



Reaching Out Across the Street and Around the World
Caring, Witnessing, Making Disciples

P.O. Box 985, Starkville, MS 39760

June 2020

Gary & Deborah Todd Living Trust
11298 Heritage Dr

Twinsburg OH 44087

Dear Gary and Deborah,

I'm working from home today, looking outside to see Swamp Rose blooms as big as a dinner plate, Knock-Out Roses that just won't quit, a canopy of trees spilling over the back fence, and sky so blue it makes you squint to look at it. It is a glorious day!



I feel that beauty deeply, and it renews my hope and expectation that all God's promises are true; that what He has begun, He will carry through to completion; and that He will turn our mourning into dancing. And I have to admit, I really need this beauty, because my heart is mourning a lot these days.



With our work providing meals for the elderly and most vulnerable of our county over the last three months, and the new friendships we have made with volunteers from every part of our community, we have been uniquely positioned (for us, anyway) to view and participate in how the recent racial turmoil has rocked the nation. I am relieved and proud to say that there if there is police brutality here, even the NAACP president (a very good friend of ours) says she is unaware of it.

There are, however, racial issues that need to be addressed, and as followers of Christ, we should be humbly *leading* the march toward justice, generosity, and Godly reconciliation.

On Saturday, June 6, students from Mississippi State University and a newly organized group of citizens called StandUp Starkville, marched and rallied for justice. Lori and I joined them for the rally on campus. From the moment we arrived, I began to weep.

I wept for the amazing show of unity – black and white, old and young, rich and poor, Christian and pagan, all gathered together to state, basically, that we are standing up for our Black brothers and sisters, that we love them, and that we will no longer tolerate brutality or marginalization in any form. I've never been so proud to live in Starkville.





I wept when those 3000 participants who were able (I am not), went face down on the grass for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, listening while the last words of George Floyd were read. In those long minutes, I think I began to understand the pain that some Blacks feel because of years of being badly treated.

I wept, quite frankly, because the church really hasn't spoken up to lead. Jesus' final words included a prayer for our unity, and for those who would come to know Him because of us. Too many times, our voice has been more judgmental than loving.

The day before our community demonstration, helped lead a community prayer rally. We sang, "Jesus Loves the Little Children" and "This Little Light of Mine." We ignored social-distancing and gave one another side hugs. We said, "Amen," and "Yes, Lord," and we talked about joining the march and rally the next day.



Prayer is the main work. I believe that with all my heart. Prayer, however, should not stand alone. Just like faith that must be accompanied with good works, prayer must be accompanied with action. Will you join me in reaching across the lines of division to be the light of the world, like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden?



The key, I believe, is to develop loving relationships. When you know someone, it's awfully hard to demonize them or their actions. Here are a few suggestions which I hope to implement in coming months:

- Worship with a Black congregation a few times. Ask a friend who attends there to watch for you so you don't have to sit alone. Better yet, attend a Bible study! It will be a smaller group and you're likely to be able to make some genuine friends.
- Start a book club with a diverse group of people. Don't just read controversial books. Read those that inspire you and make you laugh.
- Get involved with your local NAACP or another group taking action to reduce systemic racism and police brutality. You won't agree with everything that's said, but you can bring your loving, Christ-following voice to the table.

Share, give, love. Be the light! And remember, we love because He first loved us!

Still feeding His sheep,

Lee Ann