

New York Yearly Meeting

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 13, 2016

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QUAKERS SPEAK OUT ABOUT THE KILLINGS IN MINNEAPOLIS, BATON ROUGE, AND DALLAS

*An open letter to Communities of Faith in the United States encouraging peaceful
discourse, nonviolent action, and unity*

[July 13, 2016; New York, NY]

*My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground
because my people are destroyed. . . . Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?*
Lamentations 2:11-13 (New International Version)

Each time there is another death, it shatters the numbness that all is well in our land.

Each time another innocent black man is killed by our police, it shatters the illusion that all is well, that we as a society do not live in the middle of an ongoing nightmare.

Each time another black man is killed by police, we respond with vigils, with prayer, with statements, giving vent to our grief. But with each killing, the next seems more inevitable. So, far too often, we do what we have done far too many times before, grieving the violence and injustice while feeling helpless to prevent either.

This is not enough. Grief upon grief upon grief all too easily can turn to impotent rage.

This is not just our police. And this is not one enraged and violent man seeking vengeance. This is all of us. We are all of us embroiled in a system that has to change. How many more will have to die before we have the courage to change it? How many must die before we do something other than grieve, make memorials, hold vigils, or rage?

We, the people of New York Yearly Meeting, grieve the loss of so many black men, now at least 144* in this year alone, killed by our police. We lift up the names of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, remembering these most recent deaths among too, too many deaths. And we decry the killing of our police in Dallas— Lorne Ahrens, Michael Krol, Michael J. Smith, Brent Thompson, and Patrick Zamarripa—and the hatred that lies behind that violence. We reject the simplistic answers that lead to blame, hatred, and violence. We seek instead to better understand and to root out the seeds of racism within ourselves, to understand how we are all, every one of us, a part of the problem of systemic structural racism in this country, of which the killing of black men and the Dallas police are the most painful and immediate symptoms.

We invite all people of faith to join us in looking in the mirror that these killings hold up before us. We invite all people of faith to grieve, and to mourn, not just these killings, but for our broken, torn, and bleeding country. And then we invite people of faith to seek repentance for our collective sin of structural racism, to learn its roots in each of our lives, and to pray for Divine guidance as to how to act to heal our broken nation.

We know that violence begets more violence, creating a never-ending cycle of violence and retribution. We reject all justifications for violence, and support all those who strive non-violently for social justice, and who exercise non-violent freedom of speech and civil disobedience. We know the power of love to heal our brokenness. In this time of heightening tensions, we call on all people of faith to actively promote peaceful discourse, non-violent responses to violence, unity in our communities, justice, and peace.

We urge all people of faith to work constructively with their local police, promoting justice and encouraging the retraining of our police so that lethal force is not the first recourse to a perceived threat.

May God have mercy on us.

Lucinda Antrim, Clerk
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* *The Guardian*, July 13, 2016: <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database>.

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