

CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN
(DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)
GEORGIA
God's Beloved Community



May 12, 2020

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An Open Letter

The Christian Church in Georgia is a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United States and Canada. In Georgia, we are a community of 52 congregations that celebrate God's love, faith, diversity, welcome, and a commitment to care for all. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. Our congregations are in neighborhoods throughout the state of Georgia in rural, urban, suburban, and inner-city areas. Across our state, we are familiar with profound and beautiful differences, and we affirm and value community. Besides our faith in Christ, what we have in common is that we align our voices with the call of justice. Too often, silence takes precedent under the assumption that things will take care of themselves. Well, this time, we will not be among the silent.

We are grieved and saddened by the killing of Ahmaud Arbery. At the time of his death, Mr. Arbery was simply taking a Sunday afternoon jog in a community not far from his home. As a citizen of the United States, he had the right and freedom to jog wherever the road took him on a public street. However, on February 23, 2020, he ran through the neighborhood of Gregory McMichael and Travis McMichael. They confronted him without cause, brandishing deadly force, unlawfully attempted to detain him, and killed him. The McMichaels claimed that Mr. Arbery had committed a crime. Armed with a shotgun and a handgun, they say they intended to make a citizen arrest, though they had no knowledge of any felony needed to justify that. They further claim that while they were making a citizen arrest, Travis McMichael feared for his life and shot Mr. Arbery. We cannot be silent!

At the time of his death, the record has no account of Mr. Arbery committing a crime. He was not carrying anything on his person exhibiting criminal intent; there was no reason to believe that he was in the neighborhood to do anyone harm. Yet, while on a Sunday afternoon jog, he was apparently murdered. The only reported suspicious activity in the neighborhood was from a questionable 911 call from the McMichaels themselves.

Initially, there were no arrests, no publicly revealed investigation, and no objective handling of the case on the local level. An investigation ensued only in response to public outcry. What are we to make of a system that seems to have so little regard for the life of a young Black man, his family, and the citizens of Brunswick, GA?

We, the undersigned clergy, are deeply concerned that it took the public release of a video capturing the incident that resulted in Mr. Arbery's death, for the arrest of the McMichaels to take place. However, that footage was already in possession of the authorities. We are outraged and appalled by the lack of a timely investigation and the apparent biases that took the lead in this case. Vigilante justice and its tragic outcome is a painful reminder of our Jim Crow legacy. We cannot be silent!

We demand a thorough, transparent, and unbiased investigation of the Glynn County Police Department and all entities that participated in the initial inquiry of this case. We demand that The Federal Bureau of Investigation be the lead investigators in the case. We demand justice for Ahmaud Arbery and his family! No amount of adjudication will bring Mr. Arbery back to his family. Therefore, we demand accountability and prosecution against those who took his life.

We acknowledge that Georgia is one of four states that does not have legislation that adds a greater penalty to hate crimes against people based on their race, religion, gender, disability, or sexual orientation. We demand that Georgia enacts a Hate Crime Law to protect our citizens from violence perpetrated by hate.

This killing and the delayed response of the justice system sends the wrong signal to young Black men in Georgia. Imagine the outcry if young white men were subject to violence for merely jogging on public streets! Our African American youth have yet another reminder that their lives are temporary, undervalued, and in constant danger. Justice demands that we expect better from our society and our legal system!

Our prayer is that the systems of racism and racial profiling so clearly embedded in our culture and society be resolutely undone. Through the tragedy of the lost life of Ahmaud Arbery, may we all be forced to examine our hearts for prejudice and our civil lives for ways prejudice has infected our mechanisms of justice and the rule of law. As followers of the gospel of good news of Christ's love for all people - we cannot, and we will not be silent!

Standing together for justice,