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Statement from KYAG
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Regarding Injustice
& Race Relations

**STATEMENT FROM KENTUCKY ASSEMBLIES OF GOD NETWORK PASTOR
SUPERINTENDENT
JOSEPH S. GIRDLER, DMIN
REGARDING INJUSTICE AND RACE RELATIONS**

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Suddenly, it seemed as though Coronavirus was a passing concern amidst continued national turmoil of race relations. Racism has long been understood to have roots leading to revival of the Church. Genuine revival is needed today more than at any other time in modern history.

No words seem to ease pain. It's taken me a week to process even enough of my own grief to offer a public statement. Silence is wrong. But, discerning and processing the voice of the Father is heavenly in moments like this.

That heaviness overwhelms people to the point of tears. Friends, Black and Anglo, Hispanic, Bi-racial, and minority multicultural families, deal with a myriad of emotions, as expected, from anger to brokenness in prayers for their own children's safety growing up in such an unsettled time; fear and apprehension every day of their lives because of the hue, pigment, shade, and God-given color of their skin.

Walter J. Hollenweger penned the Foreword to Ian MacRobert's, 1988 work, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*. In it, Hollenweger wrote: 'Black spirituality in Pentecostalism is evidenced by scores of black hymn-writers and evangelists and above all by William J. Seymour (1870-1922) a son of former slaves from Centerville, Louisiana. Seymour taught himself to read and write and was for a time a student of Charles Fox Parham's Pentecostal Bible School in Topeka, Kansas (1873-1929), often described as a pioneer of pentecostalism, who was also a sympathizer of the Ku Klux Klan and therefore he excluded Seymour from his Bible classes. Seymour was allowed only to listen outside the classroom through the half-open door. In the face of constant humiliation, Seymour became an apostle of reconciliation...that...led to the revival in Los Angeles which most Pentecostal historians believe to be the cradle of Pentecostalism.'

In recent weeks of this writing, George Floyd, a 46 year-old unarmed black man in Minneapolis died after a police officer knelt with full body weight on his neck for over nine minutes while he cried out, "I can't breathe". Mr. Floyd was arrested for allegedly buying cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. Just a twenty minute drive from my home in a Louisville suburb, Breonna Taylor, was shot and killed in her apartment during a police raid gone wrong. Ahmaud Arbery was jogging on a south Georgia roadway when he was chased by two gunmen and shot point blank. Unfortunately, the rising anger is not something only of recent weeks. Names of murderous atrocities continue including 17-year old, unarmed, Trayvon Martin, visiting relatives in a Sanford, Florida neighborhood in February, 2012, when he was fatally shot just 70 yards from the back door of the townhouse where he was staying, or Eric Garner (44), who was killed in a Staten Island, New York incident from the summer of 2014, or 18-year old, Michael Brown who was shot

in August of 2014 in a St. Louis suburb (Ferguson, MO), or Philando Castile (32) in a St. Paul suburb who took five bullets at close range while in his car in the summer of 2016. The list of names could continue for seemingly an eternity, as citizens of color experience racism recurrently.

It seems words must be backed up with actions. It is not enough to simply say I am opposed to racism. I've learned we don't have to say things perfectly. I simply need to have the conversation. Begin there. What am I doing to make a difference? How am I living my life with and among my friends and community? Am I truly standing up for the injustices around me? I can say, "I am sorry." I can say, "I grieve with you." I can say, "I am thankful my minority friends are my friends." Do I genuinely let my voice be heard? I don't want to be blind to what's happening around me. Have I stopped to check in on my Black or minority friends to ask how they're feeling or how they're doing amidst this chaos? People are enraged, scared, and confused. Could this be the moment that changes a society? Could this be the hour that finally turns the corner for America and the nations of the world in the battle against injustice, racism, and bigotry?

As churches were re-opening for in-person services because of COVID-19, yet at 33% capacity and with social distancing regulations, Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020, was welcomed with a Louisville-crisp Sunday morning and sunny skies. The beauty of that day did not squelch the new concerns plaguing cities across America. The night before Louisville mayor, Greg Fischer, had enacted a citywide curfew from 9pm until 6am to avoid further riot destructions and death. The Thursday previous seven people had been shot in those Louisville demonstrations. Other cities across the land were experiencing the same. And, at the midnight hour of this Pentecost Sunday in Louisville, riots led to more shots fired and the killing of yet another individual.

It was with power the Spirit moved upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2). And at moments in our spiritual journey, when sometimes waters have been deep, many of you, like myself, have been pricked in our hearts to cry out, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit is my forever Comforter (John 14:16, 17). He glorifies Jesus (John 16:14) and empowers people for witness (Acts 1:8). The scripture authors spoke under unction of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). And, in those times of my spiritual walk when I needed the reminder it is the Holy Spirit's affirmation to me that I am -though broken and needy- redeemed by Christ and a child of God (Romans 8:16). It is Pentecost-the passion, dedication, and burning desire to preach Good News with unction and conviction-that will bring Christ's healing and redeeming story to the hearts of people before His imminent return. It is within this redemption story revival fires are flamed. Recent happenings throughout the United States reminds us of how far we yet have to go in reaching the mark. This is not a black and white issue. It's a right and wrong issue. I've stood at the locations in Los Angeles' where the faithful African-American, Rev. William Seymour (fresh from his unfortunate hallway stoop to be able to overhear the Charles Parham-led bible class sessions in Topeka, Kansas) readily preached the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe we had all hoped these racist times were in the past. They are not. Maybe we thought Nelson Mandela had ended the racism movement with his life-long anti-apartheid activism. Maybe we thought Mahatma Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, Jr., or Mother Teresa, or Desmond Tutu, or Rosa Parks, or Malala Yousafzai, had brought an end to some degree to the humiliating of segments of society for who they are, what they represent, or the color of their skin. It is clear I will likely never truly understand what my minority friends experience on a daily basis, nor will I comprehend what it is like to live without white privilege. To that, I am sorry. But, more so, I want change.

I am grateful for my friends, many who are minorities and multi-cultural. Your simple willingness to be in my life, accepting and loving my family for who we are, makes me better. I have great respect for you. Thank you for standing tall while injustices abound. I vow to be a voice of healing to the cities and the nations to what extent I am offered. I promise to stand against prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry. I refuse to believe this is the new normal. Burning down city establishments, indescribable brutality to mankind, and protests that are destructive leaves us pleading for a touch of God in our land. The writer of Proverbs (Chapter 31:8-9, NIV) challenges us with, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

While most do not know exactly what to say it becomes easy to simply say nothing at all. But the silence is deafening. The topic is complex. I hurt when I think of black friends who surely must worry about their own sons and daughters every time they get behind the wheel of their car. I grieve with young Black-American mothers who have spoken with me about conversations they already have regularly with their children as young as 8 years old about how to respond if they find themselves in a "situation" challenged by someone of authority. How can it be that we still have a society that precious children go to bed wondering about such conversations from moms and dads? I applaud law enforcement officers who are faithful, sincere, blameless leaders, protectors of society, and honorable in all their sacrifice. I call for justice for all who find themselves bound to horrific or murderous acts of the few who are not.

We all need someone to talk to. We need someone to educate us. We need to be saying to our minority friends, "I see you. I see your beautiful God-given color. I see and hear your pain. I give you room to share your raw emotion. I join with you in creating a venue for cultural intervention and societal change. I don't want to assume things I know little of. I want to be vulnerable, humble, and teachable. Race walls have divided America long enough. It is time the Church and her leaders speak out against social injustice. I want to show love, sympathy, and compassion. I want to be a voice of healing for the nations. I want to be a voice of healing for my Commonwealth and my city. Like so many we often do not now where to begin.

I encourage you to pause before you post. I encourage you to consider your witness for Christ with your social media and with your actions, statements, as well as silence. I encourage you to realize while you may be immovable about a subject, with every right to be so, to whom much is given much is required that we might not become harmful to the

body of Christ and a point of disunity, rather than focused purpose. I encourage you to be a voice of healing. I encourage you to stand against injustice. I encourage you to use maturity, developed wisdom, and reliable responsibility in your leadership. I encourage you to put actions to your words. I encourage you to become a mentor to the fatherless. I encourage you to visit and engage your neighbors of diversity and minorities. I encourage you to begin conversations. I encourage you to contact elected officials and demand justice be served. I encourage you to vote. I encourage you to thank faithful public servants and officers who do the right things and place their own lives on the line in harms way for all of us daily. I encourage you to not only go to church, but be the Church to a hurting world around us. I encourage you to be a peacemaker. I encourage you to make the extra-step efforts to befriend, support, and encourage Black and Minority families in your communities. I encourage you to learn from cultures different from that of your own. I encourage you to listen to those who disagree with your position scripturally or otherwise. I encourage you to do as Christ called the Church. I encourage you to love.

There are so many things that can be done to make a difference. I know, for me, it begins with listening; and prayer. I cannot condone the violence, the burnings, the pointless deaths caused from such vehement riots, or the illegal rooting from rage, but I can protest injustice. Leonard Ravenhill said something to the effect that most Protestant Christians are no longer Protestant, just non-Catholics; they no longer protest anything. I stand as a voice against injustice. I cannot be silent on sin. I cannot be silent on murder. I cannot be silent on senseless racism. A friend of mine said recently that violence was a face of oppression. I am praying the oppressed have a voice and the silent hear the cries. I admit I will never understand what it means to be a black man, a black husband, a black father raising children in today's America. But, I will be a voice. I am going to acknowledge openly that racial discrimination is real. I am going to admit openly that there is still racism and prejudice in many pews of American Christianity. I am going to admit the Church must lead the conversation of Racial Reconciliation.

I've visited Azusa Street Revival, William Seymour's Los Angeles Bonnie Brae Street house-church where on April 9, 1906 seven sincere souls, worshipping with all they had within themselves, were filled with the Holy Spirit. Little did they know this unexpected and quite unknown experience, except for what they'd read in scripture, would spark a movement around the world that was as multi-cultural as was ever experienced on earth.

If we ever needed a fresh Pentecost, we need it today. The promise is not for some, not for a so-called elite class, not for a people of a specific race or color, but "...for all whom our Lord our God will call (Acts 2:39)."