

Why is there a “Black Lives Matter” sign on the lawn of this church?

As you approached our church this morning, you may have noticed a new sign on the lawn. It reads “Because we believe that all lives matter, we affirm BLACK LIVES MATTER.” The appearance of this sign is the result of months of work by the church’s Racial Justice Committee. Members of the committee petitioned the Leadership Team on three separate occasions for permission to display a Black Lives Matter sign, and won approval for the sign with the particular language you now read.

What does this sign mean?

- **“Black Lives Matter”**

In the past several years, the high-profile murders of a number of black people by the police brought the nation’s attention to the systematic racism that black people continue to face each day. The Black Lives Matter (hereafter “BLM”) movement and slogan originated in the black community in response to those murders and that racism.

The BLM movement is not easy to define. While there is a BLM website and Twitter account, the BLM movement is diffuse, made up of many organizations, networks of activists, and individuals. Uniting them is a belief that direct action must be taken to rid this country of systematic racism. The movement is led by black people, and they have welcomed white allies to join with them in this struggle.

Because the movement is diffuse, it has been mischaracterized, and so a few words must be said about what the movement, and a sign identifying with it, does *not* imply. By saying that “Black Lives Matter,” we are *not* implying that we are anti-police or anti-white. As is the case with any mass movement, there will be a few people who attempt to hijack it for destructive ends. Such isolated cases must not distract us from the positive accomplishments of the overwhelming majority of BLM affiliated organizations and individuals, who have been fighting for a truly inclusive society, which is what our sign represents.

But why the words “Black Lives Matter”? What do these words mean? Sixty years ago, in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, many assumed that racial disparities would slowly but surely disappear. Yet three generations later, black people born in this country can still expect to suffer far more than their white peers by most metrics, including life expectancy, child poverty rate, per capita income, incarceration rate, personal assets, violent crime, and police brutality. For generations, white people have affirmed that black lives do matter to them, but the numbers do not lie: we have created a world where black lives are systematically devalued. “Black Lives Matter” therefore, while at first glance a bland statement, is in fact a bold repudiation of one of the gravest systematic injustices remaining on American soil, one that we all have a responsibility to dismantle.

- **“Because we believe that all lives matter, we affirm...”**

This is a church, and we are a people of faith. It was important to us that our sign be phrased as a statement of belief. Jesus instructed us to view all men and women as our brothers and sisters. But he also wasted little time worrying about the lives of the rich. He ministered to the poor and the marginalized, called attention to their struggles, and implored those who heard him to follow his example. We placed this sign on our lawn because we are trying to do just that.

For some who pass by this sign, it will come as a gentle reminder or a positive affirmation. Others may become upset, as they feel that their assumptions have been questioned or their values attacked. The words of Jesus brought comfort to some, but were so disturbing to others that they felt compelled to murder him. No one at this church will be murdered for this sign, but it may bring some uncomfortable conversations. If that is the price for following Jesus, it is well worth paying. The official goal of our denomination is to “Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” It is our hope that, in some small way, our sign may help to transform the world for Christ, and that by demonstrating how Christians are willing to stand in solidarity with an unpopular but just movement, we will create more disciples.

Further Discussion

As noted above, we understand that not everyone welcomes this sign. If you count yourself in that number, we would like to talk with you about it. Our group has planned discussion groups that will convene on __, __, and __.

If you would like to talk about the sign on a one-on-one basis, please feel free to approach whichever member of the Committee on Racial Justice makes you feel most comfortable doing so. We are: Jane Allen, Jim Bennett, Stewart Lanier, Elaine Nordstrom, Sarah Rakhmankulova, Molly Stewart, Thomas Stewart, Tom Stewart, Wendy Warren, and Bert Whittier.