**STATEMENT on DIVERSITY and INCLUSION**

Our nation is experiencing civil unrest on a scale we have not seen in quite a while. Protestors are marching for an end to systemic racism that pervades the institutions of our society.

The church is not exempt from systemic racism. As much as we want to say that Christianity in general, and our congregation in particular, have put the sins of racism and prejudice behind us, it simply isn’t true. Christian worship has often been called “the most segregated hour in America.” Perhaps we don’t actively engage in segregationist behaviors in our congregation, nor do we actively discriminate against people based on race. But do we do enough to dismantle the structures and systems that benefit white people and inflict harm on our siblings in Christ who are black or brown?

In scripture, we read, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). We profess to live a faith that seeks equity for all people regardless of race or gender or nation of origin or economic status. But the fact remains that, while all people matter, some people are being threatened more than others. The insistence that Black Lives Matters is an affirmation that God calls us to stand with the most vulnerable, the most oppressed, the most threatened in our community. All lives won’t really matter until we can affirm that Black lives matter to us and to God.

 I confess that I have not done enough to dismantle the privilege I experience as a white male. I have not done enough to engage in actions that lead to justice and equity. Nor do I believe that we have done enough in our congregation to work explicitly toward full inclusion of persons of all races and ethnicities and backgrounds. The poet, Maya Angelou, is attributed to have said, “When we know better, we do better.” We do know better; and we need to do better – as individuals, as a congregation, as a nation. I don’t know exactly what that looks like, but I do know we have to keep trying to find out.

 In the days and weeks and months ahead, I urge each of us and all of us to engage in the difficult conversations that are required of us to know better. I urge us to maintain a posture of listening, so we can hear the stories we need to hear. I urge us to pray for wisdom, so that we can discern a way forward. And I urge us to take steps towards doing better. Lives depend on it!

 Peace,

Rev. Jack Barden