



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

June 2020

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

Dear Central District Conference churches . . .

from Doug Luginbill, Central District Conference conference minister

On behalf of CDC leadership, I give thanks for each congregation of CDC. Over the past three months I have witnessed tremendous flexibility, creativity, faithful witness and extremely hard work from pastors and congregations as you have responded to COVID-19. Since the May 25 murder of George Floyd, a second (but always present) virus is being confronted through our communities; systemic racism and all its variant strains.

On June 1, approximately 200 members of the Bluffton, Ohio, community walked in silence for nine minutes (length of time the officer kneeled on Mr. Floyd) to acknowledge and remember George Floyd and the many other Black people who have died over the past years at the hands of police. We prayed. We heard stories of racism experienced in our small community. We were offered resources to read and ways to become more involved in changing our racially divided society. We also experienced a passer-by shout, "All lives matter!" in response to a "Black Lives Matter" poster carried by one of us. I was angry. I felt ineffective. I felt guilty. I felt emboldened. I felt solidarity.

CDC leadership affirms and supports the statements provided by MC USA executive director, **Glen Guyton** and the statement on **Racial Injustice** that reflect similar perspectives offered by other denominational leaders such as **Catholic Archbishop Wilton Gregory** of Washington, DC. As the words "All lives matter" continue to ring in my ears, I appreciated the paragraph in the MC USA statement that answers *Why is it inappropriate and tone deaf to say, "All lives matter"?*

Our CDC theme this year is *Spirit, bless*

our souls with yearning. As a conference of 46 congregations spread across 11 states, I yearn for a united voice condemning racism. I yearn for God's spirit to open our hearts to the ways we participate in and benefit from the injustices and inequalities of systemic racism. I yearn for courage and a humble spirit to welcome transformation as we labor to create anti-racist communities and a more just society. I yearn for God's Spirit to bless us with words and actions that provide healing and hope in our broken and beautiful world. I welcome ways our collective voice and actions as a conference can make a difference both personally and in our nation.

I echo Glen Guyton's words: *We need to engage in more costly peacemaking, rooted in radical discipleship, which seeks to dismantle systems of oppression.* I look to the Palm Sunday story as an invitation to call-out sinful and unjust systems and as a reminder that God's mission of peace and justice must be proclaimed and lived out by all of Jesus' disciples. I have included a short reflection on the meaning of Palm Sunday.

Also, worth much reflection are Martin Luther King, Jr's words: *Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.* May the wisdom, peace and courage of Christ be with each of you today and always.

Doug Luginbill
Conference Minister

See next page for "Donkeys and Stones"

Donkeys and Stones

by Doug Luginbill

Why in the world didn't Jesus sneak silently into Jerusalem, that symbolic city where kings, zealots and religious elites clamored to be relevant and powerful? Why didn't Jesus stay in the obscure villages, doing his good deeds and teaching the peasant crowds? Why didn't Jesus camp out on the Mount of Olives and pray and weep and pray some more?

Why didn't Jesus write a book or endorse a product or start a business? *The Art of Healing, LLC*, JC ben Joseph, CEO

Why did Jesus orchestrate a protest, a political spectacle, a satirical slap-in-the-face of Caesar, Pilot, Herod and every violence-wielding, law-and-order leader throughout history?

Why? Because it is Donkey Time! It is get-on-your-feet and sit-on-your-ass, upside-down kingdom time. No war horses here. No royal carpets or brass trumpets. No security detail or advanced announcement. No tear-gas and flash-bangs to make his way to the temple. Just a prophet with a vision, and a donkey, and a voice.

"Tell the people to shut up!" the nervous leaders announced. Don't make a scene. Don't

draw attention. Don't incite a riot. Don't, just don't, please don't get the authorities involved! We're warning you!

"But then the stones will cry out!"

It's always the stones.

Water from stones, stones turned into pillows and pillars, stones of remembrance, covenant-bearing stones, heart-stones, key-stones and corner-stones, stones dropped from the hands of judges, crumbling temple-stones, rolled-away tombstones, and New Jerusalem gemstones.

Indeed, the stones will cry out because God's Word will not be hidden, not under a stone, not under the foot of violence, not under the roof of a church.

God of donkeys and stones, in this time of turmoil, chaos, hatred, fear and violence, teach us your ways which are not the ways of principalities and powers. Grant us wisdom in the midst of confusion. Teach us courage in the face of opposition. Teach us love in the midst of division. Offer us grace in the midst of guilt. Guide us toward hope in the season of despair. Lead us in the way of Christ, our rock and our redeemer, a sure foundation today and always. Amen.

June 3, 2020

Resources on white privilege and racism

Visit the CDC website for a wide array of resources, organized for **Learning, Worship, Acting Together, and Families and Children.**

mcusacdc.org/white-privilege-racism

Lead us in the way of Christ, our rock and our redeemer, a sure foundation today and always.

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