

February 2021

Dear Ministers and JPIC Animators,

May the Lord Give You Peace. In February we commemorate Black History Month. This year I believe we are called to focus on history being made right here and right now:

Trayvon Martin
George Floyd
Rayshard Brooks
Daniel Prude
Breonna Taylor
Stephen Clark
Bothan Jean
Aura Rosser

and the many other black Americans killed at the hands of the police over the last decade. We remember their names because God remembers their names. We pray for them and their families, knowing God holds them in mercy and compassion. We cry for justice, but what justice can there be when a 22-year-old man (Stephan Clark) is standing in his Grandmother's backyard, unarmed, with a cell phone in his hand when the police shoot him. Or when George Floyd is heard on the video taken by a passerby begging for his breath from the police officer leaning on his body and occluding his airway. Or when Botham Jean is sitting on his couch eating ice cream and an off-duty police officer mistakenly enters his home and shoots him, thinking he, and not the police officer, was the intruder.

I called Carolyn Townes, our National JPIC Animator, to discuss, and we had a ZOOM reflection. I asked her advice. What are we as Franciscans to do in our profoundly divided nation? Her advice?

**Educate
Encounter
Engage**

Let us embrace these words, sisters and brothers. Let us read, reflect, and learn about the lives and circumstances of those in our nation who have struggled with racism, both personal and institutional. Let us go out and encounter those members of the human family and learn from them their experiences. Let us engage in actions to address the social/political/and economic structures that leave our black sisters and brothers vulnerable to fatal police actions, discriminatory social structures, and dehumanizing cultural practices. Let us join voices to say it is not okay to pass over these events as if they were exceptions, or as if they do not matter. They matter. Because, dear sisters and brothers, whatever happens to anyone in the human family matters to God and, as his disciples, it matters to us.

Let us join in prayer and action. Let us learn from the God of justice what He is calling us to do. As the Psalmist teaches "God's **loved ones** are very **precious** to him, and he **does not lightly let them die.**" Psalm 116:15.

Peace and All Good,
Patricia Grace, OFS
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