



EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT
PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

*"All right, if that's something you feel you really need to do."
– the Rev. Canon Ed Rodman, to me, in 2008
at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA.*

In 2014, I was becoming more and more aware that the people whose names and faces I saw on television who had been subjected to violence at the hands of the police (Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri, Dajerria Beckton in McKinney Texas, Eric Garner in New York City, Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina, Freddie Gray in Baltimore and Tamir Rice – 12 years old, armed with a toy gun – in Cleveland, Ohio) were people who look like me.

This police brutality and murder were hurting my heart in a way I had never known before. My people – Black people – were being targeted and killed by the police. So when my wife Marie told me that there was going to be a Black Lives Matter March in December, and that some of the folks we knew at Union Theological Seminary were organizing a worship service before the march, I knew we had to go.

When we arrived at the chapel at Union for worship, we were given forms to fill out and at the bottom was the phone number of the person who would have our information. We were then instructed to write that phone number on the inside of our arm in case we got arrested. That was the moment when things became real to me and I began to get frightened. Marie and I looked at each other, sighed, and grabbed each other's hands.

When it was time to leave everyone started chanting, "THIS IS WHAT THEOLOGY LOOKS LIKE" as we walked to the subway station. That chant moved me to tears. From my time studying with the Rev. Canon Ed Rodman at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA, I knew that this was exactly what theology looks like – protest and non-violent direct action. I knew he would be proud of me, and I knew he would remind me to keep myself safe.

When our group met up with the other marchers on the route, I could see all the helicopters, police, and media. Once again, I felt fear. I held



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up my sign that read, "I can't breathe." This was the plea that Eric Garner repeated 11 times as police had him in a choke hold. I cried when I first chanted: I can't breathe...one, I can't breathe... two... all the way to "eleven."

I walked that day like I had never walked before. I walked with passion and purpose. I walked with my White wife in a march to show the world Black lives matter, that my life matters. I felt connected to the 25,000 people who marched that day and connected to God in this movement for justice.

-- The Rev. April Alford-Harkey, deacon, serves at St. Thomas', New Haven and works as a chaplain at St. Vincent's Medical Center.

ECCT's Racial Healing, Justice, and Reconciliation Ministry Network convenes quarterly for an in-person working retreat. The next meeting, open to newcomers, will be held June 1 at St. Luke's, New Haven. The core team leaders and two co-conveners also hold a monthly online video meeting. The Network's five core areas of focus, and leaders, include:

- Reconciliation Models (the Rev. Rowena Kemp; Carol Taylor)
- Resources for Formation and for Training & Facilitation (Sue Roman; Sharon Pearson)
- Communications (the Rev. Diana Rogers)
- Pilgrimages and Events Coordination (Valarie Stanley; June Aziz)
- Advocacy/Civic Engagement (the Rev. Tracy Johnson Russell)

The Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT) entered a "Season of Racial Healing, Justice, and Reconciliation" for a minimum of two years by vote of its Annual Convention in October 2018. [Visit episcopalct.org/season-of-racial-healing-justice-and-reconciliation/](http://www.episcopalct.org/season-of-racial-healing-justice-and-reconciliation/) to read the enabling resolution and for resources, events, and more. ECCT's Racial Healing, Justice, and Reconciliation Ministry Network is helping to facilitate much of the resolution's implementation. Contact the Rev. Rowena Kemp or Suzy Burke, co-conveners of the Ministry Network, at rowjkemp@gmail.com or suzy@alegriainports.net.

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