



June 18, 2020

Statement In Support of Racial Justice and Equality in Arlington, VA

Our nation is in the midst of what some are calling another awakening. This national awakening centers around injustices experienced by people of color in this country for centuries. While this awakening has been percolating for years, it organically intensified in response to the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minnesota police officers. As Black pastors in Arlington County, we are calling upon members of the Arlington community to participate in this awakening in some specific ways.

Our congregations unequivocally stand in solidarity with those non-violently protesting for racial justice and equality throughout our nation and world. We believe that Black lives matter, we believe that the lives of people of color matter, and we believe that all lives matter. Unfortunately, the lives of Black people and people of color are undervalued due to systemic racism in our nation, including in Arlington. We invite all members of the Arlington community, especially our Arlington governmental leaders and police department, to commit to make the necessary changes to policies and practices in Arlington to ensure that all lives are treated equally.

No earnest conversation about improving the lives of African Americans in Arlington, or in our Nation, can be had unless and until we all agree that Black lives matter. A sign that such agreement has been reached will be when African Americans, and all persons of color, are fully valued, and our humanity honored, by our leaders and our fellow citizens alike. This means having both the freedom from abuse and discrimination and the protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that is afforded to all others.

In bringing you our concerns, we are following the biblical mandate of God lifted by the prophet Micah. "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8) We believe that the issues of racism, violence, police brutality, and economic and educational disparity are not only moral and social, but also biblical and spiritual. It is incumbent upon our County to work tirelessly to ensure that all its citizens experience equal and just treatment in every facet of their lives.

Calloway United Methodist Church - Dr. DeLishia Davis | Lomax African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church - Dr. Adrian Nelson, II |
Macedonia Baptist Church - Rev. Craig Harcum | Mount Olive Baptist Church - Dr. James Victor, Jr. | Mount Salvation Baptist
Church - Dr. Lee Earl | Mount Zion Baptist Church - Dr. Leonard Smith | St. John's Baptist Church - Dr. John Nicholas, Jr. | Saint
Paul Baptist Church - Rev. Robert Yancey | The Church at Clarendon - Rev. Danielle Bridgeforth | Trinity Episcopal Church - Rev. Kim
Coleman | Wilson Boulevard Christian Church - Dr. Carol Green-Freeman

We believe that power of any kind is given to governmental entities for the benefit of the common good and for all people. However, in our country's history, we have seen, all too often, that power has been used to oppress and abuse Black people and people of color, which has the effect of reinforcing racial disparities. This misuse of power, especially, occurs within police departments across this nation. It is well-established that the rates of African American arrests far exceed the percentage of African Americans within the population and that prison sentences are disproportionately harsh for African Americans. Because of this reality, it is prudent and appropriate for the Arlington Police Department and County government to enhance their exploration of how policies and procedures might be contributing to the disparities that people of color are experiencing today.

To this end, we specifically call upon the Arlington Police Department to examine its own policies and practices as outlined below. For too long, we have endured the constant dehumanization and destruction of Black bodies at the hands of police who are sworn to serve and protect. Too often, police are proven to be unable to intervene in Black communities or with Black people without engaging in lethal or excessive force.

Therefore, as an initial step we are calling for radical and transformative policy reforms that will eradicate the existing threat of police brutality upon minorities, including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Changing use of force policies to ban chokeholds and other strongholds.
2. Requiring police officers to provide warnings before shooting.
3. Providing extensive de-escalation tactic training.
4. Requiring all police officers to annually engage in Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism training.
5. Requiring all police officers to wear body cameras while policing.¹
6. Providing training in comprehensive reporting.
7. Providing thorough background investigations on new hires and returning officers proven to be "bad apples" who tend to transfer from one law enforcement agency to another.
8. Supporting mandatory measures which will require officers engaged in misconduct to be reported to a national database to prevent them from being hired in other jurisdictions.

Finally, we endorse the demands of the Arlington Branch of the NAACP, which are outlined in a June 16, 2020, letter to the Honorable Libby Garvey, Chair, Arlington County Board.

"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."
(Amos 5:24)

Questions may be directed to: Dr. James Victor, Jr. at 703-920-7293.

¹ We acknowledge that as part of the proposed one-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) County Manager Mark Schwartz is including \$1.05 million to begin implementation of a body-worn camera. It is our belief that if the CIP funding is approved in July by the Arlington County Board, the program will be implemented immediately, not delayed until January 2021.