

Not Patiently Waiting

by **M. Linda Jaramillo**
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In the midst of an exciting renaissance of downtown revitalization and economic development, the last few months have been challenging ones in my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. Cleveland is one among many cities in this nation who have been struck by tragic situations involving police shootings of unarmed persons, many of whom are African American. Many of whom are young people with their whole lives before them.

Tensions are high as Cleveland waits for the ruling of Judge John O'Donnell in the case of Cleveland Police Officer Michael Brelo who is charged with manslaughter in the shooting deaths of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams. It is very difficult for the community to wait patiently for a decision that has lasting impact on the quality of relationships and trust in public officials. However, it is even more difficult for the families of Timothy Russell, Malissa Williams, Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, and others to patiently wait. Just as we seek justice and want to renew and rebuild our city, they too want to rebuild their lives in the midst of their sorrow.

So as we impatiently wait, there are some daily protests that quite frankly get most of the media attention. However, as we impatiently wait, there are some amazing coalitions being built. The voices of the masses are being heard in local community meetings, gatherings of business and church leaders, and strategy sessions among public officials. Mayor Frank Jackson has been working with community and faith leaders to ensure the safety and security of residents if city-wide protests develop.

United Church of Christ local, regional, and national leaders are present in those discussions. Several local UCC Pastors, congregational leaders, and national staff are organizing faith response teams to ensure safety and peaceful demonstrations. In response to the Mayor's call, local churches are

stepping up to be a “Safe Haven” for those seeking safety if violence erupts. Just this week, Amistad Chapel United Church of Christ, located right in downtown at our national headquarters, joined the “Safe Haven” movement. We are humbled to be counted among the many community organizations who proudly claim Cleveland as home. For example, Khalid Samad of Peace in the Hood plans to form a rapid response team full of violence interrupters and former gang members to help diffuse a growing situation before it escalates.

Several weeks ago, a letter from the Officers of the United Church of Christ was hand delivered to Mayor Frank Jackson. Here is an excerpt:

Mayor Jackson, you have accomplished many wonderful things as mayor of Cleveland. We, therefore, humbly encourage and implore you, in this your final term of office, to make the issue of police reform one of your greatest legacies. We believe Cleveland can be that great city, a people and a police department who, together, insist on a better way. As Cleveland’s renaissance continues to unfold, we urge and pray that Cleveland will become known as the nation’s leader in restoring justice.

We are part of this great City we call home. We want a peaceful outcome, so our organizing for a nonviolent response to injustice should not be interpreted as patience. We can no longer wait patiently while justice is delayed or denied. We are an Impatient Witness for Justice



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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