

The Columbia Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) stands with those wanting to be safe in their community, who should not be afraid of those who are supposed to protect and serve. Systemic racism and oppression are present in our society in too many ways to count; policing is only the most recent, egregious, visible example. We can not have justice for all, as the Pledge of Allegiance says, until there is justice for those traditionally and systematically treated unjustly. There are more than 400 years of racial and cultural injustice in the history of our nation “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men [sic] are created equal.”

Recently, there have been nationwide protests to affirm the humanity of Black people, and other people of color, in the face of racism and hatred. These protests have demonstrated a strong desire for change in our institutions. For centuries, government and corporations have oppressed and disenfranchised people of color and other minorities to serve the interests of the rich and powerful. Tacitly condoning violence, leaders hold on to their power over the downtrodden who often feel their condition is hopeless. Sadly, these feelings are supported by data; a Black man has a 1 in 1,000 chance of dying from an encounter with police, much more than a Latino or White man has, even though they are less likely to be armed. As the recent (8/20/2019) article in *Science* put it, this is a “non-trivial lifetime risk.”

We must seek to understand, and strive to unravel, the systematic racism prevalent in our society. We have not suddenly arrived at a crisis, but we are at a crossroads. Saying nothing accomplishes nothing; it is no different from police officers watching a colleague take a life and saying nothing. In Quaker terms, it is high time we all spoke truth to power.

It is not the time for despair or inaction; it is the time for actively promoting change. We must become vocal to help end oppression. As Tommie Smith, Olympic 200 meter gold medalist at Mexico City in 1968, recently was quoted, “Keep believing and keep working on community. It takes dedication to muster up the power to move forward.”