

Over the past month, PYWA has been learning from, praying for, and deeply loving all the people who have been making their voices heard, taking a stand, and sharing the truth that Black Lives Matter. We have been grieving the unnecessary loss of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others. We are grateful for the courage of black leaders inside and outside our church communities who have been and are continuing to help the church and our communities see the racist behaviors and ways of thinking that have permeated even our best-intended thoughts and actions. We are listening, we are learning, we trust that with the help of God, we will do better.

Stated Clerk of the PCUSA, J. Herbert Nelson, said in response to the death of George Floyd and the protests that have happened across the country, “We can no longer hide behind not being controversial.” PYWA genuinely agrees with this statement. We believe that this is a time when Youth Ministry must play a crucial role in helping young people gain a faithful understanding of God’s creation of all people. Equally, this is a time for young people to understand the call of faithful people to say “no” to the discrimination (both overt and covert) of black and brown people in our communities, our country, and our world. We know the tendency is to shy away from these sorts of conversations and learnings with our young people because it seems “controversial,” but what the courage of the people protesting in the streets has reminded us is that this is a controversial topic only because we have made it controversial. It is a conversation that we should be having with our young people because it is a faithful, loving, and hopeful conversation that we, that they can do something about today.

PYWA is committing ourselves to support Youth Workers around the country as they lead needed conversations, actions, and interactions around racism, social justice, abuse of power, and how systems both intentionally and unintentionally oppress people of color in our country. We hope that Youth Workers will take this moment in time to examine how they address these issues with the young people in their churches and communities. PYWA pledges to be there to support them as they work to share the Gospel. PYWA also promises to examine what we do and what we can do better to be inclusive and understanding—at the same time breaking down the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that perpetuate the false thinking and damaging actions that have led to the systematic oppression of black people in the world of Youth Ministry. We will be working throughout the summer to collect and share resources to help educate ourselves and the youth in our ministry. We hope these resources will empower youth workers to facilitate change in the self, the church, and the world.

We are thankful for the grace given to us always to be working to be better. We are grateful for the brave voices of black leaders who insist that we listen and learn. We are thankful for a God who never abandons us and is always working for us as we desperately try to create heaven on earth, even when heaven feels like a distant dream. We are thankful that we get to model all of that for young people who will make this world a better place and help us to see God more fully and honestly.

We will do better. We have to do better. Youth Workers will help lead the church into this time of change. PYWA will support you in your work just as we do our own work.

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