

A Personal Statement of Conscience from Pastor Kurt Helmcke

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24)

To the congregation of North Creek Presbyterian Church and our neighbors in the community:

The life God breathes into us is precious. Seeing a video in which an African American man dies as his life’s breath is forced out of him under the excessive force of four police officers is utterly traumatic and grieves the Creator who gave each of us life. It is deeply disturbing and worthy of outrage. What happened to George Floyd, and to Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery in recent weeks (and countless names before them), is unjust and inhumane, and we must demand change.

As much as this act was sickening, the situation is made even more horrible by the lack of a swift response of justice upon the perpetrator by those under oath to protect and serve the community. I am in agreement with Pierce County Sheriff Paul Pastor – a man who I believe speaks of the noble profession of police as public servants like few others – who is on record saying that the offending officer’s knee to the neck beyond the point of responsiveness in the victim is a clear case of the use of excessive force, and the lack of intervention by the other three officers a clear violation of ethical responsibility. I call upon law enforcement not to delay in enforcing just laws, even when it means arresting one of their own. The silence of the law enforcement community and reticence to make public condemnation in cases like this is no longer acceptable.

I believe this is a time for resolute and peaceful protest. I affirm the right of assembly and free speech for all who see this as a moment of conscience, even as I recognize the important role that police officers serve as keepers of the peace when people gather to exert these rights. While I do not affirm the actions of those who are rioting and looting, I do affirm their humanity; I call upon them to join peaceful protests for positive change. Rioting is wrong because it puts the safety of innocent people at risk. Looting is not only wrong but misguided, diverting the attention and the passions of all involved - the looters, the police, and the viewing public - from the crucial issue of justice.

In accordance with the wisdom of biblical prophets like Amos and the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must keep our eyes on the goal of a just society, with fair and humane treatment of all citizens regardless of the color of their skin as the norm. I stand with those who stand up for victims of police brutality. I stand as a sinner who needs to repent of racism and as a white man who acknowledges my part in larger systems of racism. Our current social turmoil reveals a deep, unresolved racial divide in our society that we all need to come to terms with. As I continue to discern God’s direction for my response as a pastor and community leader, here are two resolutions:

1. As much as it is possible, I will seek to reestablish our congregation’s historic relationship with the predominantly African American congregation of Greater Trinity Church in South Everett. Through this relationship I will seek to renew interracial dialogue and friendship, starting at the place where it was always most powerfully felt – among the men of the church – and continuing as the Lord leads.
2. I will lead a study of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” This was suggested by our denomination a few years ago and encouraged by evangelical leaders of the Fellowship of Presbyterians, of whom NCPC is a part. I had begun preparing to help the congregation engage this historic statement of Christian social conscience, but other pressing topics and issues muscled it out of the way. No more distractions. I am compelled by the Spirit of Jesus to lead this study, and in so doing offer myself to the process of being shaped into a witness for the peace and justice of the Reign of God.

Together in Christ,

Pastor Kurt Helmcke
May 31, 2020