



## **Devote Yourself to Something That can Help**

During the past several weeks, we have been encouraged by our local congregations, Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery, and PC(USA) to get involved in current events especially as they relate to racial justice. Reverend Travis Winckler, pastor of Second Presbyterian (my home church), acknowledged to his congregation that, for many of us, marching in the streets during this time of pandemic is not a

viable option. Frankly, I count myself among those who are hesitant to take to the streets. We realize that our age puts us at higher risk to experience serious outcomes should we contract COVID-19. For others, prevailing health issues necessitate that they refrain from large gatherings. But take heart! “Not everyone is a front-liner, and that’s OK because we need all types of people,” says Andréa Hudson, an activist based in North Carolina. “There are many ways people can help out from their homes, and we need people to do it. We need everyone to show up.” What does that look like? I’d like to offer a few suggestions (in no particular order) on how you might join the protest from home.

### **1. Support Bail Funds**

A bail fund is an organization that collects money for the purpose of posting bail for those in jail on pretrial detention. Bail funds are used for a number of purposes, including freeing protestors who have been arrested or journalists detained in the course of reporting on the events. **The Bail Project Inc.** pays bail for people in need, reuniting families and restoring the presumption of innocence. Because bail is returned at the end of a case, donations to The Bail Project™ National Revolving Bail Fund can be recycled and reused to pay bail two to three times per year, maximizing the impact of every dollar.

### **2. Donate to Organizations on the Ground**

Donating money to organizations that serve to fight injustice and racism allows them to continue serving their missions. Here are a few; there are many others:

- **Black Lives Matter** is working for a world where black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise.
- **Metropolitan Congregations United** puts faith into action by developing leaders who move their congregations, organizations, and communities to change public policy for the common good.

- **The Okra Project** is a grassroots, organizer-led initiative with the goal of fighting food insecurity in the black trans community.
- **Loveland Foundation** is committed to showing up for communities of color in unique and powerful ways with a particular focus on black women and girls.
- **Arch City Defenders** is a holistic legal advocacy organization that combats the criminalization of poverty and state violence, especially in communities of color. ACD's foundation of civil and criminal legal representation, social services, impact litigation, policy and media advocacy, and community collaboration achieves and inspires justice and equitable outcomes for people throughout the St. Louis region and beyond.
- **Action St. Louis** exists to build a future where every Black life can thrive and where our communities are free of oppressive institutions that have caused us harm.

### 3. Create Art

Not everyone is equipped to make avant-garde protest art, but anyone can create something inspired by how they are feeling in the current social environment. Makia Green, a co-organizer for Black Lives Matter DC (who uses *them/they* pronouns), said that they would like to see more people creating art in support of the protests. "Culture is very important in the moment, and we need people making signs and banners that align with what we are trying to change," they said. "You can easily make a Black Lives Matter banner and put it on your balcony or up in your window. You can even make a song or write a poem. Whatever you feel moved to create and make is important."

### 4. Contact Public Officials

Citizen lobbying is a way to voice your views to the elected lawmakers who represent you, and to put pressure on them to make decisions in ways that reflect your views. Emailing, tweeting, and calling your local officials to advocate for nondiscriminatory and antiracist policies, or to demand they take action to stop police brutality, influences policymakers to enact meaningful change. If an issue affects you personally — if you have witnessed the impact of racism in your community, for example — tell the member's staff when you call or write a letter. And remember, written notes still have value. "It sounds outmoded, but it's 100 times the value of an email," said a former political organizer. Be respectful, clear, and specific about why you're writing. If relevant, tell a personal story.

### 5. Vote

Protesting isn't the only way to raise your political voice. Voting is a complementary activity with a similar goal — translating frustrations into political change, said Cliff Albright, the co-founder of the **Black Voters Matter Fund**, which works to boost voter turnout. “These two strategies have to work together. They’ve always worked together.”

For Missouri voters, information on voting can be found **here**. For Illinois voters, voting information is located **here**.

This year, many of us living in Missouri will have the opportunity to vote absentee due to the ongoing pandemic. If you live in Missouri, a citizen initiative to expand Medicaid coverage was certified for the August 4 primary ballot. So, if you want to vote for/against this initiative, you must vote in the August 4 primary!

### **A Final Thought**

The title of my blog was taken from a video recently shared by Jenny and Jed Koball, PC(USA) mission partners in Peru. They recorded an interview with Mama Toya, an 84-year-old environmental activist who has planted 30,000 trees in the hills beyond her home. When asked what advice she has for those of us living during this time of quarantine she said, “Devote yourself to something that can help.” She goes on to say we must find something useful to do with our hands. If we have children, we must share our work with them, and they too will become content. And, we must never stop praying to the God who loves us and protects us. Such sage advice applies equally to the pandemic and the current protests seeking racial justice. If you'd like to watch the interview, it can be found **here**.

Peace,

Barbara Bowyer

2020 Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy Moderator