



Dear Parkside Community UCC,

“Holding tension is our call today. We can hold the tension between crying out for Jacob, and crying out for those who lost businesses and are feeling listless. We can hold the tension between calling for justice and standing against destruction and looting. It is too easy to lump everything and everyone into a this-or-that paradigm. We are devastated at the shooting of Jacob Blake. We are devastated by people with little ties to Kenosha coming in and destroying our city and destroying the work of the nonviolent protesters who were out there all day. We are still more devastated that there is still a debate of if there is a moral wound in the soul of America. We are called to be bridge builders and peace makers. Christ’s call for justice is the call that holds tension and builds an equitable world.” Statement from Ecumenical Partner; Rev. Kevin Beebe, Pastor at Spirit Alive!

The Racial Justice Task Force of the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ denounces the police shooting of Jacob Blake, an unarmed African American, in Kenosha, WI, on August 23, 2020. His name must now be added to the too long list of Black and Brown men, women, boys, girls, trans, and non-gender conforming beloved children of God who have been subjected to state-sanctioned violence.

Seven bullets. This is the number of shots fired at Mr. Blake’s back at close range as he opened his car door. His children watched in terror from the back seat. Amazingly, Mr. Blake survived, but his injuries are life-altering. Amazingly, his children were not injured by flying bullets, but experienced their own life-altering trauma.

Five minutes. This is the time that elapsed between the call the officers received and their shooting of Mr. Blake. Less than five minutes between the time they arrived and the time they took out their weapons and made a choice to pull the trigger multiple times. This is hardly time to assess the situation, hardly time to de-escalate if they felt Mr. Blake was a threat. This is a familiar and too-often deadly pattern in Black and Brown encounters with police. In our culture, in which white supremacist ideology thrives, Black lives are presumed criminal and dangerous.

Three protesters. This is the number who were shot in the days following the police violence. Two died. Video shows that the alleged shooter Kyle Rittenhouse, a white teenager and one of several heavily armed vigilantes that had come to the protest, walked right past the police as protestors shouted that he had just shot several people. Kyle was not detained, but slept in his own bed that night before being arrested, without incident.

And yet, what media coverage and government officials have focused on from the protests has been arson and looting—placing a concern for property over the concern for the violence encountered by Black and Brown human beings. They have pointed the finger for violence at the protestors rather than at the police action that prompted the protests or the militarized response confronting the protestors. They have blamed the protestors rather than armed, white civilians who in one video can be seen having friendly conversation with police officers

before the protesters were shot. When will we instead focus the story on Black and Brown lives continuing to be targets of violence in this country after more than four centuries?

This blatant disregard for Black and Brown life must end! We in the Church must be part of dismantling systems of racial oppression that allowed Jacob Blake's shooting to occur. As the Racial Justice Task Force of the Wisconsin Conference United Church of Christ, we denounce violence against Black bodies and strongly affirm that Black Lives Matter. Black lives are of inherent worth and concern to God. God affirms the life of Jacob Blake and the lives of his children and family, his friends, and his community. So do we. Justice, as an expression of love within God's Beloved Community, is of paramount concern to God. We commit to the work of racial justice as a matter of faith, and as part of our reparations as an institution that is complicit in the violence of white supremacy that maims and kills in body and spirit.

Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." ~Matthew 22:37-40

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