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Churches Uniting in Christ

Churches Uniting in Christ's (CUIC) Statement on the Multiple Police and Civilian Shooting Across the U.S.A.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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We are deeply concerned with preserving the lives of all God's children, especially men of color whose lives are imminently and lethally threatened. In what seems to be a weekly, if not a daily occurrence, gun violence has led to the deaths of 3 police officers and the wounding of several others. In the month since Churches Uniting In Christ released a statement in response to the mass shooting at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, we have witnessed the deaths of Philando Castile in Minnesota and Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In response to those deaths, demonstrations arose in cities across the country. During a peaceful protest march consisting of Black Lives Matter members and other groups in Dallas, Texas, 12 Dallas police officers and one demonstrator were shot by a sniper. The gunman was not affiliated with the demonstrators. Five officers died as a result of their gunshot wounds. The assailant, Micah Johnson, was killed by a bomb attached to a police robot.

On Sunday, July 17, in Baton Rouge, law enforcement officers again were the victims of gun violence. Three officers were killed and three others wounded. Gavin Long, the suspected shooter, was killed by police officers at the scene.

We are deeply grateful for the police officers, first responders, medical care personnel, and chaplains who are providing direct aid and assistance to victims and their family and friends. They are truly a sign of the common humanity which unites us all. Such signs can serve to show us all how to act for positive change in society.

To the fallen officers, may God grant them eternal rest. To the families of the fallen officers, we mourn with you and pray for your well-being.

We also extend our compassion and prayers to the families of the assailants, for they are suffering too.

As violence seems to beget more violence, we must remember the words of Jesus Christ, "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them..." (Luke 6:27-42, ESV).

Is some change needed in our communities? Yes. 533 fatal police shootings of civilians so far this year. 990 last year. There is no debate, one is too many.

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Since July 8th, 9 police officers have lost their lives to gun violence. There is no debate, one is too many.

In the onslaught of recent police killings, we cannot lose sight of the fact that other communities of color are suffering too.

The rhetoric that creates a rationale for senseless gun violence cannot be tolerated. It is illogical and unacceptable for identified leaders to refuse to consider legislation which would screen applicants for guns and limit access to certain weapons that should be reserved for wartime uses. Words can kill when we create an atmosphere identifying some cultures/ethnicities as perpetrators and others victims based on biases, prejudices, and discrimination.

Standing with the Black Lives Matter movement does not mean one does not support our law enforcement community. It also means that one cannot stand by silently as the Latino community suffers from police shootings. In the same week that Mr. Sterling and Mr. Castile were killed, five Latino men and women were also shot and killed by law enforcement officers. There are places in our communities where the number of police-involved shootings of Latino men and women is proportionally higher than those of Black men and women. Albuquerque, San Jose, Los Angeles County are particularly troublesome.

For our Nation's First People, we must recognize that that demographic is statistically the most likely to be killed by law enforcement.

For too many years we have been spoon-fed lies that have only added fuel to this inferno that rages across our society. Lies like the War on Crime, legislation that has punished our communities of color at a disproportionate rate, with more severe punishments, resulting in the need to build more prisons and privatized prisons. These lies were non-partisan in nature. They have created, what Michelle Alexander called "The New Jim Crow."

The militarization of our police forces, stemming from an over-supply of military hardware from constant conflicts since 2001, as well as the lack of, or poor training in de-escalation of dangerous situations, capped off by reductions in funding for mental health services and the use of jails as mental health treatment facilities have created a powder-keg.

The militarization of our citizenry, with laws that allow the open carry of weapons in public, is acting as the fuse.

"Fear not." God, in scripture we hear that message from you again and again. Our minds and our streets are now full of fear---fear of police, fear of men and women of color, fear of foreigners, fear of people we think are different from us, fear of people whose faith is different from ours. Help us to admit our fears. Keep us from letting our fears drive our lives. Fill us with hope for the best from ourselves and from our neighbors as we seek your beloved community.

With each new headline of a police-involved shooting or a police officer shot, the fuse gets shorter. We may never know the impetus behind the police shootings, but both Micah Johnson and Gavin Long were veterans. Many of our Country's veterans return from these conflicts suffering from wounds we can't see on the outside. Compounding the problem is that our Country's veterans are suffering from untreated-PTSD and are winding up on many of our police forces. They are also ending up in our jails and prisons. Too many Vets are on our streets homeless. We pray for peace but recognize that we cannot abandon the needs of those who faced the horrors of war.

Demanding policy changes that call for better community policing is not the same as being unsupportive of law enforcement. Demanding that our justice system provides the fair and equitable application of the law whether one wears a badge or not is not too much to expect.

We feel the woundedness of our communities. As people of faith, we have experienced the loss of members of our churches, our denominations and the Body of Christ reels with the pain.

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The sin of racism, both overt and implicit, combined with the seemingly unbridled violence toward law enforcement, has created an environment of discord, mistrust, and tension that exacerbates an already volatile situation.

We implore that our churches preach messages of reconciliation, teach lessons of understanding, and exemplify a model of Christian love for all. There are no sides to be taken other than the side of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

We beseech our churches to create safe places for law enforcement agencies and community members to engage in meaningful conversations about the fears and concerns of all sides of these festering issues in an effort to bring peace, tranquility, and respect to our neighborhoods. These conversations should be preemptive as well as reactive to the trauma experienced by all.

As our congregations reach out beyond the walls of their buildings, we encourage speaking as if the Holy Spirit were part of the conversation. There is no room for invective in our pews, nor is their space for heated vitriol in our communities. As the Apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Ephesians, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32, ESV).

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*Churches Uniting in Christ is a covenant relationship among eleven Christian communions that have pledged to live more closely together in expressing their unity in Christ and combating racism together. The member churches of CUIC include the **African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, The Episcopal Church, the International Council of Community Churches, the Moravian Church (Northern Province), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church.** The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a partner in mission and dialogue. For more information, please see our website at www.churchesunitinginchrist.org*