Every one of us lives in a community, society and country that is racist

I spend many hours each day working on my computer, often during this time on zoom meetings. So in the past couple months I have been less interested in watching tv, too much screen time. Because of that, I get my news from the paper, which means at least the next day, if not even later. I did not hear at first of the news from Minneapolis, the news that George Floyd had been killed by a police officer kneeling on his neck, kneeling there for close to 9 minutes as George Floyd cried out that he could not breath, kneeling on his neck as George Floyd stopped asking for breath and became still. Kneeling there as bystanders pleaded with him to stop and instead he simply continued, looking complete at peace with what he was doing. It was a horrific action to see, and we only are seeing it because it was taped, and shared, and now all can see for themselves those long minutes of the killing of George Floyd by a police officer kneeling on his neck.

George Floyd was black, the police officer white. Immediately people started to say that George Floyd had been stopped by the police because he was suspected of a crime, and he had resisted arrest. Immediately people started to imply that what happened to him was his own fault. Not all people of course.  The police officers involved were promptly fired, the officer who killed him has been arrested, and law enforcement around the country have condemned the actions.

What we saw, in the killing of George Floyd, is yet one more example of the killing of black men at the hands of white men, that is so common. One more example of the racism that is embedded in the founding of this country, one more example of one of the original sins of this country. The sin that says that some people are fully human, and some are less, based solely on the color of their skin. The sin of this country that says some are worthy and some are not, based solely on the color of their skin. The sin of this country which says some are allowed to enter and some are not, based solely on the color of their skin. The sin of this land which says that the descendants of immigrants from Northern Europe are privileged over the descendants of all other immigrants. The sin of this country which says that the First Nations of this land have no claim on this land.

When I was a child, on Sunday mornings as I knelt for the general confession I would stubbornly think to myself, “Why do I have to confess, I haven't broken any of the commandments.” That was the faith and understanding of a child, who thought about sin only as my own personal actions, and who failed to see the truth of my actions.

As I grew up in age and understanding I came to understand the reason why our general confession says “we confess,” not “I”. We say “we believe,” “we rejoice,” “we pray”. In our faith we acknowledge, we learn, that we are not simply individuals living autonomous lives, we are part of a community of the whole, responsible to and accountable for the community.

The sin of the community is my sin as well. The first step in repentance is acknowledging that sin. Some who hear this might reject the idea that there is any sin, any responsibility for the acts of others. Some who hear this might think “but I do not act in that way, I am not a racist.” Some who hear this might think “but what about black on black violence,” as if that excuses what has happened.

Every one of us lives in a community, a society, a country, that acts in that way, that is racist. And if you are like me, if your skin is pale and your ancestors lived in Northern Europe, you too are called to look at what is happening and acknowledge the sin of this land, to say “most merciful God, we confess to you...”

Some will see this as only a conflict between the police and African Americans. It is certainly true that you are more likely to be stopped, arrested, jailed if you are black than white. When we say that this is just about how the police act, we ignore the fact that law enforcement is a reflection of our society as a whole.

We cannot simply say that this is a police violence issue and then feel good about ourselves. We are called to look at what type of society brings about these actions and allows them to continue.

When I worship, I kneel. I kneel in prayer. I kneel in humility. I kneel to confess. I kneel to my God. What was the god that the officer was kneeling to as he knelt on the neck of George Floyd until his breath left him? As a follower of Jesus, I claim that there is only one God, and it cannot be the false god of white supremacy, racism, and violence.

Are we willing to work for the day when the killing of black men is considered an aberration and not the norm? Are we willing to speak up against all forms of racial oppression and violence? Are we willing to acknowledge our own complicity and sin in this oppression and violence?

What God do we kneel to? My brothers and sisters and siblings in Christ, let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor. Let us change this country! Amen.

**Gretchen Rehberg - Bishop Episcopal Diocese of Spokane - May 31**

Human Rights Task Force supports peaceful protests, condemns violence

Yesterday thousands of people came out in downtown Spokane to express outrage about the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, at the hands (knee) of a uniformed Milwaukee police officer last week. Mr. Floyd was just the most recent killing captured on video. Others include Tony McDade, Sean Reed, Breonna Taylor, too many to name them all.

This has got to stop. We all want to feel safe where we live, where we shop, where we recreate and where we worship. Too many do not feel safe in one or more of these places!

The multitudes expressed their outrage through showing up in spite of the covid-19 stay at home order and the risk of spreading the disease. They were peaceful yet expressive. One of the most powerful moments was when law enforcement officers took a knee along with protesters. In another instance, protesters intervened to stop aggressive behavior of other participants. These actions were all documented. We express our appreciation for all of those who by their actions were saying that systemic racism and white supremacy must end.

We also condemn those rioters and looters who took advantage of the situation to create violence and destruction. We cannot let these few hijack the very important task at hand which is to understand and dismantle the layers of racism pervasive throughout our society leading to loss of life, as well as inequity in education, employment, housing and criminal justice.

**Spokane County Human Rights Task Force**

 Spokane NAACP sees there is much more work to do to achieve civil rights

The Spokane NAACP has been at the forefront of Civil Rights work in the Pacific Northwest for over 100 years. Through that time, we have led countless campaigns for criminal justice and police reform in this community.

While we are proud of all that has been accomplished thus far, it is clear that there is much more work to do. In this time, we are tasked with coming forward to present a positive, transformative, and bold vision of what justice can look like. Now is the time to fundamentally reimagine how we as a community promote public safety and community wellbeing.

To that end, we, the Spokane Branch of the NAACP, are making the following demands of our elected representatives at the local, state, and federal level.

Develop. We call for a plan to investigate, develop, pilot, and implement alternative evidence-based models and programs that promote public safety.   
   
Demilitarize. We call on our leaders to take steps to demilitarize the local, county, and state law enforcement. This includes developing and implementing a plan to discontinue the acquisition of military-grade equipment and practice of equipping officers conducting non-emergent duties with firearms.  
   
Redirect. Our budgets reflect our priorities. We are calling on the City of Spokane to reduce the amount of funding allocated to law enforcement and direct the savings to departments that directly serve vulnerable populations and communities of color.   
   
Protect. We must protect the autonomy of our Police Ombudsman’s Office and expand their ability to conduct independent investigations.

**Statement from the Spokane NAACP Executive Committee - June 12, 2020**

Inland NW Land Conservancy recognizes a long-overdue conversation has begun

For Inland Northwest Land Conservancy, the events of the past few weeks have catalyzed a long-overdue conversation about how social justice must inform our work of conserving land.  We recognize that the history of land ownership and land conservation in the United States has been burdened with the same legacy of racism and injustice that plague many other systems of power in our country.

We stand firm in condemning systemic violence against black Americans. Our board and staff are committed to doing the hard work of listening, learning, and responding to our diverse community in order to more justly and equitably serve our region now and into the future.

Our mission is “Connecting people to nature by conserving lands and waters essential to life in the Inland Northwest.” This means all people—Including black, indigenous, people of color and other underrepresented groups. We commit to integrating social justice more deeply and intentionally into our conservation work as we continue to strengthen communities and honor lands.

Thank you for standing by us as we embark on this journey.

**Inland Northwest Land Conservancy**