episcopal Church

Senior Warden on behalf of the Vestry: _____

Priest: _____

Parish Members:

