

The Reverend Kelly Kirby
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
330 North Hubbards Lane
Louisville, KY 40207
24 June 2020



ST. MATTHEW'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr.
President,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
2825 Lexington Road
Louisville, KY 40280

Dear Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr.:

My own work as a white clergy person in Louisville who serves a majority-white congregation has led me to pursue the work of reparations that accomplish economic justice for Black-led congregations. My conscience leads me to revisit the letter that the clergy of EmpowerWest wrote to Southern Seminary with a call for reparations.

Simmons College of Kentucky is the Historically Black College in Louisville, and the EmpowerWest clergy are committed to their mission and ministry as a Black-led educational institution. It is true that Southern seminary and Simmons college are planted in the same city. So, we are neighbors and sisters and brothers, albeit neighbors, sisters, and brothers who live in different realities while we share the same location on a map.

I am in Louisville because it is where God put me. Where God set it in my heart to love the people who live in this city, and to come alongside the citizens of this city to work for the purposes of education, economic justice, and hope. Poverty and blight exist in the western stretches of this city that you and I call home, but the difference is that Simmons students see it every day while our white brother and sister clergy breeze through that side of town rarely, and only when we have an invitation.

You said you "will always be open to partnerships that honor the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Word of God". I know that there are limits to this statement. When powerful religious organizations partner with Black-led organizations for the work of reparations, it involves relinquishing some power. Control is rarely voluntarily given up by one who has power over another. It must be insisted upon by the one who seeks it. It is far more difficult for an entire organization to give up control than it is for an individual, especially if it was accumulated unjustly. And we both remember that Reinhold Niebuhr taught that groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr.

24 June 2020

Page 2

When we think about the moral and cultural weight of our religious institutions, there is an urgency to call for matters to be set right. We have all groaned in our tents longing to be clothed in heavenly clothing, but it fails to materialize before us. Perhaps this has to do with our unjust foundations.

Simmons' unjust foundation looks like a school that is underfunded with students who cannot escape the brutal toll of systematic racist policies and the poverty that engulfs them. The unjust foundation of Southern Seminary lies in its racist and exploitative past which infects the faculty and student body with a perverse claim on God's work in this world.

Four hundred and one years after the first slave set foot in our country, you and I along with the other clergy in EmpowerWest all remain trapped by the history that shaped our nation, our culture, and our image of God. This history created a structural flaw in our society where it became fashionable to shun racism without addressing racial inequality. The result is that white clergy demand absolution having never named the sin. You call on God to build you up while refusing to look at your foundation.

Dr. William Augustus Jones once said, "the system reveals a sick sociology based on a faulty anthropology that emanates from a false theology". Our church is possessed, and we pretend that our demons were exorcized long ago.

The effect is far more insipid and dangerous than we care to admit. The white church has for too long made a claim that we are working out God's purposes in this world while working against the very spirit of truth in the name of Jesus.

Therefore, your claim on the gospel is false. We have no right to preach peace without first preaching justice. This immoral way of living and moving and being has led to a distorted image of God served by a distorted community of faith. Stokely Carmichael said, "Racism is not a question of attitude; it's a question of power. Racism gets its power from capitalism. Thus, if you're anti-racist, whether you know it or not, you must be anti-capitalist. The power for racism, the power for sexism, comes from capitalism, not an attitude."

The accumulated power and wealth of the white church must be dismantled before we can begin to seek a faithful way forward.

As well-meaning individuals, we must divest of our wealth and transfer it to the black community. Only then can it become possible to try to lead our churches in this endeavor. I invite you to re-examine our call for Southern Seminary to seek repair for its role in perpetuating slaveholder religion by de-confederizing your campus and by gifting 10% of your endowment to Simmons College.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr.

24 June 2020

Page 3

Yours for the cause of Justice that could lead to God's Peace,

Kelly Kirby, Rector

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church