



A Call to Lament, Repent, and Pursue Justice and Unity June 2020

The senseless, brutal death of George Floyd on the streets of Minneapolis has elicited deep sorrow and outrage, resulting in demonstrations and riots across our nation, including Baltimore. Those horrific nine minutes occur after many unjust deaths of people of color, including Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Freddie Gray. We acknowledge that America still needs redemption from her “original sin” of systemic racism. People of color have been oppressed, from manstealing and slavery to Jim Crow laws to institutional post-civil rights racism. Baltimore Antioch Leadership Movement joins with others¹ who reject this injustice. We weep with those who weep and long for justice.

In 2000, while pastoring Faith Christian Fellowship, BALM’s leaders led the congregation in adopting a Unity Declaration.² This document was the fruit of two decades of experience and theological reflection within this racially and culturally diverse congregation in Baltimore.

The following points from the Unity Declaration are especially relevant during this crucial moment:

Our Fundamental Identity

We declare that God our Father, in His great love, has redeemed us by sending His Son Jesus Christ and by His blood united us as people from diverse cultures into one family through the Holy Spirit committing to us the message of reconciliation.³

2020 Implication: The gospel of Jesus Christ remains the only hope for lasting transformation in hearts, communities, and nations. The church must spread this hope not just verbally, but by demonstrating His love for all people. Biblical justice can only be realized as the church leads in living out the love of God for our world.

Repentance and Forgiveness

We acknowledge that great transgressions based on race, gender, class and faith have tragically marked our life together as a human family throughout the history of the world and this nation. While the Church has pursued justice and reconciliation, regrettably it has often participated in this sin through active support or indifference. We join with those believers who confess that true

¹ Southern Baptist declaration <http://www.bpnews.net/54877/southern-baptist-leaders-issue-joint-statement-on-the-death-of-george-floyd>; see also the Statement from the AND Campaign on Racialized Violence in America <https://andcampaign.org/statementonracializedviolence>

² See the Unity Declaration <https://baltimoremovement.org/resources-for-unity>

³ *John 17:20–24; 20:17; Ephesians 2:19–22; Colossians 3:11; Galatians 3:26–29; Ephesians 4:4, 5; Acts 2:5–12; 2 Corinthians 5:19*

reconciliation cannot be realized without a commitment to repentance, forgiveness and the pursuit of justice.⁴

2020 Implication: Despite personal conversions and revivals in our national history, the church has often actively or passively been complicit in disunity and oppression. Attempts at confession, repentance and forgiveness are shallow unless we commit to living together in authentic community across the divides of race, class and culture. Tears are not enough; Jesus demands the fruit of repentance. When black, white, Latino, and Asian believers live, work, pray, play and worship together, this unity testifies to a skeptical world of the power and truth of the gospel.

Justice and Community Development

We declare that the church is called to be the redemptive presence of Christ by proclaiming Good News, which is demonstrated through concrete deeds of mercy and justice. This Good News affirms dignity, cultivates an environment of hope, and restores people to God through Christ and to service in God's kingdom.⁵

2020 Implication: As God's people, we remain committed to modeling the Biblical ethics of the strategies used in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s which emphasized non-violent protest.⁶ God changed hearts and laws through courageous people who demonstrated love for enemies, redemptive suffering, and an appeal to God's moral authority. We believe that this, undergirded with prevailing prayer, can prick the conscience of our nation to live up to her stated ideals.

⁴ Nehemiah 1:4–11; Daniel 9:4–19; Ephesians 4:1–6, 32; Philippians 2:1–11; Acts 6:1–7

⁵ Micah 6:8; Luke 4:18, 19; Acts 6:1–7; Galatians 2:10; James 2:1–9

⁶ *The pledge of nonviolence written by Martin Luther King Jr., and signed by his marchers, 1963*

1. As you prepare to march meditate on the life and teachings of Jesus.
2. Remember the nonviolent movement seeks justice and reconciliation - not victory.
3. Walk and talk in the manner of love; for God is love.
4. Pray daily to be used by God that all men and women might be free.
5. Sacrifice personal wishes that all might be free.
6. Observe with friend and foes the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. Perform regular service for others and the world.
8. Refrain from violence of fist, tongue and heart.
9. Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. Follow the directions of the movement leaders and of the captains on demonstrations.

<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/50-years-birmingham-pledge-nonviolence-still-inspires>