

Jeff's Jottings

It's been a week ...

July 14, 2016

By Jeff Japinga

Transitional Executive Presbyter

A week ago, my Jottings column already written, I awoke in Chicago to the news of the shooting death of Philando Castile in Falcon Heights. I added a brief prelude to the column, acknowledging the shooting and its possible implications for us in the presbytery.

I had no idea.

I had no idea of the breadth and depth of what those few sentences meant, or, more accurately, needed to mean.

I'm not sure I do now. In the ensuing week — a week that saw the ambush and assassination of five Dallas police officers last Thursday; the ongoing, roiling protests here in the Twin Cities; and comment from virtually all quarters of our society on what these events mean for us as a society and as a church — I don't know that I've gained clarity on the way forward. Not certainty, to be sure. But maybe, just maybe, I've found greater resolve, to do the work we need to do.

At presbytery on Tuesday night, the chair of our Presbytery Leadership Team, Denise Dunbar-Perkins, said in no uncertain terms that this presbytery would, and must, have the hard conversations around race, not simply to talk but to change, both itself and, by extension of its witness, the culture in which we do ministry. In that, Denise has my full support.

I know those words have every opportunity to ring hollow; I know they've been said over and over again, and now, here we are, saying them again. There is much in my past and our past for which we must confess. And I cannot

pretend that I know this conversation will be the breakthrough one. I only know the next step must be a faithful one.

I am grateful for and deeply moved by the heartfelt responses offered in our PTCA churches this past Sunday morning. The stories I've heard are incredible — orders of service scrapped and re-written, sermons re-done, prayers from our knees, individual initiatives for change. Thank you all for your witness. I hope you've read the pastoral letter the leaders of your presbytery released on Saturday (<https://www.facebook.com/presbyterytwincitiesarea/posts/10153420363111362>). I want you to read the statement we heard at presbytery from the young people of Kwanzaa Community Church's 21st Century Academy that we've published elsewhere in this EMerge

(<http://files.ctctcdn.com/17207f49001/4a57ab5f-48ec-446f-8794-9d78cd39ea50.pdf>). I'd like you to read this brief piece from my friend and colleague Craig Howard of the Presbytery of Milwaukee (<http://www.belovedcom.org/home/new-normal>), and this one (<https://pres-outlook.org/2016/07/confession-time-white-supremacy-hurts-white-people/>) and this one (<https://achurchforstarvingartists.wordpress.com/2016/07/13/beyond-thoughts-prayers-how-about-some-orientation/>) from our PCUSA co-moderators Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston. All of this is the life-giving fruit of being a connectional church.

Let's be clear, though. Reading won't get us to where we must go. Neither will a pastoral letter. We must all keep challenging ourselves; keep asking the hard questions; keep listening, especially to those persons who are telling us a piece of the story we do not know or have not experienced. We must keep engaging deep and thought-provoking words, pictures, experiences. As I do that — as I've done that over the past week — I am also painfully reminded and confess how inadequate I am to this task and calling. I so desperately need to walk this with others.

This is our work, as it has long been. May God bless this effort, today, right now.