

Statement on George Floyd

Progressive Religious Coalition

Once again. an unarmed black man who was no threat to anyone was murdered, and once again, it was by a police officer. George Floyd did not deserve to die. But neither did Tamir Rice nor Philando Castile nor David McAtee nor Breonna Taylor nor Sean Reed nor Ahmaud Arbery nor Arianne McCree nor Michael Brown nor Antwon Rose nor literally hundreds of others, names known and unknown, just since WWII. Once again there are demonstrations across the country. Once again some, often from outside the community, used the chaos to burn and loot. Once again too many people focus on the violence and dismiss the legitimate grievances that underlie the protests.

The members of the Progressive Religious Coalition of Augusta stand with the protestors saying no more to “once again.” The aftermath of Floyd’s murder does seem to be different this time. The protests are not just national but have spread across the globe, and they give evidence of being more sustained. The violence has decreased while the moral outrage over Floyd’s murder and by extension the murder of those hundreds of others continues to fuel the protestors.

What is clear is there must be a cultural change and such changes always come from the ground up. Unfortunately, those who benefit from the current system will use their positions and power to oppose that change which means we will just have to work harder and be more persistent in pursuing that change.

That change is not something new or foreign. It is rooted in our founding documents. “All men are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The fourth amendment says “The people have the right to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures” and the fourteenth and nineteenth amendments say that right is extended to everyone regardless of race or sex.

Unfortunately, those rights have never been fully extended to our black citizens. The cultural change we need is a simple one – that all people under the laws of the United States be treated fairly and equally. We don’t have to like everyone nor agree with their beliefs or opinions to insist that they be given all the rights and protections of our laws. For if we make exceptions about who gets treated fairly, then our own expectation to be treated fairly can change with the next election.

This understanding is the basis of the annual interfaith Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration sponsored by the PRC. People of diverse ethnicities and religions come together to celebrate the life of a man who gave his life to that vision of justice and equity for all.

Starting from the ground up means that each of us has the responsibility to act on our historical commitment to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for everyone, no exceptions.

All our religions tell us the same thing: treat everyone with respect and fairness. We must carry that attitude into our workplace, the professional and social organizations to which we belong, our religious institutions, and as we evaluate candidates running for office. Of course, it will sometimes be uncomfortable, but it will be nothing like being discriminated against or even killed because of the color of our skin or the type of headgear we wear.

The change we must have if this country is to endure in the form our founding fathers envisioned and for which thousands have fought and died starts with us and with you. It depends on mutual support as we undertake this task. But it will not happen unless we act now and continually. May we make it so.