



CHRIST CHURCH, DARTMOUTH

An inclusive church welcoming everyone

61 Dundas Street, Dartmouth, NS
www.christchurchdartmouth.com

June 11, 2020

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” -Galatians 3:28

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love.” —Nelson Mandela

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we continue to see the protests in the United States, Canada, and around the world, we realize that as a society, we have much work to do achieving equality among all people. Media reports and videos of horrific acts against people are very difficult to watch, but it is my hope that trauma can lead to systemic change. I have spoken to some of you about these recent events, and I know they rest heavily on our hearts. One of the things that I have observed is that many are not just reflecting on the reality in the United States, but we are exploring what is taking place in our local communities.

As we know, the church has been brought into this conversation, and rightly so. Some of you may have been disturbed and upset to see President Donald Trump on June 1 standing in front of St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC holding a bible. To arrive at Lafayette Square, police and the National Guard cleared protesters with tear gas and great force. Upon his arrival at the church, the President stood in front of cameras and raised a Bible and stated, “We have a great country. Greatest country in the world.” At this brief photo op, the President did not mention the death of George Floyd, or that the church was damaged during protests. He never mentioned the coronavirus pandemic, but instead seemed to be preparing for the upcoming November election. Political theatre if you will.

You may suggest that this conversation is political, and I would say, absolutely. I would submit that North America and the world is seeing a lack of leadership, morality, and justice, particularly in the United States. I also want you to know that as Anglicans, Donald Trump's actions were not sanctioned nor endorsed by the Episcopal Church (the Anglican Church in the United States). Quite the opposite, in fact, as many in our denomination have spoken forcefully against the actions of the President.

Bishop Mariann Budde of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington immediately released a statement saying:

The President just used a Bible and one of the churches of my diocese as a backdrop for a message antithetical to the teachings of Jesus and everything that our church stands for. To do so, he sanctioned the use of tear gas by police officers in riot gear to clear the church yard.

I am outraged.

The President did not pray when he came to St. John's; nor did he acknowledge the agony and sacred worth of people of color in our nation who rightfully demand an end to 400 years of systemic racism and white supremacy in our country.

We in the Diocese of Washington follow Jesus in His Way of Love. We aspire to be people of peace and advocates of justice. In no way do we support the President's incendiary response to a wounded, grieving nation. In faithfulness to our Savior who lived a life of non-violence and sacrificial love, we align ourselves with those seeking justice for the death of George Floyd and countless others through the sacred act of peaceful protest.¹

The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, issued his statement writing:

This evening, the President of the United States stood in front of St. John's Episcopal Church, lifted up a bible, and had pictures of himself taken. In so doing, he used a church building and the Holy Bible for partisan political purposes. This was done in a time of deep hurt and pain in our country, and his action did nothing to help us or to heal us.

The bible teaches us that "God is love." Jesus of Nazareth taught, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The prophet Micah taught that the Lord requires us to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God."

The bible the President held up and the church that he stood in front of represent the values of love, of justice, of compassion, and of a way to heal our hurts.

We need our President, and all who hold office, to be moral leaders who help us to be a people and nation living these values. For the sake of George Floyd, for all who have wrongly suffered, and for the sake of us all, we need leaders to help us to be "one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all."²

In my opinion, the actions of the President have for some time and are increasingly running against the message of the Gospel, and the commandment Jesus gives us—"love thy neighbour." The response to the Black Lives Matter movement, and the deaths of people based on gender, race, religion, and socio-economic background is unbearable.

¹ <https://www.edow.org/about/bishop-mariann/writings>

² <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/pressreleases/presiding-bishop-michael-currys-statement-on-president-donald-trumps-use-of-st-johns-holy-bible/>

And the actions of some in leadership is quite frankly disgusting. This is not a liberal or conservative issue or conversation, but a reminder to all Christians that we are called to speak out and protest such empty responses.

As we see images of hate, some of us may say, “I’m so glad I’m Canadian.” I, too, am a proud Canadian, but I do not pretend that we, as a society, have engaged deeply in the conversation of systemic racism that is widespread today. Our national episcopal Bishop’s released a statement on racism and our role in complacency:

We have been horrified by the public murder of George Floyd. We are deeply distressed and profoundly disturbed by the images, rhetoric, violence, division, and chaos that has followed. We offer our prayerful support and solidarity with our sister church, the Episcopal Church, as it prays and guides its people while it simultaneously repents of, and protests the sin of racism. Our own house is not in order. Systemic racism exists in every part of Canada.³

One of the ways that I am seeking to understand is through education. I am finding that reading and examining resources are helping me. I have asked Gail Texeira, a parishioner, to provide us with some resources which I share with you. I also offer a link and a Podcast that I have found helpful. I encourage all of us to take time to read, mark, and inwardly digest material that allows us to have an in-depth conversation so we can collectively make a change, as our Lord Jesus Christ did, and does for us.

Some of the resources that I have found helpful include:

The Canadian Council of Churches: Resources for Ending Anti-Black Racism in Canada:

<https://www.interculturalleadership.ca/news/resources-for-ending-anti-black-racism-in-canada?fbclid=IwARo-OcInUjibHG2JXgawKgI2pl8TdPEECMOF4aXY9tpXX---l4aKcsVGW7s>

1619 Podcast on the history of American Slavery by the New York Times:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/1619/id1476928106>

Also, Gail has generously provided resources that relate directly to our communities and can be found on our website at:

https://www.christchurchdartmouth.com/uploads/6/2/9/8/62981681/black_lives_matterv3_-_g_teixeira.pdf

³ <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Statement-on-Racism-R2.pdf>

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle Wagner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Dr. Kyle Wagner
Rector, Christ Church, Dartmouth
Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI
Anglican Church of Canada