

To Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Prelate of the Thirteenth Episcopal District, Dr. Susan Leath, Episcopal Supervisor of Missions, Presiding Elder C. Robert Finch, Host Presiding Elder, Presiding Elder Linda Thomas-Martin, Presiding Elder Dr. Dave Adams, Presiding Elder Colleen Gibson, Rev. Errol Thomas, Host Pastor, Conference Component Leaders, Ministers, Laymen and friends of the 146th Session of the West Tennessee Annual Conference,

We greet you in the joy of Jesus, Who has risen, is reigning and shall return to claim the righteous!

Beloved, I address you from the confines of a multiplicity of pandemics. From the sophomoric, narcissistic, racist rants birthed from the insecurity and idiocy of the occupant of the White House; to the diabolical deliberations that emanate from the State House; to the injustice that has landed far too many in the jail house; to the economic and racial disparity that impacts our house, we are in trouble! We find ourselves in an all too familiar place in our nation's young history. We are constantly reminded that the original constitution did not incorporate the well-being of people who did not migrate from European shores. We are once again witnessing in very overt tonality, that Black achievement is too often met with White vengeance.

We also understand that the critical nature of leadership has never been more obvious than it is right now. The perfect poisonous storm that has made George Floyd, Ahmad Arbery and Breonna Taylor household names; the coronavirus that has taken the lives of over 210,000 Americans; the fires in the west that destroy people and property alike; combined with the vitriolic nature of the political landscape; all suggest, that if we ever needed the Lord, we sure do need Him now! Our country is divided, and the prophetic voice is seemingly marginalized by political affiliation, hidden agendas, horrendous hermeneutics and erroneous theology. Time has indeed brought us into a contemporary space; but, the themes of yesterday's Jim and Jane Crow, Black Codes, White Citizens Council, Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy, are very much alive and well, with a friend and proponent who supports them from the highest office in the land.

It is because of our collective pain and identical experiences, that we, the members of the Social Action Committee of the 13<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District, have begun working together to address the common issues of injustice within the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the State of Tennessee. We have examined the 8 Can't Wait police reform platform; galvanized thought around specific legislative objectives; sought out other organizations for partnerships in addressing the issues of our time; as well as engaged in the peaceful protests that keep the attention on our issues, to ensure that they are not lost in the 24 hour news cycle that we live in. As people of faith, one cannot separate the state of the church from the state of the country, for as the church goes, so goes the country. As the church, we are to fortify our identity as the last line of spiritual substance and social justice. As the church, we are the echoes of the prophetic and standard bearers for justice.

While all of this is a very present danger, we are also in the midst of an election cycle, as well as a national census. In lieu of this, we must exercise our greatest tool to enact change, which is our vote. Despite voter suppression efforts, we must reject the notion that voting does not make a difference, and that the census is useless. However, we must not only engage in voter

registration, we must also engage in voter education and voter motivation. Beyond the vote, we must hold those whom we vote into office accountable. We must vote in local elections with the same fervency that we vote in the general elections. Judges, District Attorneys, City Officials and State legislators are critical to the framework of our society, and thus, must reflect the values of the electorate, not just a select few, dedicated to the maintenance of the status quo.

To this end, we suggest the following:

- That we as the church, move forward in the forging of partnerships with other organizations that are involved in the work of social justice and liberation.
- That we motivate our congregations with regard to voting, but also the development of legislative agendas that we keep before elected officials and our respective communities
- We promote voting amongst our congregants and community members in the upcoming election, and in upcoming local elections.
- That we engage elected officials in legislative conversations and processes that lead to change in social, economic and educational policies.
- That all churches develop a social action ministry to be engaged in these issues and keep their respective churches informed and engaged.
- That we engage opportunities for public displays of outrage against the status quo, in peaceful demonstration.
- Adopt a local school to provide tutoring/mentoring and social assistance to families in your geographical radius.

The church remains the center of the local community, whether urban or rural. It remains the source of spiritual and social engagement even while contending with the growing sentiments around the validity and benefits of church affiliation. We understand that multiculturalism is a myth, because being in the same space is not the same as being in the same place. As the remaining and long-standing beacon of hope in our communities, the church must identify with the issues impacting the people who live in the area where we worship. To this end, the church must realize that it is not always the pinnacle of assistance, but rather the catalyst of assistance. Every church needs a resource list to adequately address the needs of its people. We further recommend that all churches in addition to the relationships they have with local schools, also develop connections with the local first responders; the business community; the inter-faith community; the local media; grass root organizations and elected officials who serve their locale. We also encourage the promotion of minority owned businesses and exploration for possibilities of cooperative economics by banking with minority fiscal institutions. In addition, pursue collaborations with other congregations to increase fiscal leverage in our respective communities.

We encourage all churches to begin to reimagine ministry to create a more vocal and visible witness of the liberation ministry of Jesus Christ.

Humbly Submitted, the Social Justice Committee of the West Tennessee Annual Conference

The Reverends Dr. Byron C. Moore, Dr. Janie Dowdy-Dandridge, Linda A. Evans, Perry Herman, Dr. Benita Livingston, David Yancy II, Lay Delegates, Samuel Herring, Aleshyan A. Johnson, Linda Pettigrew, Remell Rogers, Ella M. Standberry and Esther Thornton.