

LITANY OF CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD MOVEMENT

By Dr. Kimberly Majeski

Lord of grace and glory, God of the universe, keeper of the stars and our stories, the One who forgives our sins and makes us new, we acknowledge, at once, the greatness of your power, how we have broken your heart for unity, and the magnitude of this present moment.

We observe the shaking of the ground, the dust in the skies, the plight of refugees, the desperate prayers in ICU wards, the tears of healthcare providers, the fear of our children, the injustice in our neighborhoods, and the soldiers in our streets.

We confess that we have long since been asleep. We have been numb and resigned to ignorance in our slumber. We have been insulated and insular, and we have failed to hear the cries of your children.

And even as we have apathetic, ill-informed, mal-equipped, and tone-deaf, we cannot unhear the pleas of George Floyd as he lay in the street, the boot of racism heavy on his neck. We saw, we heard, we knew it so reprehensible that we can no longer turn a deaf ear, avert our pale eyes, refuse to stand with our sisters and brothers of color, and understand ourselves to be anything less than complicit in our times.

We are shaken to action. We are grieved of heart and mind, of body and soul. Even as we pray for the families, the communities of George, Breonna, and other Black lives taken, we must first stare in the face our own history, the poverty of our own choices as a tradition, as a family of faith, we must confess and repent the sins we have carried for so long, too long.

We confess there were moments before, long ago when we the Church of God could've done, should've done differently, could've embraced, should've embraced our heritage and stood firm for racial justice. Instead we chose the path of least resistance, and we stood with power and not the powerless.

We confess that when the issues of racial unity were raised to our leaders, to our forefathers and mothers, they failed us and we could've, should've held them accountable, and we did not; we followed their lead into the wilderness of sin.

We confess and we grieve that we followed Jim Crow when we could've, we should've followed Jane Williams.¹

We confess that we turned our backs on our Black sisters and brothers to embrace white family members and, when it was ours to choose, we dismissed the importance of racial harmony and decidedly did so to focus on the "salvation of white men and women."²

We confess and grieve that we, the Church of God, we who celebrate an open Table, uninvited our Black brothers and sisters to dine as if it were our table upon which to extend invitation. Instead what we could've done, should've done was, "Reach our hand in fellowship to every blood-washed one"³ and, in so doing, spread the table cloth on top of the flames of racial prejudice, sat down as one family—the body of Christ—passed the bread and wine, sang out "I am a child of God,"⁴ and feasted on our love.

We confess that our actions caused sadness, broken hearts, and broken fellowship. What we could've done, what we should've done is stand in unity, refuse to give sway to unbiblical notions of white supremacy, we should have surrounded, protected, stood for and with our Black sisters and brothers in their oppression. We confess that our decisions sent our Black sisters and brothers into exile until they found a new promised land.

We confess that we have lost decades of time and generations of leaders, prophets, and preachers to our sin and our actions might have stifled the flourishing of God that was destined for our world through the Church of God.

We confess we have long failed to celebrate the gift of diversity, to look to the voices of our Black and brown sisters and brothers for providential insight and education.

We confess that in our fallenness we have become two assemblies when we could have been one. We confess that it was the sending away of the Black brothers and sisters that caused them to found a new assembly. Even then, what we could've done, what we should've done was/is, show up, support, encourage, promote, those leaders, those events, those conversations.

1 Jane Williams is one of the earliest African Americans associated with the Church of God. She wrote field notes for the *Gospel Trumpet* regarding the camp meetings she held across the South. As racial tensions rose, she continued to hold unified meetings in spite of pressure to segregate the gatherings.

2 Massey, James, African American Pioneers of the Church, quoting E.E. Byrum

3 Naylor, Charles Naylor, "The Church's Jubilee" (1923)

4 Warren, Barney, "A Child of God" (1907)

We confess that we have had opportunities to set matters right, to confess our collective, inherited sin and we have failed to take responsibility, and we have been derelict in our inaction.

We confess we have been wrong and have wronged so many whom you love and have designed for the service of your church and the building up of the kingdom for the good of the world.

We repent the sins of our community, of our congregations, of the decades, of the generations, we lament the sins of our time.

We ask you to cleanse us, to forgive us, to make us new. To open our hearts and minds, our eyes and ears, we ask you to enliven our pulpits, to sharpen pens so that we might take to the classrooms, and sanctuaries, that we might go into the streets to proclaim what is true and right, that #BlackLivesMatter.

And we ask that as you raise us to new life, as the old has passed and the new has come, you would appoint us as ambassadors of reconciliation,⁵ that we might be for and with our Black sisters and brothers from here and ever more.

5 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 NRSV