June 4, 2020

What does the Lord require?
A statement from David Steele, General Secretary, Church of the Brethren

*“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”--Micah 6:8*

Our hearts break for the loss of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others who have lost their lives due to the color of their skin. Each death represents injustices disproportionately affecting the Black community.

Many across our country have protested in the wake of George Floyd’s death because of the way authorities delayed arresting and charging the police officers involved, but most importantly because his killing is a perpetuation of the injustice, violence, and racism that have devalued and harmed Black Americans for centuries.

Many protests have remained peaceful; violence has erupted in some. What is clear is that the nation, and especially our sisters and brothers from various racial backgrounds are hurting and in mourning.

Jesus commanded in Matthew 3:8: *“Bear fruit worthy of repentance.”*Bearing the fruit of repentance, we stand in solidarity with all who suffer from injustice, violence, and racism.

Brethren have long recognized the inherent worth of all human beings while also recognizing that our church, and we ourselves, are not free from racism. Our denomination has recognized that we have participated in and benefited from racism, whether we have been aware of it or not. The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in 1991 issued a report on “Brethren and Black Americans” ( [www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1991blackamericans.html](https://brethren.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=fe053219fdb661c00183423ef&id=2862635bff&e=c25ed6fe83" \t "_blank) ) that said, in part:

“Members of the Church of the Brethren face the subtle temptation of thinking that because there are not many black Americans in the denomination, or because many of us do not live in physical proximity to black people, that the problem of racism is not our concern. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many of us benefit from racist practices, without being direct participants, because of decisions and policies already in place in our religious, economic, and political institutions.”

Jesus spoke strongly to those who choose willful ignorance for their own benefit, saying in Matthew 23:23: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.”* And we find this in James 4:17: *“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.”*

As a denomination we must reaffirm that racism is sin, and that there is good we ought to be doing to combat it. Racism is indeed our concern as we strive to truly love both God and neighbor. When we are not concerned and do nothing, we sin.

We must repent for ways we have participated in the racism that has caused so many deaths. We must repent for the ways we have not spoken or taken action against systemic racism’s structures and institutions. We must repent for the times we have witnessed overt racism yet remained silent.

The 1991 report recommends that congregations “stand in solidarity with black Americans and other victims of racial hate by speaking out against overt expressions of racially motivated violence and offering assistance to victims.” In doing so, we identify ourselves as disciples of Christ, who said: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free”*(Luke 4:18).

Let us commit ourselves to be a part of the healing of the nation. Let us pray, and let us act to undo racism in these times.