

Bishop Cynthia Fiero Harvey (President Designate of the Council of Bishops)

I have wondered whether I have any more to add to the profound and powerful words others have shared but the nudging of the Holy Spirit is often relentless.

My words, as feeble as they might be, are simply a reflection of the flood of feelings I have processed over the last few days. I understand sharing this comes with risk; someone will be offended, someone is not going to like what I say but I ask for grace and I ask for forgiveness.

First, Ahmaud Arbery and now George Floyd. The video footage of the last moments of these men's lives have left me angry and outraged. I cannot help but wonder how many more have needlessly died whose names we may never know?

I am tired but not nearly as tired as my black sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, cousins, aunts and uncles. I am a person of color but I confess that I have been complicit in many ways.

I understand the protests but I confess that I don't understand the looting and destruction that is occurring across our country. I pray that no other innocent lives are lost.

I am not black! I do not know what it is like to walk into a bank and have all eyes on me. I don't know what it is like to be pulled over in a "white neighborhood." I don't fear when I go for a run.

I am a brown female. I am married to a white man. We have a beautiful brown-ish daughter. I have an advanced degree and a wonderful ministry. I have been blessed to be the "first" in many areas of my life and work. We have a privileged household income. I don't have a heavy accent. I have had to work three times as hard as my white male counterparts. I know my experiences are different but they are mine. I often wonder if I had not changed my name when I married if I would be treated differently as a Fierro vs a Harvey? I am often asked, "what are you?" What I really want to say is "a human being or a child of God" but I kindly smile and say, "I am Hispanic. I am Mexican." This usually results in a new set of questions like "where were you born?" "Where were your parents born?" "What about your grandparents? Where are they from? Were they legal?" Often the question they are really asking is, "are you legal?" They may be innocent questions filled with curiosity but in many ways they are an attempt to make me feel less than I am.

While I have experienced racist comments and been treated differently, I do not fear walking in a bank or being pulled over in my neighborhood but sadly I have held my purse a bit closer when a black man walks in a bank or wondered what that black person is doing in my neighborhood. FORGIVE ME! For I have sinned. I want to go and sin no more!

Today, I am going to follow the lead of my colleague, Bishop Bob Farr of Missouri and ask every white Louisiana United Methodist to read two books that I promise will change your life – "White Fragility" by Robin DiAngelo and "How to Be an Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi. They will be challenging but transformative. They helped me understand and name my own sin and complicity and continue to do so.

Imagine if every pastor, every church staff member, every congregation member, every Sunday School class, every small group, every Bible Study read these books, had hard discussions and took real action not just offered platitudes but real tangible action? Could the United Methodist Church be responsible for moving the needle of antiracism in the state of Louisiana?

Imagine, United Methodists transforming entire communities!! Please join me in this important transformative, life-changing, heart-changing journey.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come.