

Select Page



# Russellville Area Churches Hold Public Act of Prayer in Response to George Floyd Killing

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Photo by Jade Chisum

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The May 25, 2020 killing of George Perry Floyd at the hands of former Minneapolis Police Department officer Derek Chauvin set-off nationwide protests in all 50 states and around the world that have lasted for weeks.

In Arkansas, the protests have remained mostly peaceful with activists seeking justice and change in police departments around the state.

United Methodists in Arkansas have also spoken out on George Floyd's death, with the [Arkansas Conference Cabinet](#) recently releasing a statement of solidarity with black clergy and members, and [pastors speaking out from the pulpit on the sin of racism](#).

The Revs. Sarah and Michael Lowenberg, UMC clergy at First UMC Russellville and Wesley UMC Russellville, recently organized a collaborative prayer rally with Russellville area churches to honor the memory of George Floyd and pray together in an act of solidarity against racism in America.

"Like many folks, I have experienced a range of emotions due to the George Floyd murder and the national reaction. So last Tuesday, while sitting on my back porch, my prayer was simple, 'God what am I supposed to do?' said Michael Lowenberg, senior pastor at Wesley UMC. "Coming from a mostly rural and Caucasian context, what am I supposed to do; with all these emotions? In response to the injustices and racial oppression? As a pastor? With loved ones whom I strongly disagree?"



Rev. Cindy Bright speaks to a gathered crowd of more than 60 people at the Public Act of Prayer meeting. Photo by Jade Chisum

Michael said that in his questioning, the Holy Spirit reminded him of the Kyrie prayer, "Lord, have mercy on me." He said this prayer allowed him to confess to God the ways in which he has fallen short.

“The only authentic and faithful response I have as a disciple of Jesus in Russellville, Arkansas is to confess and adjust my posture before God and in the world to one of humble penitence. For all the ugliness I have seen, for all the hate-filled words I have heard, for my own judgmentalism and desensitization- all I can faithfully do is beat my chest and cry out, ‘Lord have mercy on me a sinner.’”

He began to think of a way to bring others together to offer a time of confession and prayer, and that’s where the idea for a prayer meeting came to him.

So Michael, along with his wife Rev. Sarah Lowenberg, associate pastor at First UMC Russellville, and Rev. Tony Griffin, senior pastor at First UMC, planned a gathering in the Russellville area and called it a Public Act of Prayer.

The meeting was held on June 7 at the Russellville FUMC parking lot, and more than 60 people in the area — along with others who joined but remained in their cars due to social distancing guidelines — participated in the gathering, according to Sarah. Churches represented included Wesley UMC Russellville, First UMC Russellville, Westside Church of Christ, New Life Church, Pottsville UMC, Wesley Foundation – Arkansas Tech University, and First Baptist Church Russellville.

“We pushed out an invitation to all churches in the area, as well as the community,” Sarah said.



Rev. Michael Lowenberg speaks at the Public Act of Prayer meeting. Photo by Jade Chisum

Along with messages from Rev. Michael Lowenberg and Rev. Cindy Bright, people gathered in the parking lot to worship together in song.

Michael said the prayer gathering received a great response from the community and feedback has been encouraging.

“This event was important because it provided space for Christians, from a mostly rural and Caucasian context, to faithfully respond to the current societal agitation from a place of genuine humble penitence. Our call/mission is not to fix the brokenness of the world (because we can’t — it would be pretentious to think so and could possibly perpetuate further racial division) nor distance ourselves from it (because we are a part of this world

and we share in the consequence and responsibilities of its brokenness), rather, following Christ's example, we have to find ways of taking the sin of the world on ourselves; picking up our cross as Christ picked up the sins of the world.

"More than ever, the church needs to recognize and acknowledge its posture of humble penitence so that it can faithfully be a voice of both justice and reconciliation, responsibility and mercy," Michael said.

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- [June 2020](#)
- [May 2020](#)
- [April 2020](#)
- [March 2020](#)
- [February 2020](#)
- [January 2020](#)
- [December 2019](#)
- [November 2019](#)
- [October 2019](#)
- [September 2019](#)
- [August 2019](#)
- [July 2019](#)
- [June 2019](#)
- [May 2019](#)
- [April 2019](#)