

**Reflection on an Anabaptist Christian Response to Racial Injustice**  
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**Cornerstone Class Session – via Zoom**  
**Sunday, July 26, 2020**  
**8:30-9:30 am**  
**Neffsville Mennonite Church**

**Introduction**

Two weeks ago I reflected with you on my bicultural life. My bicultural experiences have impacted me in three major ways. First, they have made me appreciate both my Puerto Rican and my North American heritages. Second, I grew up in a rural and poor area of Puerto Rico, and because of this experience, I am attracted to cultures who are in the margin of society. Third, I have been enriched by two cultures ever present in my life. As such, I carry many tools for dealing with a world that sometimes is harsh and unkind. Realizing I have these tools, I don't feel victimized. On the contrary, I'm constantly brainstorming solutions to the most vexing problems of society.

**Societal issues**

What are societal issues we are facing right now, especially those that deal with racial injustice? And how am I thinking about solutions?

I am thinking of three racial justice issues that include the aftermath of George Floyd's death, the removal of confederate statues, and the disparities in the impact of COVID-19 on communities of color.

***The aftermath of George Floyd's death*** highlighted the extensiveness of police brutality in this country. But it also uncovered a deeper issue of Black Americans in this country not feeling safe. What can we do to engage African American communities near us who do not feel safe in our own community as we ourselves feel safe?

For some people, ***the tearing down of confederate statues*** feels like the destruction of history and culture. But isn't the real issue that in this country we need to create a history in a way that communities of color who have historically

enriched this country such as the African American, Hispanic, and Native American communities, can see themselves in a shared history?

We have plenty of evidence that ***COVID-19 has disproportionately affected communities of color***, particularly Black American, Hispanic, and Native American. But isn't one of the deeper causes of the disparities in infections and death linked to pre-existing health vulnerabilities in these communities such as lack of quality health care and a higher proportion of families from these communities living under the poverty line?

### **Resources from our Anabaptist Christian faith**

As Christians within the Anabaptist tradition, we have something to offer in brainstorming solutions to racial injustice.

For example, we emphasize discipleship and following Jesus daily in life. We read in Matthew 16:24: "The Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'" For us, following Jesus daily means that we are going to try to practice Jesus' teachings about loving our neighbors. It's a practical, solution-oriented faith, guided by an ethic of love.

Anabaptists Christians also emphasize Jesus' teaching on peace and nonviolence. In Matthew 5:43-44 Jesus says "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..." This approach gives us tools to be peacemakers and bridgebuilders. We strive to love our enemies. Our faith compels us to reach out to vulnerable communities, which society often treats prejudicially through systemic racism, and sometimes even considers as enemies of our life together in this country.

Anabaptists also practice the "priesthood of all believers." In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter exclaims, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." This means that we invite people to experience God's kingdom on earth. We invite everyone to experience God's transformative healing and salvation. In our faith, no one is left behind from enjoying God's gift of justice and salvation for humankind.

## **Our Anabaptist Christian response to racial injustices**

Given our Jesus-centered, practical, and egalitarian faith, how do we respond to racial injustices today?

How do we engage with African American communities around us who feel unsafe, so that they can experience safety as we feel safe in our own communities? Could we start by joining forces with African American churches like the Brethren in Christ Church in Harrisburg, PA, or maybe closer to home in Lancaster, Crossroads Mennonite Church, or Brightside Baptist Church? And then, should we be discussing with them how law enforcement can be supportive and protect their communities and make them feel safe?

How do we create a shared history in this country so that African American, Hispanic, and Native American communities see themselves in this shared history? Could we join the educational efforts of Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society and its longhouse in Willow Street, and help tell our Lancaster Mennonite history in a way that acknowledges and incorporates Native American history as well?

How do we respond to the reality that Hispanic and African American communities in Lancaster do not enjoy access to quality healthcare as many of us do? For example, is there a way that our congregation could show support for the efforts of the Lancaster Health Center?

**Question for discussion:** What are your thoughts on solutions to racial injustice that our congregation could support?