



The River of Life Christian Church, Inc.

Official Statement from the Office of the Pastor and Executive Board of The River of Life Christian Church Speaking Out Against Prejudicial Treatment of Black and Brown Bodies

July 9, 2016

While reeling from the shooting death of Alton Sterling by a Baton Rouge, Louisiana police officer, the black community at-large was dealt a double blow when Philando Castile was killed just hours later by a police officer in Minnesota. These shooting deaths, point to the growing number of African-American men and women who have lost their lives at the hands of those who are sworn to protect and serve. Even more, it underscores the racial tensions that lie beneath the surface of this country which threatens to divide these United States even further. Igniting protests and outrage in cities throughout the country, we are challenged to attend to the deaths of these two young men (and countless others) at the hands of police officers while acknowledging the loss of five police officers in Dallas, Texas during a peaceful protest on Thursday night. America stands at the crossroads with respect to violence, race and gun control. As such, we contend our commitment as follows of Jesus Christ to reclaiming dignity for all, particularly African Americans.

We could no longer be silent to the violence ignited in cities throughout this country on account of policing practices, systemic racism, injustice and gun control. Historically, there has existed within these United States a concerted effort to subjugate particular groups of people because of their race or ethnicity. The impact of such malicious intents has led to considerable internalized oppression among those within minority communities whose voices are silenced or unheard. History bears witness to America's heinous treatment of minority groups with African-Americans seemingly bearing the brunt of injustice. Our sordid American history has framed black men as brut, bestial, sub-human, hyper sexual and aggressive. Centuries of propaganda supporting these erroneous claims have led to less-than stellar attitudinal behaviors and treatment of the same. Misperceptions of the black body has led to heightened exploitation and objectification of the black female body. America's historical gross mishandling of those who have been created in the image and likeness of God, is in part, the root cause of today's unrest. As a result, America stands on the edge of unprecedented violence as those who seek liberation from Pharaoh's rule break the chains of their own bondage. What we are witnessing is the enslaved overthrowing their oppressor and the systems that forward oppression.



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Yet, we decry retaliatory violence. In fact, we seek peaceful protests, diplomatic discussions, and action that will support liberty and justice for all. While we acknowledge that our weakened morality has heaped upon each succeeding generation has led to widespread violence and a devaluing of human life, we contend that life is still precious and a gift from God. It is true that while we have worked towards coexisting, we have neglected the necessity of providing avenues of healing for both the oppressed and oppressor. Therefore, we champion the cause of Jesus Christ who went about reclaiming the dignity of human life for both rich and poor. We continue in his ministerial vision to topple every institution, religious, political or otherwise, that threatens to divide or subjugate this country and its citizens on the lines of religion, gender, race or sexual orientation, or political affiliations. We condemn violence against any community. We stand with every church, organization and institution that believes in and forwards the sanctity of human life and the necessity of ending all violence, particularly violence against minority communities. While our rallying cry remains black lives matter, we acknowledge the sacredness of all life forms. Indeed, the vindictive intents of the snipers in Dallas, Texas do not represent our African-American community at-large. While in the past we have been disappointed by non-indictments of police officers in similar incidents we deplore rogue and vigilante acts such as this.

Therefore, we invite churches in every denomination and peoples of all religious traditions to stand with Baton Rouge, Minneapolis, and Dallas for a more reconciled America. We call for preaching and teaching that reclaims the dignity of the human life and body, particular the black body. Join us in pooling our resources and power to address and eradicate systematic oppression, forward peace and shift attitudinal behaviors to preserve life. We call for continued prayers for those impacted by the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile and countless others whose names escaped the media. We ask continued prayers for the officers and police departments actively involved in each incident. We demand all state and municipal authorities to cooperate with and support the ongoing Justice Department Investigation, and if facts bear out, file necessary charges. Also, as facts determine, that the police involved in the shooting of Alton and Philando be prosecuted to the furthest extent of the law. We call for a review of policing practices to ensure compliance with the Justice



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Department. We urge local officials to address and clearly spell out their commitment to justice reform, undoing racial profiling, and use of excessive force.

Until these things become our reality, we will continue in the tradition of our savior Jesus Christ and prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Mahatma Ghandi, Harriet Tubman and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. After all, what God requires of us is what was required of old, that we act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with our God. Even so, Come Lord Jesus.

Reverend Dawrell Rich
Lead Pastor