



EPISCOPAL  
DIOCESE  
of Southern Virginia

## Pray, Listen, Speak: A Message from Bishop Hollerith

Dear Diocesan Family,

From Orlando to Minnesota to Dallas, these past weeks we have heard the voices of people in pain and anguish, and voices crying out for justice. Regardless of which side of the issues we happen to stand on, we are all affected by injustice and all have a stake in seeing that peaceful resolution and reconciliation are the order of the day across our land.

Given the complexity of the matters at hand and the fact that many of us are physically removed from the unrest, it is easy at times to feel detached and powerless. It is not always clear what, if anything, we might do to make a difference. It is not always clear how we might respond in a way that is faithful to our calling as followers of Christ. And yet I believe that God invites us to be more than passive bystanders.

To that end, I want to suggest three simple things that we can do - both as individuals and as worshiping communities - in response to these events. I offer them as the basis of a spiritual posture which we Episcopalians might assume when faced with social tragedy and conflict.

- **Pray!** It's hardly a new, earth-shaking idea, but I think we sometimes forget just how powerful prayer can be. Prayer is the stance we Christians take in the face of our own powerlessness. It is our unceasing faith in the power of God to create healing opportunity. All churches in the Diocese of Southern Virginia and all individuals should be praying regularly for the places and communities where citizens and police officers have been unjustly killed or wounded - and for all communities where strife is present. Pray for those who are in pain or are grieving. Pray for peace.
- **Listen!** One of the most important activities we can engage in is that of listening to the feelings and experiences of others. We live in a society where people are generally far more interested in asserting their opinions than listening to what others have to say. Or, in the words of William James, "A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices." As Christians, we must demonstrate an alternative way of being in the world, one that values openness to the experiences of others and acknowledges that the truth is usually a multifold reality. In particular, deep listening involves paying close attention to the stories of those who differ from us. And a listening posture helps create an environment where healing and reconciliation are possible.
- **Speak!** Not all of us are called to speak in public. Not all of us are called to raise our voice in the midst of a public protest. But God calls every one of us to speak against injustice as we experience it in the

day to day, ordinary contexts of our lives. Evil is all around us no matter where we live - however subtle, however soft-spoken it may be. It's just a matter of our opening our ears to hear it and opening our eyes to see it in our own communities. The most powerful witness we can ever make as baptized Christians is one of risking to "speak the truth in love" to others on behalf of what is right and what is of God. This is especially important to do when we hear others - even those who are close to us - articulate hate or indifference or prejudice - the very tinder of social violence. It is part of the promise we make in the Baptismal Covenant when we say that we will "...strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being." (BCP p. 305)

It is impossible to know whether further acts of violence will take place across our country this summer. But I think it is relatively certain that we are seeing only a glimpse of the terrible unrest that lies beneath a great portion of our American society. We have some very hard work ahead of us as a country. My hope is that all of us who are part of the Episcopal Church in Southern Virginia will find some way to be more than just armchair Christians and will actively exercise our faith in the service of God's justice. After all, who can better address these issues than those who follow Jesus? Who could possibly be better equipped to demonstrate the power of love to the world? So, I invite you to find your way to pray, listen and speak.

In Christ,  
+Holly

The Rt. Rev. Herman Hollerith