

From: David Zack <dzack@ashevillenc.gov>
Sent: 6/2/2020 6:05:03 PM
To: Jerri Jameson <jjameson@ashevillenc.gov>
Cc:
Subject: Fwd: A clergy person reaching out to you

As per our conversation.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Marcia Mount Shoop <mmountshoop@gcpcusa.org>
Date: Tue, Jun 2, 2020 at 5:01 PM
Subject: A clergy person reaching out to you
To: <dzack@ashevillenc.gov>

Dear Chief Zack,

I am Rev. Dr. Marcia Mount Shoop, Senior Pastor at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church on Merrimon Avenue in Asheville. I am also a clergy member of an interfaith and ecumenical group of faith leaders called Faith 4 Justice Asheville. Faith 4 Justice is a coalition of 12 different congregations from 7 different denominations.

The faith leaders of Faith 4 Justice and I are in prayer for the entire Asheville community and for the entire country in these difficult times. We appreciated your words in the op-ed you wrote several days ago, but have also been troubled by the ways peaceful protests have escalated into an aggressive police response these last two nights in Asheville.

We have gotten conflicting narratives on what happened on the ground. We know that is not surprising given the chaos of these times. I am reaching out to share a few hopes with you from a part of the faith community who has been working hard to come alongside Black and Brown communities in Asheville/Buncombe County to provoke justice and social change.

First, given the COVID19 pandemic and the added peril the virus creates for everyone in these mass gatherings, is there a way the police could alter the strategy of pushing large crowds into smaller and smaller spaces? This prevents anything like social distancing and increases the chance of these events becoming super-spreading events. We are working to provide free masks for protestors to help prevent spreading the virus as well. Are there ways the community and APD can work together to take into account the added danger that COVID 19 creates for everyone in these chaotic times? And can we acknowledge that not taking these steps creates even more harm for Black and Brown communities?

Second, I am curious about why all the law enforcement around the country seems to be taking the same aggressive approach to the very same situations--outside agitators coming in to be destructive spurring a violent police reaction. Can you help me understand where this approach comes from? Who is on the ground directing the APD and State Troopers in the moment? Are there other preventative measures that the APD and community could be working together to achieve with the outsiders coming in?

You mentioned in your remarks that you want to be held accountable to your values. There has to be a way the community and APD can work together to root out the outside instigators. They should not be able to trigger state sanctioned violence against peaceful protestors. From a faith perspective, firing tear gas and rubber bullets on a community traumatized by state sanctioned violence is more than insult to injury, it is terrorizing. We understand that officers could well feel afraid and be following orders. And they are heavily armed and have on military grade protection, while protestors have no such protection. As faith leaders we ask you to use your power as Chief to de-escalate, rather than authorize responses that escalate and further traumatize the community.

Third, I know you are just getting to know Asheville, but you may be already finding out that there are many thoughtful, creative, and passionate people here. Many people are interested in change in our community, but coordinating efforts is very challenging because of a deep mistrust that exists among different communities. Faith 4 Justice has been working on building trust for three and a half years, since the shooting of Johnny Rush. We met with Chief Hooper twice privately and had constructive conversations. We are here to support and resource the conversations and work that we know is already underway about reform.

Thank you for reading this email, and I look forward to your response.

Peace to you,

Marcia Mount Shoop

The Rev. Marcia Mount Shoop, PhD

Pastor/Head of Staff

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