



Race and COVID-19

John Dorhauer
General Minister and President

When the pandemic started escalating in the U.S., I thought without thinking of it through the lens of my privilege. When someone wrote to me and asked why we hadn't commented on the racism inherent in the spread of the virus, my first thought – I am embarrassed to say and yet readily admit – was, “Why would we do that? Viruses don't discriminate.”

That's what a lifetime spent in privilege does. It conditions me to make assumptions that assure me that I will see the world through the lens of privilege.

The first thing I did was check in with my two very trusted, very competent, and very not-so-white-privileged colleagues, Traci Blackmon and Karen Georgia Thompson, both Associate General Ministers in the UCC National Setting. Their honest responses shook me free from that perspective of privilege. Again. Not for the first time, and unfortunately not for the last time.

A virus may not discriminate, but when it enters a system structured to advantage wealthy and white, what happens next is all about privilege.

Access to good health care, hospitals, ventilators, nurses, doctors, medicine, etc. look different from the perspectives created by wealth and whiteness.

Underlying health conditions – which can be the difference between recovery from COVID-19 and dying from it – strike the poor and the black communities in disproportionately high numbers compared to the economically and racially advantaged in America.

Data re revealing the racial impact of this pandemic. In Chicago, a city with a 30% black population, 70% of the deaths from the virus were black. In Milwaukee County, a 26% black population carried 66% of the deaths. In Louisiana it was 32% and 70%. In Michigan 14% and 52%. These numbers go on and on throughout the country. The virus may not discriminate – but put it into a system like ours, where privilege functions to advantage whites over all others, and the results lay bare our rampant racism.

The United Church of Christ has long been an ally in the fight to end racism. Of the many things that are going to change in our world because of COVID-19, our commitments to racial equity must not go by the wayside. Now as much as ever, our vigilance in this effort to build a just world for all must continue.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. John Dorhauer is General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.

LEARN ucc.org/justice

DONATE ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE
WFJ bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.