

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Faith communities call for racial justice: A Jewish reflection

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**Note from Douglas Kindschi, director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute:** Faith communities from Minneapolis to Washington to the Vatican have joined the chorus responding to the recent protests with calls for racial justice. Evangelical responses in Minneapolis included helping in the cleanup efforts. In Washington, D.C., conservative churches led a march supporting Black Lives Matter, and Sen. Mitt Romney joined the effort. Pope Francis denounced what he called "the sin of racism" while referring to the killing of George Floyd. He addressed all Catholics saying, "We cannot close our eyes to any form of racism or exclusion, while pretending to defend the sacredness of every human life." The Islamic Society of North America unequivocally condemned the "horrific death of George Floyd," and its president, Dr. Sayyid Syeed said, "Incidents like this go against the very fabric of our nation and the ideals we hold so dear."

Other faith communities representing Bahai, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist traditions have likewise condemned the murder of George Floyd and called for action to end racism. In today's Insight, Allison Egrin, from the Kaufman Interfaith Institute staff, relates a recent online discussion sponsored by the Coalition for Black and Jewish Unity:



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On June 4, I attended a conference call hosted by the black-Jewish coalition sponsored by the Detroit chapters of Jewish Community Relations Council and American Jewish Committee called "Dear White People, Please Listen." The meeting, enabled with the computer app Zoom, was hosted by several clergy, bishops and pastors who were there to call on the local Jewish community to stand by them and support them in dismantling systemic racism. All the leaders spoke about their thoughts and struggles and gave tangible ideas and actions for what we can do to support them. As a white, Jewish female from metro Detroit, my first takeaway was the importance of mutualism in activism. Activism is a two-way street.

On the Zoom call, many of the speakers reminded us that the black community shows up for the Jewish community when it comes to lobbying for Israel and for standing up against anti-Semitism. I have seen this with my own eyes at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee convention in D.C. I have seen the large turnout of black evangelicals there to lobby and stand with us to support our country and to fight against anti-Semitism.

As a Jewish woman, I have felt the deep support of other communities in the face of anti-Semitism. After listening to the call, I am asking myself and my Jewish community, what are we doing when those same supporters need us to stand up with them? Furthermore, what can our broader interfaith community be doing? It is not just on the Jewish community to support our black brothers and sisters, but also on every community with the means or privilege to do so.

It is not enough to just simply "stand by" and physically be there for the black community. Ibram X. Kendi, author of "How to Be an Antiracist," once said, "What's the problem with being 'not racist'? It is a claim that signifies neutrality: 'I am not a racist, but neither am I aggressively against racism.' But there is no neutrality in the racism struggle. The oppo-



Hundreds gathered to march through downtown Grand Rapids in solidarity with Black Lives Matter on Saturday.

Anntaninna Biondo, MLive.com

site of 'racist' isn't 'not racist.' It is 'antiracist.'"

It is not enough to not be racist anymore. We must work toward becoming antiracist, to fight this long overdue fight. A 400-plus-year-old fight, to be specific. Our neighbors, our friends, our brothers and sisters deserve this from us. You can't have activism without action.

The speakers on our Zoom call gave clear actionable steps for us to take, and while they may not seem quick or easy, they are vital in getting this work done.

Challenging our friends and family members when they say something that they shouldn't, or calling out people when they need to be called out, is not a comfortable thing. At Kaufman, we also say the worst thing you can say during a conversation is "agree to disagree" because it ends the conversation. In order to really be an ally and advocate, we cannot be satisfied with agreeing to disagree. The conversations must not end.

Challenge your friends. Have those uncomfortable conversations at the dinner table. That is how we can all be antiracist in our day-to-day lives. Consider who you are voting for. Where do they stand when it comes to racism? Is your company voicing an opinion right now or sitting idly by? Are the companies you are purchasing from doing the same?

Most importantly, I encourage you to listen. Listen to your peers. Listen to what they need and are asking of you. I

encourage you to learn. Seek out literature, television, movies and documentaries that elevate black narratives.

This work is not easy and it cannot be done alone. We all must come together to dismantle our own internal biases, fight for change, educate the younger generations to continue this work and to not stop until every life is treated equally. This work is a constant and it's a must. It cannot end when the news cycles change to another topic. This must be an active, persistent and conscious effort. It isn't enough to go to one protest, make one donation or have one uncomfortable conversation. We must continue until the work is no longer needed.

If you ask yourself the same thing I did — "Why me? What position am I in to be sharing my thoughts?" — consider this from the Jewish proverb, Pirkei Avot 1:14: "If not now, when? If not me, who?" Hillel the Elder says this as a call to action in Bible times. Now, it cannot be more relevant in regard to racism in America. It is on all of us to speak out against racism, to fight for equality, and to fight for our black brothers and sisters in these urgent times.

All lives can't matter until Black Lives Matter. We must never fail to act when we witness bigotry, racial discrimination or the devaluing of human lives. Most importantly, we must get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

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