

"David said further to his son Solomon, "Be strong and of good courage, and act. Do not be afraid or dismayed; for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished." 1 Chronicles 28:20 (NRSV)

"Love Takes Courage"

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

Greetings and blessings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

As Disciples, we are at our best when our witness points to restoring wholeness in the body of Christ. As a movement people – once a westward movement, then a movement from repentance toward reconciliation, Disciples have always embraced the difficult questions of our landscape with courage and conviction that the light of God's witness entrusted to us never grows dim.

Recent events in the life of our country and church prompt us to recognize a special opportunity for sincere reflection regarding what it means to 'be Church' in this moment. The repealing of key provisions of the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 and the verdict in the murder trial of the State of Florida versus Zimmerman have provoked a public outcry that highlights the persistent nature of racism in our culture. While society can be polarized around the issue of race relations and racial justice, we are heartened by our Disciples' commitment to our pro-reconciliation/anti-racism priority.

True to our Disciples character, we do not hold a singular perspective about the events that led to the death of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his assailant, George Zimmerman – events that affected a collective gasp of despair among black and brown sisters and brothers. However, our Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism mission priority affords us an opportunity within our differing perspectives to lean into this *kairos* moment – God's timing – to wrestle with the pertinent questions of this hour.

- What is the Church's response to hurting brothers and sisters for whom these events re-open tender wounds of historic violence and oppression?
- How do we position ourselves to listen to each other's experiences holding in tension the very real possibility that our own perceptions could be changed?

Reconciliation Ministry offers the resources to engage these questions and to assist in convening these critical and courageous conversations. Included in this letter are three resources/recommendations that invite dialogue in the small groups or circles of your choice. You will also find them at www.reconciliationministry.org.

As we approach the season for our Special Offering for Reconciliation Ministry, we invite your wholehearted participation in this emphasis as well as your generous giving to the Reconciliation Ministry Special Offering on **September 29th** and on **World Communion Sunday, October 6th**. This year's theme could not be more in keeping with the spirit of this hour -"Love Takes Courage." Therefore, we also invite your participation to enter into 'courageous conversation' and to seriously consider this moment as an opportunity to work for reconciliation in your community and increased understanding in your congregation around issues of race relations and racial justice.

Finally, we invite you to reflect on King David's words to his son Solomon in the daunting responsibility of building the temple of the Lord to house the Ark of the Covenant. David's comforting words reminds us of God's faithfulness toward us and God's promise of continual presence with us as we seek to accomplish the work of building God's realm on earth, restoring wholeness and dignity to every member of our church and communities. "Be strong and courageous and act," as we hold God's covenant of love for each other remembering Christ's courageous love for us.

God's peace be with you now and always,

Sharon E. Watkins

Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins
General Minister and President

April G. Johns

Rev. April G. Johnson
Minister of Reconciliation



Resources

Relate/Encounter Guidelines for a small group:

- Appoint a convener for your small group and a time keeper.
- Ask someone to serve as an intercessor to pray for your group and its conversation.
- Secure a worship 'center' or focal piece such as a candle to serve as remainder of the sacred presence of God in your meeting space. If you are on a conference call or video call request participants to secure a worship center in their place of participation.
- The convener should solicit input to establish a small group covenant of respect, safety and confidentiality. Convener should ask participants to use "I" statements when they share and descriptors such as "I feel/felt _____ when . . ."
- Close your time together with intentional silence and prayer.

Questions

- When did you first become aware of race and racial difference in your home or community?
- What was the name of your first friend that was racially or ethnically different than you?
- Describe your first understanding of racial disparity or injustice in your lifetime, for example did you become aware of people of a different racial or ethnic group being treated differently than people of your own racial or ethnic group? How did you respond?
- How was race discussed in your home, school or church?
- Are you accustomed to seeing people of your race represented on television, media, history books, etc? How do you feel or respond when you do not see yourself represented?

Study

I. Begin a book club and or study in your Region or congregation to review and discuss during Sunday School or a regularly scheduled meeting day to raise awareness of race relations, racial justice or race history. Check www.reconciliationministry.org

and click on the “Resources” button on the left for recommendations or call the office 317-713-2587.

Action

II. Next Steps Ideas

- Seek a partner congregation with a majority racial/ethnic membership different than your own for a regular pulpit exchange and fellowship.
- Partner with another congregation, ministry group, or Region to plan an introductory Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism training event.
- Partner with another congregation, ministry group, or community group to address a racial justice concern in your community. (ie. Transportation equity, school board representation)
- Plan your own youth training event using this lesson plan from Reconciliation Ministry http://www.reconciliationministry.org/Portals/RM/PDF/Youth%20Power%20Exercises.pdf