



St. Brendan's Episcopal Church  
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## Combatting Racism: St. Brendan's Responds

June 2020

On May 25, **George Floyd** died while being held face-down by three police officers in Minneapolis. Captured on video, the brutality with which he was treated recalled the deaths of **Ahmaud Arbery** in February and **Breonna Taylor** in March. Many at St. Brendan's probably also remembered **Antwon Rose**, shot dead by East Pittsburgh police in June 2018.

**Today, St. Brendan's Church joins protesters throughout our nation and across the globe** in saying to all people of conscience but especially to our Black sisters and brothers ...

- We find these specific acts repulsive.
- We recognize that they are not isolated events but the most recent examples of systemic racial discrimination that has permeated our society for centuries.
- It is our duty as Christians to act in solidarity with men and women of all races and creeds to dismantle racist institutions of all kinds—and, in particular right now, to reform any police policies and practices that perpetuate them.
- We pray for the souls of George, Ahmaud, Breonna, and Antwon, for their families and friends, and for the countless others who preceded them.

**As Christians, we try to follow in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth**, whose ministry focused on the poor, the weak, the sick and all those sidelined by the culture of his time and place. Jesus shocked even his closest followers by the compassion he showed for victims of oppression and by bluntly calling those in authority to account. This is the example he gave us. It is also what led to his own death—in itself an act of unjustifiable cruelty committed in the name of “law and order.”

**At our baptisms, each of us promised that we would remain faithful to Jesus' teaching**, a promise we have repeated many times since. Again and again, we have been asked, *Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?* to which we have responded, *I will, with God's help*. Too often, though, we try to wriggle out of our responsibility to live up to this commitment, telling ourselves that we have not—not ourselves, not consciously—behaved unjustly or disrespected others. That excuse is no longer acceptable.

**Today, as members of St. Brendan's, we must instead confess that we have not worked to pursue the just social order that Jesus referred to as "the Kingdom."** The deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Antwon Rose and so many others demonstrate this all too clearly. And we must dedicate ourselves to responding in ways that are collaborative, creative, peaceful, compassionate but unwavering—and above all true to Jesus' Gospel teachings.

**We have a lot to learn.** There are things we do not know because our schools gave us at best an incomplete view of our history and culture. There are things we do not know because we ourselves did not care enough to track down the stories behind news headlines that cried out for further investigation. There are things we *did* know at some point, but later forgot as private concerns diverted our attention. The White privilege that most Brendanites enjoy runs deep—so deep that we don't even see it—and it will take hard work to overcome our blindness to the forces that have shaped (and still shape) racial inequity in policing and so many other areas of society. Then it will take courage to speak out loud the truth as we have uncovered it and to use our privileged positions to support smart proposals for change.

**We must also listen—listen deeply, with open hearts and minds.** The Jesus of the Gospels was not a theorist or a politician; he was a man with deep compassion for the people he met, adapting his lessons to draw on their experiences and giving them each individually the support they most needed. We too must find ways to work with others in true solidarity—with a shared understanding of the challenges ahead, with shared goals and shared tactics for pursuing them. It will not be easy to earn the trust of others. Too many just like us have embarked on similar journeys in the past, only to drop out when the path became too steep for comfort. Yet without an authentic relationship with those we hope to serve, we risk adopting strategies that then backfire because we did not understand their real-world consequences.

**What specifically do we plan to do?** With leadership from our Justice Ministry team, ...

- ✓ We will learn more about the history of racial injustice and how White privilege, through its silence, allows injustice to continue.
- ✓ We will study the stories behind policies that appear neutral but in fact discriminate.
- ✓ We will use our positions of privilege to work to eliminate discriminatory policies, including those that appear to be neutral when in fact they are discriminatory.
- ✓ We will pursue economic justice by ordering from minority-owned businesses.
- ✓ We will assist protesters as we are able—by joining them when we can and by providing money, food and water, and whatever other supplies they may need.
- ✓ And first, last and throughout, we will pray, as God gives us the strength, that God's Kingdom may at last come on earth just as God has promised through the ages.