

Note: We chose to use music to enter and depart from the space. Beginning with the African American spiritual, *Wade in the Water* and ending with the refrain from *For Everyone Born* by Shirley Erena Murray (GG 769, Glory to God, 2014).

Introduction & Opening Prayer

Thank you for coming. Thank you for reaching out to others in this place. Thank you for wading into the waters so deeply troubled. We come to find, with one another, the strength to join the Holy One in bringing reconciliation and peace.

Please pray with me the prayer that accompanied the statement¹ released by our leadership this week. The response is *Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.*

O God, with heavy hearts we turn to you. Another life taken. Another future robbed. Another young person of color killed. One death that led to injury, violence, and unrest in the days that followed, exposing divisions and systems of injustice. Struggle and confrontation that continues today.

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

Family, friends, loved ones, and neighbors of Michael Brown unable to mourn in peace because their backyards are filled with tear gas, rubber bullets, violence, and military force. Children unable to attend school. A place where the shadows of night bring uncertainty instead of rest. A place that could be our place, too.

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

A time where hands in the air not only mean surrender but solidarity. As differences seek to rule the day, we search for another path, a new way to live in community. Change our hearts and transform them from places that see “otherness” to ones that honor your image in each person. Guide us to use our voices to name the racism still thriving in our midst, striving for systems of accountability that maintain justice for all people. Strengthen us for the difficult, but beautiful, work of dismantling racism and building a community where all are welcomed and honored.

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

There are no excuses. There are no reset buttons. There is just us, your faithful people, seeking ways to bring hope into a time in such desperate need of it. Stir our hearts, free our minds, guide us to follow your way. Help us to push aside our complacency to make room for your Spirit, calling us forward from this place. Make us instruments of your peace.

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

We come together after the fact. We come to sit with the discomfort of realities not often given voice in polite society. We see. We hear. We sob. We resolve to do better. Thirteen days ago a young man died. And in the wake, a nation is talking and taking sides. This is not the place for debates.

And the people say, Amen.

¹ Prayer that was included in the statement released on August 19, 2014 by Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Ruling Elder Heath K. Rada, Moderator of the 221st General Assembly (2014), Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia, Vice Moderator of the 221st General Assembly (2014), and Ruling Elder Linda Bryant Valentine, Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency - <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2014/8/19/pcusa-leaders-call-calm-and-prayer-ferguson-crisis/>

As we wrote in the introduction to this time together, we hope to bring your experiences and wisdom to dialogue together and if we can to turn to proposing actions, for us individually, as a workplace, as a Church.

We will talk with one another for a little while and then we will turn our attention to exploring possible action steps we can take with one another. Sera and I will help you keep track of time.

We encourage the use of **Mutual Invitation**. The ground rules are simple – one person speaks at a time and instead of formulating responses, we agree to listen for understanding. When the speaker completes their thought, they invite another to add to the conversation. Each new invitation may be responded to in three ways:

1. Adding to the conversation
2. Pass, for now (asking that another invitation come)
3. Pass (I do not want to add anything)

When you have shared your response, you must invite another. This is true even if you choose options 2 or 3. I encourage you to not go in a discernible order – instead invite out of curiosity and lean into what each of you shares. Do not interrupt with questions or respond in argument. Accept the offering each one brings. Conversation continues until all have spoken, before someone is invited again.

We have framed a few questions – they are a starting point. If you have a need to propose another to your group, do so. The group will determine which question they wish to respond to...

As the prayer asks us – **We come together after the fact. We come to sit with the discomfort of realities not often given voice in polite society.** – let us sit in this discomfort. It is a creative place that can move us on, out of complacency if we let it.

Please pay attention to how you are feeling and if you can where it is felt in your body. Be kind to yourself and others. If it helps, draw a deep breath, breathing in compassion for yourself (hold it) and as you release it, breathe out compassion for others. May we see Christ in each other and respond accordingly.

Those who are here are the right people. We have what we need to respond in love.

Questions

Where are you finding yourself in the stories that have emerged since August 9th? How does the killing of Michael Brown affect you? Your circles of friends?

We are learning again about the deep racial and economic divides in our midst. Where do we need to be? How do we need to be?

Where can the church make a difference?

We will record action steps on the newsprint, and all will have an opportunity to vote for their top two action steps.

**Invite people to form groups of 5 or 6. Discuss these questions for ~20 minutes. Return to the larger circle seating to discuss concrete action items.*

Suggestions

**Suggestions for action-items will be taken “pop-corn style.” Start by giving examples to jump-start the discussion. Some examples include:*

- Invite congregations to this conversation
- Have a theological and biblical basis for our actions
- Fine-tune our message, so it speaks passionately and accurately to the situation
- Train and equip congregations in responding to crisis situations
- Have a confessional dimension (i.e. internal reflection) to our work

**Write down suggestions on the newspaper. After the closing prayer, invite people to vote their top two action items by placing a sticker next to them.*

Closing Prayer

Prayers for the Days Ahead²

Let us pray

that Jesus’ love will comfort those in Ferguson, Missouri, who feel anger and sorrow.

that healing comes to all persons mourning the loss of someone who tragically died by gun violence.

that God will assist the legal system to hear the truth in all cases involving injustice, without biased ears and predetermined agendas based on bigotry and racial domination.

that we in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be sensitized to the daily violence that permeates our society and do something about it in our efforts to build community across the lines that divide us.

that we will be the instruments that end bigotry and hatred, challenging the false construction of race in our nation and world, so that we can see one another with hearts of love and not simply skin color.

that the Church will lead us with courage into a new day with the guidance of the Holy Spirit

that we will come to understand that love wins and God is in charge of this world - not us.

Amen

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² Written by the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II (Director, Office of Public Witness, PCUSA). This prayer appeared in the statement on the killing of African American Boys and Men, released on August 21, 2014 - <http://officeofpublicwitness.blogspot.com/2014/08/j-herbert-nelson-on-killing-of-african.html>