



An Open Letter to the United Church of Christ

*I, Paul, and my companions in faith here, send greetings to the Galatian churches. My authority for writing to you does not come from any popular vote of the people, nor does it come through the appointment of some human higher-up. It comes directly from Jesus the Messiah and God who raised him from the dead. I'm God-commissioned. So I greet you with the great words, grace and peace!
(Galatians 1:1-3)*

As leaders of the United Church of Christ, we gathered in Savannah, Georgia, to envision Authorizing Ministry for the Twenty-First Century. We were 140 women and men serving the church as associate conference ministers, conference ministers, national partners, national staff, and elected national officers.

As we gathered in the midst of the Advent Season, our hearts were broken as we heard the news of the miscarriage of justice. We lament when those entrusted to protect us are shielded from accountability.

In the season of the year that is intended to be joy filled, we weep because we live in a culture that tolerates senseless acts of violence that unjustly target certain sectors of our communities. Benjamin Franklin said, "Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are." We are outraged!

As we approach the third Sunday of Advent and light the candle of joy, we are mindful of others whose joy is diminished. We remember those whose lives were extinguished prematurely and unjustly, and those who mourn their loss. We are reminded of our responsibility to abide with them in ways that restore their joy.

On Christmas Eve we lift the Christ candle in the midst of our people proclaiming the birth of the one who is the light that shines in the darkness. The one who calls us to be the light that shines in the darkness of a world still filled with hopelessness, hatred, sorrow and violence.

With arms open and HANDS UP, we welcome the one who brings hope, love, joy, and peace. It is our prayer that the grace given freely by our Savior Jesus Christ is personally yours.

Below is "A Litany for Those Who Are Not Ready for Healing," by Dr. Yolanda Pierce. (Shared with Dr. Pierce's permission.)

A Litany for Those Who Aren't Ready For Healing

By Dr. Yolanda Pierce

One: Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

ALL: Let us not rush to offer a band-aid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

One: Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

ALL: Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss. Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child ... someone's beloved son.

One: Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

ALL: Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice. Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

One: Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those hearts are being torn asunder.

Instead ...

ALL: Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extra judicially every 28 hours. Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

One: Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

ALL: Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease, and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

One: Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.

ALL: Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends.

One: Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase. Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground.

ALL: Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

God, in your mercy ...

ALL: Show me my own complicity in injustice.

Convict me for my indifference.

Forgive me when I have remained silent.

Equip me with a zeal for righteousness.

Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.

Dr. Yolanda Pierce is the Elmer G. Homrighausen Associate Professor of African American Religion and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary and Liaison with the Princeton University Center for African American Studies. She blogs @ Reflections of an Afro-Christian Scholar.