

ADVOCATES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

UNION CHURCH IN WABAN
14 Collins Road
Waban, MA 02468

April 23, 2023

Pastor Kelly Miller Smith, Jr.
First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill
900 Nelson Merry Street
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Pastor Smith and Members of First Baptist Church:

We the undersigned members of the Union Church of Waban in Waban, MA, a church affiliated with the United Church of Christ and American Baptists, outside of Boston, want to let you know we are thinking of you at this difficult time in your state. You have been through some tragic events with the school shooting (leaving 6 dead, 3 children), and the extreme disciplinary action of expulsion from the Tennessee Legislature of Justin Jones and Justin Pearson for their giving voice to their opposition to current gun laws, or lack thereof.

When Jesus was walking unrecognized with Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus, he asked what they are discussing. What they were discussing was what was happening politically in Jerusalem with the arrest, beating and crucifixion of Jesus. Our faith has to find ways to speak to the political events, the events that impact the lives of all people in our culture, and to do so in a way that reflects the way of Jesus. The distinguishing feature of Jesus' love was its inclusiveness and the worth and value of every human being. At the center of his teaching was a commitment to non-violence. His table of fellowship included those others would send elsewhere. His way was to build a beloved community of respect, justice, compassion for all and to break down barriers that would alienate us from one another. When rules of decorum become more important than substantive dialogue about what brings violence to our communities we are

in trouble. When two black men are expelled for speaking out about what their constituencies care about and put in their place, you have no place here, we need to speak to a way that builds foundations for justice rather than expulsion.

We write not to urge you to take any particular action, but for you to know you are very much in our thoughts and prayers as you wrestle with the latest tragedies in Tennessee and reflect on what action and witness your church might take in the midst. The church becomes church at its best when we ask, "What would Jesus do?" and when we seek to find a faithful response. We are praying for you and that you find a way that is right for your congregation to be faithful to the way of Jesus at this time.

May God bless you in your ministry,

Undersigned members of the Union Church in Waban and its Advocates for Racial Justice