

## Remarks at the Dedication of the “Black Lives Matter” Flag

June 19, 2020

What this flag says is that in a white supremacy culture, we of Community Christian Church and Guardian Angels Catholic Community make the choice to be anti-racist. To confront our own white privilege. To join the struggle for legal equality and cultural equity for all people of color in our society today. Our two communities have been making this journey for a number of years, studying racism and white privilege, learning from folks like Deacon Joan and a representative from Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro. Trying to discern God’s will for us. This flag makes a statement to the world that we stand for racial justice. But it also offers a stern challenge to each one of us, to live into that statement. Today is the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Juneteenth. Many of us know the story of Juneteenth. In brief, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves, on January 1, 1863. But that promise wasn’t realized until June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865 – *two and a half years later* – when U. S. Major General Gordon Granger landed at Galveston, Texas, to order that “all slaves are free” in Texas, and that there would be an “absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves.” They had been free for two and a half years, and most knew of Lincoln’s proclamation – but were denied their freedom even after the end of the war by their plantation masters.(1) And our nation has struggled with this unfulfilled promise ever since. It is one thing to say “Black lives matter.” It is far more difficult to struggle to bring that promise to living reality. It takes confessing our own participation in this nation’s culture of white domination, admitting the white privilege we palefaces unconsciously enjoy, acknowledging the harsh treatment of certain people based solely upon an unnecessary judgment about the value of the color of their skin. That swiftly worked itself into law. Rooted itself in hearts. And formed policies that have for *four hundred years* prevented African Americans from living in certain neighborhoods, access to healthy food, clean air and water, and proper healthcare, so that even this very moment, COVID-19 is killing a higher percentage of African Americans than any others. This flag challenges us to oppose *all* forms of racism, in all levels of society, from all walks of life, toward any person made in the image of God. We say “Black lives matter,” because *God* says so.

When we dedicate this flag, we also dedicate *ourselves* to this unfinished task. It will be a long road, and we will no doubt encounter opposition. It will be a hard journey, for we will examine ourselves and our own participation in the deep racism of our society. In the words of Courtney Martin, we shall learn how to be *accomplices*. She says, “An *ally* will mostly engage in activism by standing with an individual or group in a marginalized community. An *accomplice* will focus more on dismantling the structures that oppress that individual or group — and such work will be directed by the stakeholders in the marginalized group. Simply, ally work focuses on individuals, and accomplice work focuses on the structures of decision-making agency.”(2) Being an accomplice, here’s what we shall do, following insights from Deacon Joan Crawford: we shall first shut our mouths and *listen*, we shall make sure black folks are at the table – include them in the decisions we make that will affect them, and we shall follow their lead – and *show up*.

So we of Community Christian Church, and Guardian Angels Catholic Community, dedicate this flag that proclaims “black lives matter.” And, in this world that devalues black lives, we dedicate *ourselves* to the solemn promise that we shall join the struggle, body, mind, and soul, God helping us, to fulfill the promise of Juneteenth. Amen.

### Notes

(1) “The Hidden History Of Juneteenth,” by Gregory P. Downs, *Talking Points Memo*, 6/18/15; accessed online on 6/19/20 at <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/hidden-history-of-juneteenth>

(2) “Answering White People’s Most Commonly Asked Questions about the Black Lives Matter Movement,” by Courtney Martin, *The Bold Italic*, 6/1/20; accessed online on 6/16/20 at <https://thebolditalic.com/where-do-i-donate-why-is-the-uprising-violent-should-i-go-protest-5cefeac37ef9>