

Email 7/8/2020
University Mennonite Church Community,

The leadership team received the attached letter (email) that was sent to our church and signed by 10 young people (9 from our congregation). The letter was in response to the letter that leadership sent in June to local officials urging action in light of the current protests for racial injustice.

We are grateful for the thoughtful response that urges our local church to do more and to take a stronger stand for justice for the Black community that is rising up across the nation and the globe, demanding justice and the end to continued oppression. It is a challenge for us to do more as a congregation.

During our July 1 meeting, the leadership team discussed how University Mennonite Church might best respond to this challenge. In the past we have held community cafes to discuss issues facing the church; to listen to one another; learn together; and discern together how our church should respond. We believe this could be a constructive step to discern further action.

That being said, we realize that we are all in different places on the journey to understand and process the issues of systemic racism. As a first step we encourage UMC community members to learn more deeply about the issues facing our nation and our church in an effort to be better prepared for discussions on how we face and respond to these challenges.

Realizing that there are many resources available, we offer the following suggestions:

Join the **UMC book study on *White Fragility*** by Robin DiAngelo. The four-week study begins on Wednesday, July 8 and will meet on Zoom for four consecutive Wednesdays at 8 p.m. We plan to follow the initial study with a second book, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*, by Austin Channing Brown. Contact Joel Weidner, joelpsu82@outlook.com to join.

Check out other **books about antiracism and Black history**. This New York Times article lists several books to use as a starting point:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/05/books/antiracism-books-race-racism.html>

Read the **Mennonite Church USA Statement on racial injustice** (posted June 1) and related resource materials: http://mennoniteusa.org/news/mc_usa-statement-on-racial-injustice/

Read the article **Justice fund, policing, and protesting by Iris de Leon-Hartshorn**, associate executive director for Operations, Mennonite Church USA: <http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/justice-fund/>

Get involved in the **Campus and Community in Unity (CCU)** organization that includes local officials and community members who are committed to "promoting a multicultural community that respects and celebrates diversity in State College, PA." The group is led by Harold McKenzie, pastor of Unity Church of Jesus Christ, and Tom King, former State College police chief. The group has been meeting via Zoom this summer.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CCUnity/>

Website: <https://ccustatecollege.weebly.com/>

Get involved in the local **3/20 Coalition** that was formed after the shooting death of Osaze Osagie last March in State College by the police. The group continues to seek justice for Osaze's family and has organized several local protest events in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. The best way to know what's going on is via the group's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/320-Coalition-2244750575843126/>

Read a recent **NY Times Magazine article about police reform**: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/13/magazine/police-reform.html>

Listen to the **1619 six-part podcast**, hosted by Nikole Hannah-Jones, that examines "the long shadow of American slavery." <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/podcasts/1619-podcast.html>

Watch **movies about racial injustice**. Many, including Just Mercy, The Hate U Give, 13th, and Mudbound, are available on viewing platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime.

Talk with friends and family. Unpacking these issues can lead to uncomfortable conversations, but don't be afraid of that challenge. Unlearning, learning, and growing takes work.

Let UMC's leadership know what you're thinking or what you think the church should do next. Emailing leadershipteam@univeristymennonite.org will include pastor Kate, our chair, asst. Chair and all four elders.

We are grateful for the voices of the young people in our congregation that have challenged us on the issues of systemic racism. We look forward to engaging with one another on these issues to discern together how our local church should answer the call to address racial injustice in our church, our community, and our nation.

In Christ,

UMC Leadership Team
Kate Heinzl (pastor), Doug Miller (chair), Rick Stehouwer (asst. chair)
Rosita Derstine, Leland Glenna, Joel Weidner, Meredith Wideman (elders)