

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ and all Believers,

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the April 4, 1968 assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in solidarity with the struggle to eradicate the scourge of America's "original sin" of racism, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) and its partners and endorsers, including: Pax Christi, The Franciscan Action Network, The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), The Sisters of St. Francis, The Columban Fathers, and many more, gathered in Washington, D.C. for a historic event to launch its Truth and Racial Justice Initiative.

The gathering, under the title **Awaken Confront Transform (ACT) Now**, took place over three days, from Tuesday, April 3rd to Thursday, Apr. 5th, with the three-fold purpose to:

- ✚ **AWAKEN** ourselves to the truth that racism is ever-present, deeply rooted in American culture, and profoundly damaging to our communities.
- ✚ **CONFRONT** racism, speak truth to ourselves, our communities and institutions, and stand against injustice.
- ✚ **TRANSFORM** the hearts, minds, and behaviors of people and structures that shape society.

We met **Tuesday evening** at Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral. The cornerstone for the Cathedral, at 36th & Mass. Ave., N.W. was laid by President Dwight D. Eisenhower with His Eminence Michael, Archbishop of North and South America, officiating on September 30. 1956. The architectural style is Byzantine, with a beautiful central dome about 80 feet high symbolizing Jesus Christ as head of the Church. The evening began with a very moving *Orthodox Christian Bridegroom Service of Holy Tuesday*. The Orthodox Church uses the Julian calendar to determine their holy days. Orthodox Easter for the year 2018 is celebrated / observed on Sunday, April 8. The name of the Holy Tuesday service is from the figure of the Bridegroom in the parable of the Ten Virgins found in Matthew. The presider was His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Music for the liturgy was provided by the powerful voices of the St. Sophia Cathedral Choir, led by Mr. George Theodoridis.

The Bridegroom Service was followed by "*Then and Now: An Ecumenical Gathering to End Racism*". After listening to audio recordings of Dr. King's "Mountaintop" speech and a reflection given, during the same historical time frame, by Archbishop Iakovos, we heard presentations by Bishop Darin Moore (NCC Chair), Mr. Jim Winkler (NCC General Secretary), Dr. Agnes Aboum (Moderator of the World Council of Churches Central Committee), and Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins (ACT Now Coordinator). The NCC representatives and Dr. Watkins drew correlations between the involvement of clergy then and now; emphasizing how only through honest, forceful, and loving confrontation of the evil of racism, can true transformation of hearts, minds and systems occur. Dr. Aboum, also a member of Anglican Church of Kenya, assured the gathering of the continued support and solidarity of our sisters and brothers in the Motherland.

Wednesday morning's activities began at 6:30a.m. with a gathering on the grounds of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, where members of the NCC led everyone

in prayer. From there, everyone processed in a *Drumbeat for Justice Silent Walk* to the National Mall for the *Rally to End Racism*. On the Mall, Bishop Roy E. Campbell, Jr., Auxiliary Bishop, Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, was among an illustrious group of those greeting the faithful. Master of Ceremonies for the Rally was Julian Deshazier, Senior Pastor, University Church of Chicago, with Emmy-award winning hip hop artist J.Kwest.

Keynote addresses included:

- ❖ ***Confessing The Church's Complicity In Practicing, Promoting And Profiting From White Privilege And Racial Division*** by **Rev. Jim Wallis**, President and Founder, Sojourners & Author, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege and the Bridge to a New America*
- ❖ ***Confronting Racism In Education, Jobs, Health Care And Criminal Justice, Civil, Human And Voting Rights, Immigration, Media And Environmental Justice*** by **Rev. Dr. Jennifer Harvey** Author, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*
- ❖ ***Confronting Racism: Remembering Dr. King and Renewing Our Commitment*** by **Dr. Frederick D. Haynes, III**, Senior Pastor Friendship West Baptist Church (Dallas, TX)
- ❖ ***Tell The Truth To Lead To Transformation*** by **Mr. Deray Mckesson** Author, *"Transforming Systems and Institutions"*

Noted actor / activist Danny Glover also gave a very moving presentation. The addresses were accompanied by the wonderful music ministries of many artist present, including: Yolanda Adams, Marvin Sapp, Robert Miranda, the A.C.T. Now! Mass Choir; and Y'Anna Crawley.

Ben Cohen and **Jerry Greenfield**, Co-Founders, **Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream** related how they rose to prosperity through a system of white privilege, without realizing that they were the beneficiaries of structures designed to favor people of European descent over Black folks. They then rendered a fanciful, but poignant version of how their story might have played out if they were born Black!

Near the end of the day, **Rt. Rev. Vashti Murphy McKenzie**, Presiding Prelate, Tenth Episcopal District African Methodist Episcopal Church, inspired everyone with a very powerful **Call to Action**. She challenged us to never stop working until the day comes when there will be no more need for "hashtags" for victims of racial violence, no more #TrayvonMartin, #TamirRice, #AltonSterling, #PhilandoCastile; no more "hashtag" cities, no more #Ferguson, #Charleston, #Baltimore, #Orlando, #Dallas.

Holding his little toddler son high in the air, Bishop W. Darin Moore ended the day with a very emotional promise to his young progeny that he would never cease to A.C.T. until racism is dead.

Thursday, April 5th was a *Day of Action and Advocacy*. The "Day" began at 8:30 a.m. with a session titled "**Training – Issue Platform Briefing and How to Do Effective Legislative Visits**". The session was held at the **Historic Ebenezer United Methodist**

Church, 400 D St. SE. Attendees were then encouraged to visit the offices of their Congressional Leaders from 11:00a.m.-5:00p.m. Workshops were offered at **St. Mark's Episcopal Church**, 301 A St. SE, from 1:00-2:15/ 2:30-3:45. Each was offered twice to accommodate schedules for legislative visits.

Keynote presentations included:

- ❖ **Moral Framing for Action and Advocacy** - Robin Tanner, Poor People's Campaign
- ❖ **Tools for Disrupting Racism – Internal Conversation for White People** – Nora Leccese, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- ❖ **Mobilizing for Justice-grassroots organizing – LaKesha Womack, Womack Consulting (AMEZ)**

Workshops included:

- ❖ **Voting Rights**- Judith Roberts, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- ❖ **Criminal Justice** – Jose Woss, Friends Committee on National Legislation
- ❖ **Immigration** – Rev. Noel Anderson, Church World Service
- ❖ **Gun Violence Prevention** - Matt Fidel, Religious Action Center for Reformed Judaism
- ❖ **Healthcare (Gun Violence as a Health Emergency)** – Sandy Sorenson, United Church of Christ
- ❖ **Environment Justice** – Shanta Ready Alonso, Creation Justice Ministries
- ❖ **Economic Justice** – Student Loans/payday lending - Faith and Credit Roundtable Center for Responsible Lending
- ❖ **Education** - Tanya Clay House, Clay House Consulting
- ❖ **How to Do Effective Legislative Visits** – Breon Wells, The Daniel Initiative
- ❖ **Legislating Racism - Racism as a Systemic Problem in our Laws** – Lisa Sharon, Harper, Freedom Road
- ❖ **Ecumenical Advocacy Days** - Leslie Copeland-Tune, Ecumenical Advocacy Days
- ❖ **Activism for Young People Ages 12-17** – Aman Tune, Hampton University NAACP

A critical focus on Thursday was the absolute necessity of **Voter Registration**. Please see the voter registration resource developed by the **African Methodist Episcopal Church Social Action Commission** at <http://www.amev-alert.org/>

Phyllis Johnson (St. Joseph, Alexandria, VA) attended the Thursday sessions and provided the details above. In commentary, she wrote “*Racism has infiltrated every aspect of our lives; in our homes, work, government and our churches. I'm glad I went to the workshops. The presenters were outstanding. There was a lot of helpful information to help us on our difficult journey ahead. Now, it's time for all of us to do the work*”.

Pictures of the Ecumenical Service, Rally, and Day of Action and Advocacy were taken by **Mrs. Phyllis Johnson**.

My beloved sisters and brothers, there is a sickness in our country: in too many of our communities; in too many of our police departments; in too many of our political candidates; and in too many of our hearts, that is keeping us from being who God created us to be...and it has to STOP! Moses told his people that the choices they made would determine what kind of life they would make for themselves in their new land. Whichever choices we make as a people carry consequences, which Deuteronomy terms “blessing” and “curse.” History tells us that as long as we chose **not** to live together by the two great commandments: to love God and to “love your neighbor as yourself”, we will perish together as a people under the curse of **unfulfilled promise**.

But ours does not have to be a “terminal illness”. There is a remedy, a cure for our national sickness. In His glorious resurrection, Jesus showed us that, through Him, the impossible is possible. As members of the Risen Body of Christ we have been given **supernatural power** to tear down the unjust socio-economic structures that perpetuate racial and economic injustice; to stem the tide of mass incarceration; to replace the school-to-prison pipeline with one that leads to truly higher education; to bring an end to the need for Black fathers to have “the talk” with their Black sons (and daughters) about how to survive encounters with the police; supernatural power to change the world! Now is an acceptable time: this is an acceptable place; together, we must **Awaken Confront and Transform **Now!****

Your Brother in Christ,

Deacon Al