



Grace Lutheran Church  
46 Woodland Street  
Hartford, CT 06105



### Our Staff and Council Leadership

The Rev. Rick Kremer, Pastor  
rickkremer@aol.com  
Nilda Bolorin, Parish Administrator  
officeatgrace@sbcglobal.net  
Dorothea Glatte, Lay Minister  
Lloyd Smith, Lay Minister  
Louisa Barton-Duguay, Religious Worker  
Artist in Residence for Outreach

Barbara Ruhe, President  
Barbara Calogero, Secretary  
Dale Eberhardt, Treasurer  
Janice Potter, Financial Assistant  
Dale Eberhardt, Organist  
Walter Scott, Sexton

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# GRACE NOTES

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH, 46 WOODLAND STREET, HARTFORD, CT 06105 860-527-7792

June 2020

## IMAGINE

For more than a week, it is hard to think of much good. Not only were we consumed with whether “opening” was good or bad, or whether even more people would succumb following the more than 100,000 who had already perished, or what about housing, jobs, those in poverty, and the potential collapse of our financial system. The even Greater Depression could be right ahead. Another Zoom service, as we longed to reach out to each other, give a hug or two, rip off our masks and laugh fully, feeling the joy of life and the beauty all around us (since cars, trucks and planes were far less in our skies, and on our roads) at least one thing seemed to be going right... almost as an accident.

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Yet then the horror of a white policeman (and three of his sidekicks) once again struck a black man, this time in Minneapolis. It was what can only be described as a cold-blooded murder. The video was instantly in the hands of virtually everyone in the United States and by now has spread throughout the world. But this, so blatant, so racist, so hateful and outrageous was the last straw... because there are no more. Enough is enough. Murder

by those paid to protect us is among the most difficult of grievances to accept.

For a person of color in America... beginning with Native Americans, then the horrors of slavery, and the related poverty, control, power, injustice and raw hell has been a part of their American Dream since this land was discovered by Europeans. In fact, it was the engine of financial growth, wealth, power and injustice. Never in human history had a person's color and race determined their life circumstances and future like slavery in the United States of America. Never.

George Floyd was murdered like hundreds and thousands of people of color over the history of this country, including the ugly and life-destroying trips from Africa on so-called slave ships.

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## Pastor's Message - I'm Reliving the Past with my Friends that Remain

It's much like a flashback. Back in the 60's there were killings, violence, demonstrations, government dishonesty, unnecessary war, that broke out in city streets. There were the Black Panthers, now there is Black Lives Matter. As I was doing ICU (Intergroup Cooperation and Understanding) experience-based workshops on racism, we found ourselves confronting years of racism now manifesting in the business world as people of color and women were just beginning to take their place in it.

When the demonstrations got scary and dangerous, when there were guns and other violence my friend Fred and I talked together about how we would have to decide which side we were on. We believed that we would have to choose in our life times, which side we were on.

Way back then I and we decided. We were on the same side. We cared about, respected, honored, loved and treated all people as being equal as being children of God as having been created in His image. We new that at some point we would have to decide. And, maybe this is it.



So many people that I knew from that time were with us. We marched at the Nixon anti-inaugural, and were almost arrested by the police in DC. I remember the Viet Nam protests, the killing of the college kids who dared to show disagreement. The Chicago riots during the Democratic Convention. Those who lost their lives. Those who were condemned further to poverty, poor education, red-lining, and separation.

In this issue we are discussing the things that we don't talk about enough as we hope it would go away. I remember how we took a group of youth to President Obama's first inaugural, the one that literally did have millions of people at it. I remember our 5:00 am walk to the Lincoln Memorial and reading the words of the Gettysburg Address out loud. The children we took with us had never been to Washington, DC and they may never have gone there in their lives.

We were hopeful. The wasteland of Iraq, the hundreds of thousands of deaths, our economy stripped to the bone by a war not budgeted and banker and real estate greed like it had never been seen in our lifetimes. And, who gets to fix it. The first Black President in history who was told on his first day in office "we need to make sure he never gets another term." And, he did. And, he did get us out of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression and he had to clean up wars, fight for health care for people who didn't have it, and even had his right to appoint a Supreme Court Justice taken from him.

So, where is the hope today. I say, listen to the words of those from the past: Ben Cohen (of Ben & Jerry's), George Will, conservative Republican, Barack Obama, the President that cleaned up much of what was present when he took office.

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## What Have People Been Saying

(continued from page 10)

This anger must be fueled to create lasting systemic change." Rich Stolz, Executive Director

"I have watched this week's unfolding events, angry and appalled." In his interview in The Atlantic he said, "Trump was actively trying to divide the nation. Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people – does not even pretend to try. Instead, he tries to divide us." "We can unite without him, drawing on the strengths inherent in our civil society. This will not be easy, as the past few days have shown, but we owe it to our fellow citizens; to past generations that bled to defend our promise; and to our children." Marine Corps General, former Secretary of Defense, Jim Mattis

"Since leaving the White House in 1981, Rosalynn and I have strived to advance human rights in countries around the world. In this quest we have seen that silence can be as deadly as violence. People of power, privilege and moral conscience must stand up and say "no more" to a racially discriminatory police and justice system, immoral economic disparities between whites and blacks and government actions that undermine our unified democracy. We are responsible for creating a world of peace and equality for ourselves and future generations." Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States

"As a baptized child of God, I am called to love one another as God has loved me. One of the ways I express that love for one another is in speaking out against racism and white supremacy. As St. Paul writes, "When one part of us is wounded we are all wounded." It is in that spirit I stand with those who are targets of racist ideologies and actions. In our country today there is more rhetoric of hostility than I can recall in my lifetime. Candidly, it frightens me. If I were a person of color, it would terrify me. While the wanton destruction and harm of property and persons cannot be condoned, the protesting of conditions of oppression, brutality and murder is appropriate." Bishop Jim Hazelwood, New England Synod, ELCA

Former President Barack Obama threw his support behind the efforts of peaceful protestors demanding police reforms during his first on-camera remarks since a wave of protests over the killing of George Floyd convulsed the country and upended the 2020 election. Mr. Obama offering a strikingly more upbeat assessment of protestors than President Trump and White House officials, said he believed only a "tiny" percentage had acted violently. "For those who have been talking about protest, just remember that this country was founded on protest – it is called the American Revolution." Every step of progress in thei country, every expansion of freedom, every expression of our deepest ideals have been won through efforts that made the status quo uncomfortable. And we should all be thankful for folks who are willing, in a peaceful way, to be out there making a difference."

Barack Obama, former President of the United States

"When I stood at that spot, the reason it got to me is that George Floyd's story has been the story of black folks. Because ever since 401 years ago, the reason we could never be who we wanted and dreamed of being is you kept your knee on our neck. What happened to Floyd happens every day in this country, in education, health services, and in every area of American life. It's time to stand up in George's name and say get your knee off our necks!"

Reverend Al Sharpton, civil rights leader, TV News host, and pastor

What Have People Been Saying

People throughout the world of consequence have been commenting on events in the United States. You may have heard many of this, but we raise them up once again, in case you have- n't. These people are responsible citizens of our world and their opinions mean something.

“There are no sidelines from which to watch. I want you to know that we at Jewish Voices for Peace are bringing all we can in our commitment to defend Black lives in this historic time. Black people are rising up in an incredible wave of resistance all over the U.S., responding to 400 years of brutal, deadly oppression. Police are responding with an eruption of violent repression all across the U.S. All organizations that care about justice have a responsibility to join the fight, and we are no exception.” Stefanie Fox, Executive Director

The ACLU: “The right to protest is a fundamental human right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment... The Police’s main job in a protest is to protect your right to protest and de-escalate any threat of violence. Over this past weekend alone, we’ve seen a number of potentially unlawful actions on the part of law enforcement and other government entities during these protests – targeting journalists and endangering all of our free speech rights.”

“The unraveling presidency began with the Crybaby-in-Chief banding his spoon on his highchair tray to protest a photograph – a *photograph* – showing that his inauguration crowd the day before had been smaller than the one four years previous. Since then, this weak person’s idea of a strong person, this chest-pounding advertisement of his own gnawing insecurities, the low-rent Lear raging on his Twitter- heath has proven that the phrase malignant buffoon is not an oxymoron.” George Will, conservative republican leader

“OneAmerica” stands with black communities. Justice must be met for the murderers of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Manuel Ellis and every other life lost due to police brutality. Our hearts ache and anger has cemented itself more deeply within many of our immigrant communities. But we cannot be stagnant. We must rise up.

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June 2020 Birthdays & Anniversaries

Franklin Darby Jr.06/02

Annelies Koenig06/04

Judith Butterworth-Kremer06/04

David Gould06/06

Sasha Williams06/06

Trenton Merrill06/17

Jody Wynn Rodiger06/19

Anne Reiher06/20

Barbara Calogero06/24

James Danielson06/26

May you all be blessed as you celebrate your special days!

Happy Anniversary Mark & Cynthia Jones 03-Jun

Did we miss your birthday or anniversary? Contact the office, 860-527-7792 or email [officeatgrace@sbcglobal.net](mailto:officeatgrace@sbcglobal.net) to update our records.

IMAGINE

(continued from page 1)

This particular killing was “oiled” by a deceitful, liar who has orchestrated the greatest separation of peoples in this country since the Civil War all in a blood thirsty march to more wealth and power, steam rolling over anyone who was to get in his way.

Protestors and demonstrations some violent some peaceful exploded in some 182 cities in this country and have now been erupting in cities all over the world. The message, enough. Black Lives Matter.

Yesterday I was working in the basement of my home, trying to organize things going back three moves and about 25 years. Going through boxes of memories, remembering the good times and bad, the times of joy and those of disappointment. Wondering if we would ever see fun times again.

I imagined that the phone rang. It was upstairs. I climbed the stairs and answered it just in case. The person on the other line said, “Pastor, did you see what happened?” Having been working in the basement for hours, I said, “No. What are you talking about?” The voice said you had to have seen that it was a couple of hours ago. They blocked i84 in both directions. The protestors. They stopped all of the traffic. My mind wandered. How many had been hurt? Was anyone seriously injured? We were at the beginning of a Hartford demonstration Saturday afternoon. We knew that it had gotten bigger on Sunday. We watched flames on television from cities all over the country. We prayed and cried.



The person on the phone was insistent. “No, man. It was one of the most powerful things I’ve ever seen in my life. I was in tears. You didn’t see it? What’s the matter with you? Where have you been?” I’d felt I had truly disappointed the guy and asked what had happened?



I explained what I was doing and why I hadn’t seen or heard about it. After all what we do all day is follow the media and the horrors it describes. And, they really are truly horrors. The caller said, “No man, this was not bad, it was beautiful. I think it’s on Channel 3. It’s incredible... oh, it isn’t on anymore, it just switched to someplace else.”

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## IMAGINE

The story that he told me was not quite believable, but I listened to his description and gradually realized why he was so deeply moved and thankful. He said that when the protestors blocked the two directions of this major highway, there were police there, State and City. And after some confusion and yelling and screaming someone, somehow, suggested, that it was time for prayer. Even as traffic was backing up for miles. I said, "What???????"



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This was not an imagined call, it was real. Mike Gagnon a member of our church is the one that told me about it. I have now seen pictures, interviews, and read descriptions of what happened on the bridge where the highway comes close together and people were lying on the ground, standing, yelling and expressing their anger, their demand for another way, the imagining of a world that was different. A world where racism was no more, a place where people saw each other as God would have us see them. We are all neighbors, we all have gifts, we are all loved.

The policemen shook hands with the protestors, some kneeled holding hands, there was a hopefulness to it. Not that everything had been wiped clean but that there was a realization on the part of all present that something fundamental had to change, and they were trying to do that right there on the highway. Did I mention that the mayor was there, too. He and the police believed that the community had a right to be angry and had good reason to cry, "enough". And, people from all different backgrounds gathered on a bridge on a very, busy highway and everything just stopped.



If it wasn't for the fact that Mike was relaying the story, I'm not sure I would have believed it. I do know that churches, community groups, the police and the power structure are working to make things better. The police engaged with youth, clergy and with the community, the mayor responding to crises with sincerity and intention. Imagine. Just imagine.

It is time to make America great for the first time... not again. Let's make America Great for All People, from all places, at all economic and education levels with everyone having a way to contribute and share in the joys of a country founded with ideals that we haven't lived for decades.

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## Collaborative Center for Justice Statement on the Uprisings (continued from page 8)

It costs \$62,000 per year to imprison a person, while the median salary for a Licensed Practicing Nurse is \$57,000. The ongoing fears of COVID-19 overwhelming our healthcare capacity demonstrate the folly of this distribution of resources.

2. **Demilitarize the police.** Military hardware should never be wielded against civilians; therefore, police departments should have none. As human beings, the tools we use to do our jobs shape our culture. It is not surprising, then, that police forces outfitted as if they were soldiers on a battlefield will act as if they are soldiers on a battlefield. Since the late 1970s, Special Weapons and Tactics Units (SWAT) have increased 15,000%. There are approximately 100 SWAT raids per day in the United States.

3. **Ban no-knock warrants.** These warrants permit police departments to conduct unannounced, often pre-dawn tactical raids on civilian homes to serve warrants. They have increased in prevalence from 1,500 annually in the 1980s to 45,000 in 2010. On March 13, 2020 Breonna Taylor was killed in her bed by a Kentucky SWAT unit in such a raid, and her boyfriend was arrested for shooting at police officers he thought were intruders. Authorities had the wrong address.



4. **No cops in schools.** "School Resource Officers" (SRO) respond to school disciplinary matters with arrest and criminal detention. Children of color and disabled children are over-policed as issues that would otherwise be resolved by parents, educators, and counselors get referred to the police. Schools with SROs reported 5 times as many arrests of children as schools without them. In CT, Black schoolgirls are 6 – 7X more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts. This does not promote human development, but it does increase the likelihood of future dropping out and future legal trouble. Connecticut school districts should follow Minneapolis' June 2, 2020 decision to end its contract with the police. They should also take immediate steps to increase the school-based mental health supports for students by hiring additional school social workers and other mental health clinicians. Such supports are shown not only to address the needs of students, but also to play an important role in increasing overall school safety.

### A Prayer for the Power of the Spirit among the People of God

*God of all power and love, we give thanks for your unfailing presence  
and the hope you provide in times of uncertainty and loss.  
Send your Holy Spirit to enkindle in us your holy fire.  
Revive us to live as Christ's body in the world:*



*a people who pray, worship, learn, break bread, share life, heal neighbors, bear good news, seek justice, rest and grow in the Spirit.  
Wherever and however we gather, unite us in common prayer and send us in common mission, that we and the whole creation might be restored and renewed,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Collaborative Center for Justice - On the Uprisings –** Dwayne David Paul, Director

Once again, our nation is embroiled in protests for racial justice. Another cohort of young Black people is waking up to the realization that their lives can be snuffed out in an encounter with law enforcement or white, self-styled vigilantes. Their basic human rights are often not even acknowledged, never mind protected. More Black parents are having “the talk” with their Black children, young and old. The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and George Floyd recall a grief that never went away. Yet this moment is bigger than any one case.

The high-profile police killings of recent years have not happened in a vacuum. They have occurred alongside Black disenfranchisement, continued economic insecurity in Black communities after the Great Recession, and most recently, the ongoing pandemic that has disproportionately claimed Black lives. The common good demands equitable participation in civic life and the fruits of development among people. It also requires that basic human and civil rights be protected for all people. That is a state of affairs yet unseen within our borders.

When the nationwide unrest subsides, it will not constitute a return to peace. As Sister Patricia Chappell reminds us, peace demands justice. The conditions in which Black life is organized in this country are unjust. George Floyd was detained for allegedly attempting to purchase cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill amidst widespread economic devastation. We are reminded that poverty is yet another great predictor of outcomes in the criminal legal system.

It is easy to say that a person should not be put to death for stealing less than \$20, but we need the moral courage to admit that he should not be arrested and imprisoned for it either. Liberty ought to be more precious than that. George Floyd’s death highlights that Black and Brown communities, that poor communities, are over-policed and under-resourced. It is the lesson taught to all Black people in the United States from the days of slavery, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Era, to this very moment: Any offense, real or imagined, no matter how petty, can result in a death sentence.

The mass precarity that existed even before the pandemic was a moral and political failure. That failure is on display as we continue to see striking levels of economic inequality persist in our state. That failure is on display in our streets as we see expensive military-grade equipment deployed in cities still awaiting the COVID-19 testing and contact tracing infrastructure. Our priorities do not support human flourishing.

Catholic Social Teaching, indeed, the whole of the Gospel, grounds the Collaborative Center for Justice’s political analysis. Our belief that every person is made in the image of God leads us to defend the dignity and humanity of our Black brothers and sisters. It is this tradition that calls us to love all, but to prioritize the poor and the vulnerable. It is this tradition that compels us to declare that Black lives matter.

In that spirit, here are four policy demands that could promote just outcomes:

1. **Significantly defund the criminal legal system.** Redistribute those funds to agencies that directly promote human flourishing. In 2012, the United States spent \$265 billion – or \$845 per person – on policing, prosecution, and incarceration. We choose to over-invest in the institutions that keep some communities at the margins and under-invest in those that promote life. Here in Connecticut, there are twice as many prison beds as there are hospital beds.

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**IMAGINE**

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Imagine if we did. Imagine if this whole mess was a way for God to show us just where our selfishness, our separation, and our greed will lead. We need to heal ourselves, but we need to start by healing others. Then we can pay attention to God’s creation, to our brothers and sisters all over the world and we can try to live as our triune God has taught us for thousands of years.

Imagine. Let’s start on that bridge and that highway and remember what happened there... even if just for a brief time. It happened and it means something. Imagine.



My name is Ben

I am a 69 year old white American man.  
I can do, say, and be all of these things without fear (as can my family).  
I stand with my black brothers and sisters.  
I will not be killed.  
I can go jogging (#AmaudArbery).  
I can relax in the comfort of my own home (#BothemSean and #AtatianaJefferson).  
I can ask for help after being in a car crash (#JonathanFerrell and #RenishaMcBride).  
I can have a cellphone (#StephonClark).  
I can leave a party to get to safety (#JordanEdwards).  
I can play loud music (#JordanDavis).  
I can sell CD's (#AltonSterling).  
I can sleep (#AiyanaJones).  
I can walk from the corner store (#MikeBrown).  
I can play cops and robbers (#TamirRice).  
I can go to church (#Charleston9).  
I can walk home with Skittles (#TrayvonMartin).  
I can hold a hair brush while leaving my own bachelor party (#SeanBell).  
I can party on New Years (#OscarGrant).  
I can get a normal traffic ticket (#SandraBland).  
I can lawfully carry a weapon (#PhilandoCastile).  
I can break down on a public road with car problems (#CoreyJones).  
I can shop at Walmart (#JohnCrawford).  
I can have a disabled vehicle (#TerrenceCrutcher).  
I can read a book in my own car (#KeithScott).  
I can be a 10yr old walking with our grandfather (#CliffordGlover).  
I can decorate for a party (#ClaudeReese).  
I can ask a cop a question (#RandyEvans).  
I can cash a check in peace (#YvonneSmallwood).  
I can take out my wallet (#AmadouDiallo).  
I can run (#WalterScott).  
I can breathe (#EricGarner).  
I can live (#FreddieGray).  
This is reality.  
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Change the first two lines to your name and your identity and share with as many people as you can.  
Silence kills.  
Ben Cohen (co-founder of Ben & Jerry's)



Pastor's Message - I'm Reliving the Past with my Friends that Remain

(continued from page 2)

And, he showed us the kind of person and family that represented every single person in this country, and while not perfect, he was among the best. I say that as an Independent who has voted for people on both sides of the aisle.

I'm just an aging pastor. My words don't hold more weight than anyone else and they shouldn't. I just hope you see in this issue some thoughtful discussion of the issues of this day and time spoken with people who have tried to make this country better. No this isn't a "secular" issue, because what I most deeply wonder is what is God saying to us now. The hundreds on that bridge, blocking both sides of a major highway, lying on the ground and then embracing each other in prayer and recognition of how much we need each other, all of us, says so much. I know what you have heard about those moments and they may not be as my report suggests... but Mike and I look through the same set of glasses. We know we are all children of God. We are all equal in every way and are due respect, care and love.

This June issue is dedicated to loving each other like we have never done in our lives.



Photo by Brad Horrigan | bhorrigan@courant.com



Photograph by Mark Mirko | mmirko@courant.com