

## BLACK-AMERICAN VERSUS BEING BLACK IN AMERICA

By Damon I. Watts

When I wake up at my mom's, the first thing that catches my eyes every morning is this picture. For me, it makes me debate in my head what it means to be a Black-American versus being black in America.

Everybody should be conscious of what is going on around the country. To paraphrase Gil-Scott Heron, the new word to have is rebellion; and while Nat Turner might have been the good guy, I want my fellow disillusioned youths to know what that means.

Rebellion means more funds to militarize the police force, and more reasons to call on the national guard to further restrict your rights. Rebellion means for every measly dollar of property damage done during riots in the cities we call home, another public official either apathetic or openly hostile to our cause gets a seat in government.

Rebellion in this country has always meant bloodshed 2:1 against us. You're probably thinking, "Watts, what's your point?" What are we fighting for, not being gunned down or killed like dogs in the street? That's not a civil right. It's a God-given human right. In this country, it's not the guns killing us en masse; it's the butter. The systemic neglect and social apathy for our people over generations are embodied by deaths at the hands of law enforcement, but it's only one fatal symptom. The Art of War is about misdirection. It is not only the big explosion of the gunshot or gas canister we have to worry about but also the lead-

filled water you drink every day and the system that daily fails you and those that look like us.

We go through this same "action vs. economic impact" debate every year: blackout day here, riot there, and protests everywhere. Why do we act as if fleeting reac-

tions with the same focus as an ADHD student, intensity of a post-championship celebration, and duration of an AAU tournament are going to change anything meaningfully?

People of color in America are by no means united, but we've faced a government culminating in

this particular regime that has repeatedly violated our collective Human Rights. Rights violations are foundational to this nation, and I'm sorry, but the GOV and CNN will not help any of us elevate our case to the UN. In a pandemic-struck world, we are on our own. But our allies and us are all we need.

Black and brown America needs three revolutions: real economic empowerment independent of this racist system; true unity within and amongst colored communities valuing the sanctity of our lives; and a socio-political revolution by maximizing our communities' capitalization rates on human potential today while building our institutions for tomorrow.

It would be nice to receive our 40 acres and a mule, or even some casinos as my father would say. Even though this country was created on the backs of our coerced and exploited labor, the dreams of our ances-



tors won't be built by reparations. We are incredibly creative and resourceful people. Why not use our collective power to remind the world just how much we contribute to it? To memorialize the sacrifices made for us, and reaffirm that we are fighting towards a goal that can inspire generations to come.

We can build our own "City on a Hill," with another Wall Street featuring our businesses and institutions that are responsive to our needs.

We have been building cities since we came to the Americas. Yet, many in my Native American family have been made strangers in their own home. My Hispanic family is treated with disdain, and those seeking free refuge have been met with cages. And the list is so long for my African-American side I would need two lifetimes to re-tell it all.

Why not manifest this encyclopedia of trauma and rights violations into a minority-owned and administered city-state?

What do we have to lose by constructing and protecting a genuinely safe place for black and brown Americans? Assembling our physical niche and political coalition might be people of colors last chance at overturning generational curses within our communities.

Today the majority complains of minor grievances committed by a few disenfranchised members of a much larger neglected community. However, who pe-

tioned on our behalf for us when their armies burned down Prophetstown or their mobs destroyed the Greenwood District in Tulsa? Where were their tears after countless massacres, forced relocations, or government-sanctioned legal regimes aimed at destabilizing our communities? As chaotic as these events might seem today in an already turbulent election year, this moment is both metaphorically and literally the Calm Before the Storm.

Rather than destroy material things that were never made for us or waiting to reform an irreparable system, let's build our better America today. You see, the things I admire most about those Buffalo Soldiers: courage, class, drive, determination, sacrifice, and vision represent the best of what it means to be an American. Instead of another failed rebellion, let's fight for the first real American Revolution.

Most days after I look at that picture in the morning, I reach into my wallet and study a little card with the Serenity Prayer. "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." We can't change our traumatic history, but we must have the courage to transform this movement into something that will transcend both space-time; as well as, the wisdom to redefine a new American dream, reclaim our people's pride, and reward our efforts in the endeavor towards restorative justice.

## MEET ROBIN

I am Robin Kimbrough Hayes, running for the United States Senate from Tennessee to change the political culture of our state and nation. With your help, I can undo disastrous policies by the Senate majority and take back the rule of law as your representative in Washington.

I grew up in a trailer park in Lexington, Kentucky as a latch-key child. The trailer park experience taught me how to work my way out of poverty and gave me the drive to get an education. After graduating from Fisk and Emory Law School, I practiced law at the Tennessee Attorney General's office as an Assistant Attorney General, and later would work with families as an Associate General Counsel for the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. I



spent a decade of my legal career helping victims of domestic and sexual violence as the Legal Counsel for the Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence. In this role, I worked on legislation and policies to keep victims of violence safe and provided statewide training on these issues.

Additionally, I am an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and chaplain. I understand the importance of faith in how we address social justice. My faith and calling have led me to be active in many faith-based and progressive organizations, addressing issues of poverty, criminal justice reform, and women's issues.

# DISCIPLES AND UCC LEADERS ISSUE A MESSAGE AND CALL IN RESPONSE TO THE "CRY FOR HOPE"

BY MIDDLE EAST & EUROPE - GLOBAL MINISTRIES ON JULY 01, 2020

In response to Cry for Hope, the urgent call to end the oppression of the Palestinian people issued by Kairos Palestine



their connections to the struggle for racial justice and express solidarity with us, global politics and maneuvering continue, perhaps hoping for the shadow of these “distractions.” One such example is the

and Global Kairos for Justice, the General Ministers and Presidents of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ, as well as the Co-Executives of Global Ministries, have released a "Message and Call in Response to the Kairos Palestine Cry for Hope. The Rev. Teresa Hord Owens and the Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Ministers and Presidents of the Disciples and UCC, respectively, and the Rev. Dr. Julia Brown Karimu and the Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, Co-Executives of Global Ministries, having received the Cry for Hope, have taken the opportunity to reach out to members of the two churches. In their message, they offer ways that the Cry for Hope can be studied and acted on by church members. They also reiterate their strong opposition to anticipated Israeli efforts to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, and to occupation.

The full text of their message follows below:

## **Beloved family of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ,**

Greetings in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ! We write at a challenging time for us here in North America—and around the world. The struggle for racial justice in the U.S. has found new strength, tragically impelled by the horrific accounts of the unjustified treatment of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Raychard Brooks leading to their deaths—evidence of the persistent and sustained racism that we deplore in the strongest terms. We are also in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to staggering numbers of infection and death in North America and around the world, while also revealing the gross inequalities and “pre-existing conditions” of poverty, discrimination, and oppression which result in greater vulnerability to the virus.

In this wider context, even as partners, including Palestinian Christians from Kairos Palestine, recognize

anticipated effort by the Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to formally annex significant parts of the West Bank—recognized as occupied Palestinian lands—beginning as early as this month. Israeli de jure annexation of these lands is illegal under international law, but has had the support of the current U.S. Administration as articulated in President Trump’s “Peace to Prosperity” proposal, which we have criticized, along with other policy shifts by this Administration regarding Israel/Palestine since 2017.

Let us be clear: we reiterate our opposition to Israeli annexation of occupied Palestinian lands and have spoken ecumenically against that, calling on the U.S. Congress “to wield its power of the purse and not allow any United States funds provided to Israel to be used for the recognition, facilitation or support of annexation, or for denial of Palestinian rights and violation of international law, including continuing occupation.” We also acknowledge that such Israeli de jure annexation would be devastating to any hopes for peace with justice between Israelis and Palestinians while also an extension of decades of de facto Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands. In addition, we continue to work against Israel’s continued blockade of Gaza and its denial of rights of Palestinian refugees, and are deeply troubled by its 2018 basic law identifying the country as “the nation state of the Jewish people,” which openly discriminates against Israel’s one-fifth Palestinian Christian and Muslim population.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ, with mission engagement in the Middle East of more than 170 years, have been consistent supporters of peace with justice between Israelis and Palestinians through our advocacy, informed by partnership relations, the presence of mission co-



workers, and General Assembly and General Synod policies.

Just over a decade ago, Palestinian Christians and leaders took the bold step of declaring a kairos moment with the issuance of “A Moment of Truth: A Cry of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering.” That document has been seminal for Disciples and UCC members in understanding a Palestinian Christian perspective and in taking appropriate action in support of our siblings there.

Today, we receive with our hearts and souls a new plea called, “Cry for Hope: A Decisive Call for Action,” issued by our partner, Kairos Palestine, and its associated global network, Global Kairos for Justice. This “Cry for Hope” outlines the current context in Israel/Palestine and calls Christians and churches around the world “to engage in a process of study, reflection and confession concerning the historic and systemic deprivation of the rights of the Palestinian people and the use of the Bible by many to justify and support this oppression.” It states very clearly, “We cannot serve God while remaining silent about the oppression of the Palestinians.” The letter continues, challenging the global Christian community to take bold, faithful, and resolute actions “to formally reject the oppression of the Palestinian people and any use of the Bible to justify this injustice,” enumerating seven specific such actions. The Disciples and UCC, as advocates for peace with justice, have engaged several of these already as denominations, and many of our members are involved directly. We confess that we have not done enough to end Palestinian oppression without accountability or to change our countries’ policies that enable Israel to continue to violate international laws with impunity.

We therefore commend to you, as faithful members of our churches and people committed to God’s vision of peace and justice in the world, this new letter, this “Cry for Hope.” We urge you to read and study the “Cry for Hope,” as well as the original Kairos Palestine “Moment of Truth” (2009) document, individually and in your congregations, and discern ways to engage the specific action areas. This may include the calls to:

- Explore both the current realities Palestinians experience and the theologies that have supported their oppression, offering “theologies that prophetically call for an inclusive vision of the land for Israelis and Palestinians, affirming that the creator God is a God of love, mercy and justice.”

- Learn how to support non-violent resistance to “occupation, dispossession, and abrogation of [Palestinians]’ fundamental rights, including supporting the right to use economic measures, advocating with the US government and state governments as appropriate, and exercising responsibility in stewardship of investments and purchases.
- Become involved in interreligious dialogue and coalitions to support peace with justice for Israelis and Palestinians, as well as in all circumstances, including here in North America, and work against racism and discrimination in all their forms, including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim acts and speech.
- “Come and see” the land often called “holy” to visit the places of our faith story, and to encounter our partner churches and organizations while there to learn about the current reality. Global Ministries staff is prepared to assist in making those encounters possible, when travel again is possible.

You may also wish to consider affixing your name as a supporter of this call.

As the authors of the “Cry for Hope” conclude, “we embrace our membership in the community of the broken bread, the church fulfilling its mission to bring the good news of God’s gift of love, mercy, compassion, and abundant life for all.” This embrace means committing to work for peace and justice where they are lacking, and to demonstrate the good news in all that we do.

In Christ,

Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, General Minister and President Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, Associate General Minister President Wider Church Ministries, UCC Co-Executive, Global Ministries

Rev. Dr. Julia Brown Karimu, Division of Overseas Ministries, Disciples Co-Executive, Global Ministries



# Poor People's Campaign

## A NATIONAL CALL for MORAL REVIVAL

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The digital social justice assembly sponsored by the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call to Moral Revival attracted over 2.5 million Facebook viewers this weekend and resulted in nearly 300,000 letters sent to governors and members of Congress to support a newly released, multi-issue justice platform.

These viewer numbers of the digital Mass Poor People's Assembly and Moral March on Washington on Saturday and Sunday don't include MSNBC's broadcast on YouTube; listeners who tuned in on radio; media outlets that broadcast the program from their online platforms or C-SPAN.

The assembly aired twice on Saturday and once on Sunday.

In addition, 300,000 letters were sent to governors and members of Congress, demanding that they support the Poor People's Moral Justice Jubilee Policy Platform, released Saturday.

That platform is a sweeping, transformational response to the needs and demands of poor and low-income people in this country. The platform articulates the campaign's policy and legislative priorities around voting rights, police violence, indigenous rights, immigrant rights, education, welfare, jobs, education, housing, water, war, wealth inequality and more.

"We have been investing in punishing the poor; we must now invest in the welfare of all," the letter reads. "When we lift from the bottom, everybody rises."

The assembly — which was held online rather than in person because of COVID-19— was a cementing of a powerful social justice movement for this country, bringing together people of all races, faiths and sexual orientation to change the government's death-dealing policies to policies of life and to exercise voting power around an agenda based on our deepest moral values.

It focused on the 140 million poor and low-income people in the U.S., or 43% of the country. Some 700 people die each day from poverty, or 250,000 people a year. And those numbers were the reality in the U.S. before the COVID-19 pandemic.

These are people whose votes can change the political calculus of this nation if they cast their ballots. For that to happen, they must hear from politicians who break from the typical narrative where Republicans racialize poverty and Democrats run from the subject.

"Each of you must know that this might be the reason that you were born," Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, said during the assembly. "Now might be the moment when you are called into being. You have waited long for this moment. The ancestors have waited long for this moment. In this fateful hour, your time has finally come."

The Poor People's Campaign centers its demands around the five interlocking injustices of systemic racism, systemic poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy and militarism and a distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism.

"We are gathered today to call for a radical redistribution of political and economic power, a revolution of moral values to demonstrate the power of poor and impacted people banding together, demanding that this country change for the better," Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, a campaign co-chair, said during the program.

The campaign is sponsored by Repairers of the Breach, based in Goldsboro, North Carolina, whose president is Rev. Barber, and the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice in New York City, whose director is Rev. Theoharis.

## ABOUT OUR PRINCIPLES OUR DEMANDS, Executive Summary

*We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States.*

*Preamble to the U.S. Constitution*

*No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

*14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*

*Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?*

*Isaiah 10:1*

From Alaska to Arkansas, the Carolinas to California, Mississippi to Maine, Kansas to Kentucky, the Bronx to the Border, Appalachian hollers to Apache sacred lands, people are coming together to organize their moral outrage against systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, militarism and the war economy and the false narrative of religious nationalism into a powerful moral fusion movement. There are 140 million people who are poor and struggling against these injustices in the richest country in the world. A society sick with these interlocking injustices needs a voice rooted in our

deepest Constitutional and moral values to remind us of who we are and who we must be.

We know that poverty and inequality kill 250,000 people every year in American and it is still not frontpage news. Alongside these unseen deaths, we have seen more than 130,000 deaths from the novel coronavirus. We have also witnessed the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks and untold others at the hands of state violence. For every day that we choose not to address the five interlocking injustices, there is a death measurement.

In 2018, the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival set forth a comprehensive Moral Agenda based on the needs and demands of the 140 million. For years we have been shifting the narrative and building power among the poor to create a compelling moral force for broad and bold systemic change. On June 20, 2020, millions of people tuned into the Mass Poor People's [Digital Assembly and March on Washington](#) to hear the reality facing the 140 million. Hundreds of thousands of people took action and forwarded these moral policy priorities to Congress and their state governors.

We now launch a Moral Policy Agenda to Heal America: The Poor People's [Jubilee Platform](#). This platform proclaims that moral policy is also economically sound policy, because the 140 million are not only the hope of the poor. The least of these, who are, in actuality, most of us, can lead this country out of the pain we have been suffering. The rejected are leading a moral and economic revival to save the heart and soul of this nation.

Forward together, not one step back!



### The Churches Respond to the National Protests Against Racism

The recent protests against racism in our country and around the world may signal a turning point in the struggle of African Americans. Many leaders have said that "this time it feels different." In the last ten years, we have seen similar protests erupt, but soon the pressure for real change fades away. The blatant racial oppression, blacks (and other people of color)

have experienced during the last three years, has energized the struggle, and galvanized the public opinion.



In the US Catholic Bishops response, Archbishop Gomes said: "We should all understand that the protests we are seeing in our cities re-

fect the justified frustration and anger of millions of our brothers and sisters who even today experience humiliation, indignity, and unequal opportunity only because of their race or the color of their skin. It

should not be this way in America. Racism has been tolerated for far too long in our way of life."

For more than twelve years, the communions and organizations in CCT have engaged in a serious dialogue about racism. We have no doubts that these conversations have made a difference in many church leader's understanding of racism and the urgency to act. At the same time, we have heard our African American brothers and sisters say, again and again, that the time of just talking must end. The atrocities committed against African Americans and the level of frustration have reached a point of no return.

Our country must dismantle the social, economic, and political systems that deny people of color of their in-

alienable rights, rights that are enjoyed by white people in our country. The Evangelical Lutheran Church declared in their statement: "As church, together we must work to condemn white supremacy in all forms and recommit ourselves to confront and exorcize the sins of injustice, racism and white supremacy in church and society and within ourselves as individuals and households."

The responsibility of the church in the dismantling of racism is undeniable, including the repentance in its complicity and lukewarm response to the plight of our brothers and sisters.

Rev. Carlos L. Malave  
CCT Executive Director

## ON RACE

Greetings Dear Friends,

As you recall I shared the portion of the 2016 National Convocation Biennial Assembly theme - "Hindsight" in 2016 at Kansas City, MO/KS. It was a very

interesting assembly. I shared this fact: "Focus has always been centered on race -and yet -in truth there is only one race, the human race. The Bible does not speak of such things as color for in the beginning we were all people of color. Search the Word. You won't find any reference to race such as the Fair have dwelt upon today. Is there an ulterior motive in this mind-set? The African American is a beautiful rainbow and the vast majority of those who have spouted superiority have tried, often to their own detriment -to acquire this golden hue; overly sunbathing, using creams, lotions, tanning salons; -what does this mean? What does this say? This is quite a quandary, quite perplexing." I never thought I would hear one of the Fair speak out and utter the same information I shared that day for many of them know this truth and it need be made knowledgeable to all people who have been deceived. The truth need not be hidden any longer. We have got to get pass this color blockage. I have to give accolades to Jimmy Fallen for having this Fair teacher on his show on Monday night, June 1, 2020. She told the whole truth and nothing but the truth -so help her God. In her sharing she shared exactly what I had shared at Kansas City. She said this

"There are no white people on the face of the earth. You might find an Albino but none of us are white." She went on to share that when she was teaching and told the children this in her class -she was fired, ostracized, black-balled and more. She is appalled at the way the government has treated and reacted toward their brother and thinks this mess has gone on long enough. The problem is the majority of us don't know this, don't realize this, and we just continue hurting and being hurt from the lie, and ultimately hurting ourselves and one another the most. We owe it to ourselves and to one another to begin teaching the Bible's truth -just as Christ did. Not with bitterness or disdainfully but

with kindness/balance; but teach we must. We must teach like a beam that is supported freely in the center and has two parts of equal weight suspended from its ends; a counterbalancing weight, force or influence. JESUS is the balance, that beam, which supports that center. We must find it and in finding it we find that center who is JESUS. If we listen we will hear His voice and begin to prepare to go forward -teaching with new understanding.

May you find peace in this message. My heart is too full to continue at this time.

Embrace His Joy,

May Reed, elder



## JULY 4, 2020 AN AFRICAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE



**“So, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8: 36 (NRSV)**

Who would have thought the year 2020 would turn out to be the year it has been? I heard it said, “I want to send this year back, have it cleaned up, and rebooted because it has virus.” We do not have the luxury to send the year

back or turn back the hands of time. We must keep going on. At mid-year, we can look back and see the impact of the COVID-19 on the world and particularly the United States. We, the wealthiest and most resourceful nation, yet we lead the world in cases of infections and deaths. We have seen the sleeping giant for justice awakened by the murder of George Floyd to reinforce the truth that **BLACK LIVES MATTER!** Protests continue across the country calling for an end to systemic and institutional racism. There is a genuine spirit for change and transformation that is alive and active. We must be faithful in these times to serve, because when the marching stops the work does not.

As I contemplate the celebration of America’s Independence Day, I have second thoughts. To get an African American perspective on this year’s holiday, I thought I might consult my predecessor, John R. Foulkes, or church historians Lawrence Burnley or Brenda Cardwell, or even one of our past National Convocation Board presidents. But due to the time constraints of this publication and the summer solstice having already passed, I consulted the man in the mirror. So, I share my thoughts in this article.

The events of 2020 have helped raise the awareness of the nation to an atrocity of a horrible race riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma in June of 1921. It also has served to highlight the observance of Juneteenth, the day in 1865 when the slaves in Texas were freed, two and one-half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Obviously, for me a minister, serving the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I emphasize the importance of our initiative to truly be an Anti-Racist/Pro-Reconciling church.

In my contemplation of this year’s Independence Day celebration, I read the works one of our ancestors, Frederick Douglass, escaped slave, fiery abolitionist and preacher. He was asked to deliver an oration to an august crowd on “What, to the Slave, is the Fourth of July”. This speech was given July 5, 1852, slavery was nationalized, and fugitive slave laws were enforced in the north and the south. Douglass was clear to point out the Star Spangled Banner and American Christianity shared the same spirit of oppression of the slave. He strongly articulated, “For black men there are neither law, justice, humanity nor religion.” This mindset of white supremacy and black inferiority was a part of America’s legislation and America’s religion. He went on to say, “The American church is guilty, when viewed in connection with what it is doing to uphold slavery; but it is superlatively guilty when viewed in connection with its ability to abolish slavery.” Preston Taylor, founder of the National Christian Missionary Convention, sought to end the heresy looming over the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as a segregated church. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his “Letter from the Birmingham Jail”, admonished white preachers and white Christians not to condemn his actions while they sat silent and complicit with the systems that denied civil rights and human rights to African Americans.

I thank God for the circumstances that have brought us to this place. Although they are not the prettiest and most pleasant, these circumstances have created so many perfect storms for resistance, advocacy and change. When the marching stops the work does not. Let us be fully committed to be a model church endeavoring to be Anti-Racist and Pro-Reconciling. Francis Scott Key’s words, “the land of the free and the home of the brave” did not apply to Black people. But Jesus said, “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8: 36). Let us be about the work to expose and dismantle racism in its many forms and manifestations. We can make America and the world a better place to live for our children. I will celebrate July 4, 2020 in the spirit of anticipation and hope of what America may become. I will celebrate with faith in God, hope in Jesus Christ and with the love of the Holy Spirit working in me and through me. May we be the movement for wholeness in this fragmented world? My faith tells me that the best is yet to come.

(Simmons and Thomas, editors; **PREACHING WITH SACRED FIRE**, An Anthology of African Sermons 1750 – to the Present; Frederick Douglass, “What, to the Slave, is the Fourth of July”, p.137-160; W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010.)



## BLACK MINISTRIES CERTIFICATE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN MINISTRY (CAAM)



**“We Interrupt Your Regularly Scheduled Programming .....”**

I guarantee this announcement comes at the most inconvenient time. Growing up, it usually came during a crucial conversation of a favorite show or the last play of the game. Interruptions, by their nature, do not always come when planned. They are true to their definition of being something that causes a stoppage or break in the continuity of an activity or process. Interruptions alter plans, cause you to change directions and adjust. It calls for flexibility and grace with others and ourselves.

The recent multiple pandemics easily fits the definition of interruption in that it has caused a stoppage or break in the continuity of our regular activities and processes. It has altered plans, caused us to change directions and adjust. But the interruptions have birthed opportunities. For example, Disciples Peace Fellowship Peace Interns usually travel during the summer, spending time at camps and other church related events. This year they launched “Passing the Peace” a virtual intergenerational peacemakers training event. Blue Theology Mission Station Produced a Virtual Learning/Serving Event since they could not host their events in person. They were still able to accomplish their five goals: learning, serving, advocating, inspiration and worship.

Necessity is the mother of invention and this season has been an opportunity to be creative and innovative. Although we may not all be gathering in a physical place, we the people are the Church and bring the light and love of Christ into every space.

Blessed to be a blessing to you,  
Rev. Sheila P. Spencer  
Interim President, Disciples Home Missions

Rev. Dr. William Lee serves as Director of African American Clergy Leadership Development and shares information on a new program. The Certificate in African American Ministry (CAAM) provides theological, biblical, spiritual, and leadership training for women and men as pastoral leaders with attention to the twenty-first century African American congregational context. It supports those enrolled in the program to pursue excellence in core areas of ministerial practice. The program is a partnership of Lexington Theological Seminary, The Office of African American Clergy Leadership Development, and the National Convocation. It is funded in part by the Thriving in Ministry Project at LTS with a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.

To accommodate busy schedules, students attend synchronous courses online (via Zoom) as well as four-day, in-person intensive courses\* at Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington, KY, in the summer (these in-person gatherings are dependent upon changing circumstances pertaining to the COVID 19 pandemic). Upon successful completion of all 12 courses, students earn the Certificate in African American Ministry or they may apply them as continuing education (CEU) credits.

The curriculum of the CAAM program addresses sixteen areas of ministerial practice, including: biblical knowledge, church administration and planning, communication, cross cultural and anti-racism experience, ecumenism, teaching and leader development, ethics, evangelism, mission of the Church in the world, pastoral care, preaching, spiritual development, stewardship, theology, and worship.



## PORTLAND AND CHICAGO



Otis Moss III is senior pastor of  
Trinity United Church of  
Christ

The writer James Baldwin stated in 1962, “It is, alas, the truth that to be an American writer today means mounting an unending attack on all that Americans believe themselves to hold sacred.”

It is the truth that to be a person of faith in America today is to recognize that America desires Jesus slogans over morally grounded Jesus-inspired action.

America as a nation stands on the precipice of what Rev. William Barber II refers to as “the third reconstruction,” a moment in history when the zeitgeist of the nation clashes with the myth of our history. The nationwide unrest, witnessed from Maine to California, is part of America’s reckoning with a lie this nation has refused to acknowledge. As a nation, racialized thinking and white supremacy is part of not only our history, but saturates all of our institutions. I will not bore you with historical details, but scholars such as Michelle Alexander, Ibram X. Kendi, Carol Anderson, and Richard Rothstein make the case powerfully that America has a spiritual malady supported by institutions that either aggressively promote these ideals or willfully ignore their reality. Our national reckoning and possible reconstruction rest at the epicenter of this myth many today courageously seek to exorcise from our body politic.

Portland and cities such as Chicago, where I live, work, and serve, offer an additional challenge to people who want to be free of the lie that comes with loving whiteness over ethnicity and power over democracy. One must understand whiteness is a socially constructed identity, created in reaction to Blackness. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is a culturally rooted identity of shared story, music, and usually, good food. One quickly sets up a hierarchy. The other sets a table and tells stories enabling people to struggle to find common chords in the collective human enterprise.

Federal troops being sent to Portland, and possibly Chicago, complicates the movement for Black lives. The case of Portland serves as a map to help us avoid marginalizing Black voices: In a city that is 77 percent white, where a coalition organized and led by Black activists is speaking directly to America’s lie of

equality, we witness the stories Black anguish quieted by those on the Left and the Right along with media commentators. Federal troops in camouflage, without insignia, have engaged white protesters in a manner Black people have screamed about to this nation since the early formation of policing, modeled after southern slave patrols.

White protesters in Portland were given a glimpse of how Black lives do not matter in the face of state-sanctioned violence. As a result, protests swelled in Portland and news coverage increased — not to highlight racial inequity, Black pain, or the racialized deployment of the police, but instead to highlight the horrific federal transgression of constitutional authority. The heightened sensitivity was again connected to America’s historical lie reasserting itself. White citizens were being treated as “three fifths” of a person. The outrage shifted from policy, defunding the police, reparations, courageous conversations on race, repentance, and what does justice look like in America to legitimate constitutional questions that again failed to acknowledge Black suffering. Republicans using the Lee Atwater and Karl Rove handbooks seized upon this moment to speak of “outside agitators” to frame an “alt-right” interpretation of the protests. This strategy is not unlike the propaganda deployed against Martin Luther King Jr. by George Wallace in Alabama. America’s racial lie has an undercurrent that does not believe that “three-fifths semi-citizens” have the intellectual capacity for free agency and must be under some “sinister” influence from the Left.

Again, Black suffering was silenced and white discomfort and pain was lifted up in the process. People of faith, those who claim Jesus, have a moral obligation and spiritual call to resist participation in this complicated social sin. How people of faith answer in this moment will determine the future of the American church. Will believers in Jesus decide to be chaplains for the empire or prophets to the nation?

Chaplains are in a position to advise those in power, but the proximity to power recuses them from the call to resist, rebel, and join revolutionary movements. The prophet, on the other hand, seeks to disrupt power and has a heart that holds the memory of Rachel’s tears, the orphan’s death, and the poor’s exploitation as sacraments for a faithful journey. People of faith, in this moment, must decide: Shall we follow a dark-skinned Palestinian Jew, who cast his lot with those who had their backs against the wall, or will we march with the advisers of Herod, hoping our presence is enough to keep an arrogant Herod from harming all the Hebrew children?

The deployment of federal troops as a Roman legion seeking to possess the streets of Portland and Chicago must be resisted by people of faith, who have been baptized by the radical notions of Jesus who lived, loved, and ministered with and to the disinherited. How we respond to this moment will determine the future of the American church. Shall we be chaplains or prophets? The question is upon us. What shall be your answer to this moment of history?

## BLACK WALK

Hmmm!

\*\*

I took a black walk this morning. I took a black walk through a white neighborhood. When I take black walks, I think black thoughts.

I am conscious of where I've placed my gun, my gun, and my gun. I mean, my phone, my wallet, and my keys. Because Peace Officers have a hard time telling the difference.

I rehearse what I'll say if a concerned resident, or a law enforcement employee has questions about why my black body is walking through their white space.

And I remind myself to make sure the law enforcement employee has his body camera recording. Sometimes it helps if there is video evidence to accompany the hashtag.

There is no way to be stealthy when you take a black walk. White neighborhoods are blanketed by a sophisticated security systems comprised of nosey neighbors, ring doorbell cameras, and white women walking their dogs.

So, I've learned to notice the white world through my periphery. To be aware of the dangers without acknowledging them. There is an art to making white people feel safe. To say "Good Morning" and flash a smile that shows confidence and deference at the same time. To be polite because your life depends on it.

I felt the squad car behind me before I saw it.

It moved deliberately. Not like the other cars mindlessly whizzing past. Its tires inched. Crept. Stalked their way toward me.

I kept walking.

"Don't take your hands out of your pockets," I thought. Or wait, maybe I should? Maybe it's better if my hands are clearly empty. But it's cold outside... maybe it's nothing. Keep walking.

The car rolled past me and made a slow right turn. I glanced quickly but didn't stare. The air is still. My ears tuned out everything but the slight scuff of my sneakers on the sidewalk and the fading sound of those stalking tires.

Almost there.

Suddenly the squad car re-emerged. It was a block ahead of me. It made a quick right turn, continued to the end of the street, and then waited. No more stalking. This was a show of force. This was a roar. This was a reminder that I was trespassing.

I kept walking.

As I approached the corner, the front window began to roll down. The occupant didn't speak. Didn't smile. Just stared. I was being warned.

I crossed the street and the lion trotted off. He had effectively marked his territory. The brave protector had done his job.

I however, couldn't help but wonder what I'd missed during my black walk. It's hard to hear the birds chirping, or to smile at the squirrels playfully darting along the branches when you're on a black walk.

It's easy to miss the promise of a light blue sky, or appreciate the audacity of the red, yellow, and purple daisies declaring their independence from the green grass when your mind is preoccupied with black thoughts.

I took a walk through a beautiful neighborhood this morning. But I missed the whole thing.

Author Unknown



## FROM CYNTHIA'S PEN By Cynthia Hibbler

### “Twas Sunday, Christmas Day”

by Cynthia Hibbler  
2019 (Final edit)

Another rendition of  
the great classic  
“Twas the Night Be-  
fore Christmas” by  
Clement Clark  
Moore, published in  
1823

Twas Sunday, the Twenty-Fifth of December, Christ-  
mas Day,

White snowflakes were sailing in a sky of dark gray.

Not a creature was stirring throughout the house,

Not even a little brown Christmas calendar mouse.

Husband was getting ready to retrieve the church van,

To pick up Tony and Amy as quickly as he can.

The Santa stockings and candy cane trimmings were  
not

On the fireplace mantle with a mini Grandfather clock.

Neither Hallmark ornaments on a DIY ladder Christ-  
mas tree,

Or the aroma of sweet potato pie and *O Come Ye  
Faithful* music to be.

Our adult daughters were asleep in their adult homes,  
in their adult size beds,

Do they remember tossing snowmen wrapping paper  
looking for pink sleds?

Husband's bumpy movements and kiss woke me up  
from a long winter's nap,

Jumping up quickly, I put my *Bring to the King* gift in  
a church envelope. Snap!!!

It was placed in my purse while decaf coffee and a  
breakfast meal was prepared,

For a brief moment, with moist eyes of thanksgiving,  
at a cream wall I stared.

It swelled with grandparents, mom, dad, sister gone,  
joyful Christmas past,

Twenty-Fifth days full of laughter, cracking nuts, and  
molten pine fragrant wax.

Then out on the circular driveway there arose sounds  
of *clip clop clip clop* clatter,

Lifting a blind leaf, looking around I ask “What is that  
noise? What is the matter?”

Through the light snow fall, I saw the announcing ra-  
diant light of a Chosen Star,

The celestial wonder revealed Star Gazers with camels  
that have traveled from afar.

The camels wore majestic cloth and were laden with  
gold, frankincense and myrrh,

A Magi peeked at me through a dining room window  
wearing rare jewels and real fur.

I ran to open the door, he said to me in my colorful  
African ‘kerchief,

“Come with us. Need not worry. Your warm cozy  
house will keep”.

With great anticipation I stepped out on the glistening  
snow covered porch,

I knew something was going to change the heaven and  
earth's course.

Humbly I bow to the kings who represented the na-  
tions

“Come with us on a journey to celebrate the Lord of  
lords, King of kings, birth”

In reply I said “I am not worthy to see a Prime Minis-  
ter, a Queen or a Newborn King,

No proper clothes to wear or a proper gift to give, not  
one acceptable thing”

The heavy moon shed a light of encouragement on me  
and said “Go with them”

I was given an elegant warm robe and mittens with  
white faux fur trim,

Then quickly I grabbed an Amazon box from the door-  
way with a gallant whim.



The long strides of the camels followed the star to  
take us from the cold Indiana morn,  
To Bethlehem, a warmer place where a long awaited,  
spoken of old, baby was born.  
The heavy moon swath a son and his family with tender  
light in a safe dry barn,  
His temporary home with animals did not have  
stringed popcorn or bells to adorn.  
The Wise Men stepped forward to give precious gifts  
to Jesus the newborn King of kings,  
Angels sung heavenly songs as they fluttered pleasant  
air into the barn with their wings.  
Smiling at Jesus, I walked forward to greet him with a  
brown amused cardboard box,  
Inside was a hummingbird feeder, clear sugar water  
and a white finch seed sock.  
His gifts were assembled and hung on a shepherd staff  
next to his bed, a manager,  
Hummingbirds and Yellow Finches came to sip and  
eat without fear or danger.  
They danced around Jesus the Mighty King of Forever,  
the lowly Christ Child,  
The babe's joy was full of spittle and wiggly giggles:  
The Holy One meek and mild.  
The birds swirled around Him from the ceiling to the  
floor in a want to win, competitive race,  
A grin appeared under His rosy cheeks, curly wisps of  
hair waved above his cute round face.  
Jesus' happy swatting arms and waving legs gave way  
to a whimper, an exhausted cry,  
Mary whispered "Sweet Jesus is hungry and he is  
sleepy too. It is time to say goodbye"  
I began to sing a lullaby to her baby, "*Silent Night  
Holy Night*", softly and bright,  
Mounting a camel it whisked me away to my still  
asleep porch blanketed in white.  
Much to my surprise Michele, my neighbor, had given  
me a gorgeous floral Christmas *Posh Pot*,

Filled with evergreen branches and decorations, found  
in prestigious magazines. Well sought.  
Through the door I walked. There were no gold gar-  
land or blinking lights in the house,  
"I have seen the Holy Baby Boy and sang with the  
angelic choir little calendar mouse!"  
Aloud I spoke wearing my familiar frumpy blue ging-  
ham house robe and worn slippers of red,  
A simply African motif 'kerchief was wrapped around  
the burnt red twisty braids on my head.  
*Silent Night Holy Night, round yon virgin Mother and  
Child*, I sang next to the hearth,  
of the earth,  
While splashing water, *Go Tell It on the Mountain...*  
*Ev'rywhere* music was in my lifted heart.  
Festive red and green clothes embraced my body  
humming *Joy to the World, O Holy Night*,  
I sung *The First Noel* gathering my coat, keys and  
purse to attend church. All was just right.  
"Merry Christmas" rung out the Wise Men and the  
helpful heavy moon on that perfect day,  
"Jesus has come to bring joy, peace, forgiveness of  
sin, to wipe every tear and sorrow away"  
"Merry Christmas" I bellowed to everyone as I drove  
to church on that precious Holy morn,  
"And  
I have More Great News! Jesus has come to live in us.  
Jubilance is here! Be not sad or forlorn.  
The Son of God, Savior of the World, is born!"

Citing  
"Twas the Night Before Christmas", Clement Clark  
Moore 1823  
Poetry Foundation 2020  
[www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)

# THE OLDTIMERS' GRAPEVINE

Dear Friend and Reader of the Oldtimers' Grapevine: The board and staff hope that you enjoy reading every edition of our newsletter. It is a labor of love by those who produce it, write for it, and the board that oversees its realization. We are forever grateful for the saints like Dr. William Fox and Oscar Haynes who worked tirelessly to make sure this free publication is available to anyone who desires to receive it. Of course, there is a cost to produce the Grapevine, but ongoing donations from many faithful donors assure the Grapevine is available to all. The board and staff want to give you the opportunity to provide your own support—at whatever level—to make sure this important newsletter continues. Would you please take a moment to consider a gift? And will you please let us know of other ways you might be willing to support the Grapevine? Thank you in advance!

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