



## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN MAINE

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Over the past weekend, as white supremacists marched and rioted in Charlottesville, VA - spouting hate about Jews, blacks, immigrants, and just about anyone who is not white and male - the world once again witnessed America's unresolved conflicts over race. To many longtime participants in the quest for racial justice, it felt as if we had lost 50 years, that we hadn't advanced much since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

It goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway: white supremacy has no place in the Christian Church or American culture. Race is an artificial concept to begin with, a mere adaptive biological response to the environment, not a distinguishing characteristic of human beings. Culture is real; race is not. Moreover, white supremacy is a corruption of our fundamental beliefs as Christians: that all of us are created in the image of God and, in Christ, are brothers and sisters. Our equality before God allows for no exceptions. Our equal dignity as human beings requires, as a minimum, our mutual respect.

I was certified as an anti-racism trainer by The Episcopal Church in the mid-1980s and was involved, as many of you were, in decades of anti-racism training. In the Diocese of Rochester, I believe we held perhaps two to three events a year for a long time. I think the training helped with individual awareness and understanding, but it failed to get at the underlying causes: the ways political and economic systems favor white people and, perhaps, more substantially, the notion that there isn't enough to go around and that everything people of color get means a loss for white people. In the back of all our minds is the fear that there won't be enough for me.

Bishops United Against Gun Violence, of which I am a member, offered a conference this past spring called "Unholy Trinity: The Intersection of Racism, Poverty and Gun Violence." The conference explored the ways these three blights interact and reinforce one another. The victims of gun violence are often poor. The perpetrators of gun violence are also often poor - people on the outs seeking to keep others from getting what they believe is theirs. The end of this nightmare will require the

dismantling of racist systems, the development of moral courage by white folks, attention to education and employment for all people, investment in housing and healthcare, and strict licensing and training for the use of handguns.

There will be no quick fix here, just a long, slow journey by people of faith and good will. White supremacy, white racism, is a cultural problem that white people must solve. It's about how a white-dominated system uses power. A solution begins with self-examination about the ways white folks benefit from and participate in racist systems. It continues with learning how all of us can respect and support one another and how we can be allies of people of color, immigrants, and other victims of racism. It invites all of us to speak up on behalf of victims, to counter the words of hate with words of love and respect. It requires us to keep after our governments to do the right thing and to take steps to address poverty, education, employment, and health care. It roots us in the truth that God is with us and will never abandon us. We Americans will never prosper as a people if only some of us have education and employment; if only some of us have hope.

I commit, as your Bishop, to strengthening our training in multicultural awareness and to help congregations strengthen their relationships with both Wabanaki people and New Mainers. I will continue to work with the Maine Episcopal Network for Justice and to keep these matters before our state and federal legislators. I invite you to make your own efforts, in your communities, to reinvigorate your relationships with people of color and to make common cause against hate.

This is a matter of adaptive change, of cultural change. And we understand that leaders alone cannot change our systems. It is up to each of us and all of us to stand 'true to our God, true to our native land'\*.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen T. Lane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

The Rt. Rev. Stephen T. Lane  
*Bishop of Maine*

\* from *Lift Every Voice and Sing*