

To our congregants and to the public:

We, the undersigned members of the Westwood Area Interfaith Clergy Council and the Upper Pascack Valley Clergy Council, are united in our strong plea for justice. “Justice, justice you shall pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20) is our mission as people of faith and as Americans. Yet, we must acknowledge the tragic extent to which our policing and our criminal justice system have themselves been unjust. Our history and *our institutions today* are tainted by systemic racism and implicit bias.

We will not “stand idly by” and witness the spilling of the “blood of our neighbor,” whom God asks us to love as we love ourselves (Leviticus 19:13-18). That passage and many others in the Bible require us to reject any form of oppression or prejudice. The Christian Gospels are likewise full of instructions and inspiration for loving and caring for our neighbors (Mark 12:29-31, Matthew 25). We operate under the conviction that all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27 and *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad related by Muslim). Therefore, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “Race prejudice is a treacherous denial of the existence of God.”

As pastoral caregivers, faith leaders, and disciples of the ancient Prophets, we understand and validate righteous anger. Because of that same background, we oppose violence and promote hope.

Hope is no mere “wish” for something better. Hope is understood by many as a virtue implanted in us by God’s grace. Hope draws out the best in people. The promise of a better future fosters collaboration toward a shared purpose. Hope overcomes fear and inspires us to meet great challenges, in part through taking responsibility for our faults, righting our actions, and following through on our commitments.

People of faith must respond to the killing of George Floyd – and to so many other fatalities, injuries, deprivations, and insults to brothers and sisters of color – with deep mourning, empathy, reflection, soul-searching, and prayer. We must also offer hope and take action in the public sphere. Therefore, we recommend and will take part in the following actions, which we commend to people of all faiths and of no faith:

- **Gather.** Get together with other people, including people who are different from yourself. Taking account of health directives, join with them in peaceful protest, for dialogue and fellowship, to study relevant texts and issues, and/or for prayer. Right now, most get-togethers will be virtual. One way or another, be in the company of others. Look friends, co-workers, neighbors, and new acquaintances in the eye – even if it’s through Skype, Meet, FaceTime, or Zoom. Allow yourself to feel their humanity – and your own.

The Westwood Area Clergy Council is currently planning a gathering on Zoom that will include encouragement from Scripture and teachers, prayers of intercession and lament, breakout groups for deeper discussion, and social action. If you are interested in receiving more information, please contact Rev. Wayne Jones at revwaysr@msn.com.

- **Listen.** It is important to hear the pain of people from all backgrounds and perspectives. We don’t have to – and won’t – agree with our neighbors on every political or policy decision. But we will never heal the many real – and even greater number of false – divisions among us without truly listening.

As clergy, we are committed to having honest and difficult conversations with one another about racial prejudice and racial privilege. We also commit to continually educate ourselves by reading and listening to credible journalists, academicians, theologians, and activists. We encourage our congregants and larger communities to likewise gain new perspectives, information, and wisdom.

· **Give.** As you are able, give of your time and money to help organizations working for justice. Each of the following organizations is supported by at least one, but not necessarily all, of the undersigned clergy. We urge you to explore these and other groups, to find one that fits your values and needs your contributions: The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Black Visions Collective, Catholic Relief Services, Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), The George Floyd Memorial Fund, NAACP, National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC), RFK Human Rights.

· **Appreciate the Good.** Offer support to the police officers, policy makers, activists, and officials who work for justice and the public good. Honor folks who do what is right, call out what is wrong, respond constructively during a crisis, and take concrete steps, with urgency, to ensure a better future. Collaborate with such people, write them notes of encouragement, and amplify their voices.

· **Advocate.** Gathering, listening, giving, and appreciating the good may help us to know – even better than we do now – what changes in law, education, policing, and other aspects of our society may be necessary. Once you feel confident of a helpful next action, use your vote and your voice. Deploy your time and talent to achieve the enormous and holy goal that cannot be postponed: liberty and justice for all.

We hope to see you for our Interfaith Gathering. To learn details and receive the Zoom link, please contact Rev. Wayne Jones at revwaysr@msn.com. In the meantime, may God bless you. Be well and do good!

Cantor Emeritus Dr. Mark Biddelman, Temple Emauel of the Pascack Valley, Woodcliff Lake

Rabbi David Bockman, Temple Beth Sholom of Pascack Valley, Park Ridge

Rev. Raymond Boyd, Park Ridge United Methodist Church, Park Ridge

Rev. Msgr. Joseph Chapel, St. Andrew Roman Catholic Church, Westwood

Rev. Bernard D. Glee, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Westwood

Rabbi Emeritus Gerald Friedman, Temple Beth Sholom of Pascack Valley, Park Ridge

Rev. Rodney Haveman, Parkside Community Church, Westwood

Rev. Wayne M Jones, Westwood United Methodist Church

Rabbi Loren Monosov, Temple Emauel of the Pascack Valley, Woodcliff Lake

The Reverend Brian Neville, Hillsdale United Methodist Church, Hillsdale

Rabbi Dr. Debra Orenstein, Congregation B'nai Israel, Emerson

Pastor Thomas J. Pranschke, Zion Lutheran Church, Westwood

The Rev. Anthony Puca, Jr., Grace Episcopal Church, Westwood and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Hillsdale

Rev. Larissa Romero, Pascack Reformed Church, Park Ridge

Rev. Patrick Seo, Our Lady of Mercy Church, Park Ridge

Cantor Alan H. Sokoloff, Temple Emauel of the Pascack Valley, Woodcliff Lake

Rev. Marc A. Stutzel, Christ Lutheran Church, Woodcliff Lake

Rev. Mark Suriano, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Park Ridge

Rev. JerQuentin Sutton, Lebanon Baptist Church, Westwood, NJ

Interfaith Coordinator Esra Tozan, Peace Islands Institute, Hasbrouck Heights

Rev. Robert T Ulak, Our Lady of Mercy Church, Park Ridge