

Alliance of Baptists Board of Directors Statement on COVID-19

The ancient story and season of Easter are teaching us in this modern moment of pandemic. We are living in a time of apocalypse, an unveiling of the predictable patterns and perils of empire. Empires take and possess, co-opt and kill. Religion – as Jesus learned – does not protect us from the predations of empire and or plagues that come among us. Only love, lived out as resistance to empire and solidarity with our siblings, can save us from meaninglessness in life or death.

The question is, as always, how then shall we live?

We say to ourselves and the world that the Alliance of Baptists commits to

- Raise prophetic voices for liberation and justice
- Act to dismantle systems of abusive power
- Work to eradicate poverty in all forms

Where love is, called to gratitude ...

Before addressing particular matters of concern, we – the Board of the Alliance of Baptists – express our gratitude for health care workers risking their lives to serve at this dire time -- nurses, doctors, cleaning staff, chaplains and other workers in hospitals and health clinics; social workers doing outreach; emergency medical care service providers out in our streets. We are especially grateful for the Alliance of Baptists Chaplains providing comfort and care to patients in hospitals whose families cannot be with them in times of sickness and death, and Pastoral Counselors supporting persons experiencing emotional and spiritual distress.

We are grateful, too, for all the workers serving in the midst of significant risk -- grocery store workers, mail carriers, truck drivers and so many others who enable us to survive while we stay at home. To each and every one of you – THANK YOU!

And hear this clearly: We know you did not choose your line of work to be a hero. Very few of us would choose work that puts our lives – or the lives of those we love – at risk. And so, our love and respect for you does not end with gratitude only, or with isolating you on some pedestal of mythical fearlessness. In solidarity with all of you struggling to work during this time, we commit to fight for you to be fairly paid and safe in your service.

Where injustice is, called to prophetic witness and action ...

The COVID-19 pandemic is crucifying the children of God in populations already oppressed and rendered vulnerable by racism, materialism and militarism. Communities of color facing health disparities before this crisis – because of a lack of access to healthy food, environments and health care – are dying in disproportionate numbers. Older people living in communal settings -- some without the resources for adequate care and hygiene -- are being decimated by

contagion. Incarcerated and immigrant persons in militarized imprisonment settings are being swept by infection or swept out into a society with no intention or capability to provide human support.

COVID-19 reveals historic and ongoing injustices embedded in our society that the Alliance of Baptists has addressed in [previous statements](#) over our 33-year history. Our society gives attention and benefits to the wealthy and privileged in our political life – less than one percent of our population – while exploiting, profiting from and then discarding the rest of us. This profit-at-all-costs mindset continues to be modeled and promulgated from the highest levels of our government and business sectors.

As followers of a Jesus who chose love over all else, we must care for and attend to each other as we clarify our collective wisdom and raise our voices for *all* of God's beloved children and the groaning creation around us.

We, the Alliance Board, today gathered across physical distance but close in spiritual and social solidarity, and inspired by our history, commitments and statements, call out the following:

As a community committed to racial justice, we lament the disparate impact this disease has on persons of color and their communities here in the U.S. because of the structural racism and health disparities that existed long before this disease. We call for preferential funding for public health, community health clinics and health providers in communities of color.

Our commitment to racial justice also means we deplore the racist blaming of Asian and Pacific Islanders persons and communities for this virus. We castigate the true villains -- those who prevented speaking while COVID-19 silently spread in order to protect profits.

Our founding movement included support of women in ministry, and we are appalled that some are using COVID-19 as an excuse to deny women their reproductive rights. We denounce those efforts in the strongest terms: It is evil to use this pandemic as a means to attack and render women even more vulnerable. We further name our concern for women in dangerous household situations and support all efforts and actions to stop intimate partner violence.

Not everyone has been able to safely acquire what they need to stay at home; gender-expansive, trans and rural queer persons have been particularly vulnerable in this time. We see you, and we advocate for your ability to safely acquire what you need to live.

Our government's response to our commonwealth's need has been to serve the wealthy more than the common people. The virus has deeply impacted people working for cash while the political response has helped banks and corporations. We deplore the government's response to leave U.S. citizens out of benefits under the CARES Act if they are part of mixed-status families. We deplore the response that omitted anyone from benefits who pays taxes without a Social Security number, even though many such people pay taxes with Employer Identification

Number (EIN) adding billions of dollars to the U.S. tax system while the corporations that benefited the most from the recent legislation pay little or no taxes.

We will express explicit solidarities in further statements, but in this moment the Board of the Alliance of Baptists wants to invite all individuals and faith communities in the Alliance to *take constructive actions* to shape our response to this health and economic crisis. We can pray, we can share from our resources, and we can provide material support as we are able. Let this call ring out through our communities, through Eastertide and beyond.

- **May we be resurrected from doubt that our actions save lives.**
- **May we be resurrected from apathy that our votes don't count.**
- **May we be resurrected from silence, to more faithfully and consistently name our demands to our elected representatives.**

is to listen ...

We lift up the wisdom regarding COVID-19 from the Poor People's Campaign, Church World Service and National Council of Churches of Christ, including the following concerns for future COVID-19 legislation:

Health Care for All - Free testing must be extended to the 27 million people in the U.S. with no health insurance. Medicaid must be expanded. Rural Hospitals and front line workers must be protected and supported.

Essential Workers and Direct Payments – Paid leave must be provided to all (48 % were left out of the recent legislation). Food stamps, unemployment benefits, and housing assistance must be expanded to cover all persons living in the U.S.

Debt relief – Permanent debt relief for student, medical or housing debt must be included.

Immigration– Health and economic benefits must be extended to all, including immigrants and their families. Deportations must stop and ICE raids must stop so that undocumented people can seek health care or public assistance with the fear it might jeopardize their chances for improving their legal status.

Incarceration – With the highest incarceration rate in the world we must decarcerate more people from crowded and unsafe conditions where social distancing is not possible.

Ending sanctions of Iran, Venezuela, and the embargo on Cuba- In the interest of humanitarian values, the sanctions must end so that needed medical supplies and equipment can flow freely between nations.

We lift up the wisdom of our U.S. Based Partners regarding:

Farm workers -- We note that farmworkers, who continue to work in the fields providing us with life-giving substance are some of the most vulnerable economically and were not included in previous legislation. They must be provided with economic security but as important, at this time of the pandemic, they must be provided with access to important hygiene and safety measures immediately.

Low wage workers -- As city, state, and national ordinances require us to stay home during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many workers for whom staying home is not an option. Day laborers and low-wage workers are especially vulnerable to the threat of the virus as they seek

work. Many of them do not have access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). These workers must be included in governmental support, both economic and with appropriate protection.

Migrants and refugees – Many people live in refugee camps after having fled violence. They have nowhere else to go. These communities are at great risk of a COVID-19 infection. We call on the world to respond to the call from health officials to provide care and support to prevent massive outbreaks in these camps.

Immigrants in the U.S. – We join our sister organizations at Church World Service in calling for: 1) a halt of deportations to halt the spread of the virus; 2) a release of all detained children and families given the previous deaths of children while in U.S. custody; 3) a release of all adults in detention in the interest of public health; 4) assurance that public health, including free medical tests and health care, is available to all members of our communities regardless of citizenship or insurance status; 5) assurance that every incarcerated or detained person has access to proper hygiene products and free calls to lawyers, friends and family members while stay-at-home orders are in effect; and, 6) end the suspension of entry to asylum seekers and uphold U.S. and international law to protect people fleeing violence and persecution.

Currently Incarcerated Persons -- We call for all who are incarcerated and at more risk of exposure to COVID-19 to be released. We also call for those who are near their release-date or being held without charge for lack of ability to pay their bond or bail fees to be de-carcerated immediately.

Climate Crisis – We are concerned that this Administration had rolled-back regulations XXX during this crisis while we note that XXX has contributed to the easier spread of pandemics.

We urge future legislation include reductions in the pollution (e.g. super pollutants) that contribute to underlying health conditions that put whole communities at greater risk for pandemics such as COVID-19. We also call for: 1) Assistance to persons with underlying health conditions such as asthma and other respiratory conditions in communities disproportionately impacted by pollution; 2) Transition away from fossil fuel dependence and expansion of clean energy; and, 3) Investment in sustainable infrastructure in low-income communities and communities of color such as clean water, clean air and public transportation to address environmental degradation and reduce economic disparities.

We lift up the wisdom of our international partners regarding the dire need that exists in so much of this world. We advocate for healthy lives for our partners in Cuba, Brazil, Zimbabwe and many other places around the world.

- For Cuba - the immoral embargo must end NOW. The Alliance of Baptists has called for this repeatedly over XX years. The embargo is immoral, against international law and in this

moment, it is even counter-productive to international solidarity and global health.

CONGRESS, END THE EMBARGO NOW!! For our Alliance congregations that have a special relationship with a sister church in Cuba, we plead with you to contact your members of Congress to make this a personal and direct request.

- For Brazil - as the Alliance of Baptists joined with others in April 2020, we again call on the Brazil president to repent and stop risking the lives of Brazilian citizens by willfully spreading misinformation on the pandemic and follow public health measures to stop the spread of the disease. In particular, the Alliance has sister churches in Brazil which minister with poor people in the favelas. We urge the US Administration and the US Congress to pressure the president of Brazil to repent of and change his shameful actions.
- For Zimbabwe – Prior to the pandemic, Zimbabwe was already suffering from a drought due in large part to effects from the climate crisis. Zimbabweans were crossing into neighboring countries to purchase food. With COVID-19, the borders are closed making food a tremendous challenge for many people. In addition, doctors and nurses in Zimbabwe went on strike because they did not have protective gear, and they feared for themselves and their families. They needed personal protective equipment to go back to work. We support collaboration between the World Health Organization and other humanitarian agencies to airlift donated PPE to Zimbabwe in coordination with The Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights, and AFSC Zimbabwe who will ensure transparency and distribution of the PPEs. Alliance congregations and members are encouraged to [donate](#) to this effort.
- For Palestine - Consistent with years of Alliance advocacy for justice for Palestinians and Israelis, we ask that the Administration and the Congress condition all financial assistance to Israel to ensure that the settlement activity halt so that Israel and Palestine can focus on addressing the health crisis, and that Israel stop arresting and detaining Palestinian children with military personnel. Finally, the U.S. should restore all funds cut from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, so that UNRWA can assist the people of Gaza and the occupied West Bank with response to COVID-19.

Alliance Must Take Action

But this time calls for more. . . . As our former Board Member, Laura Mayo said so clearly in a [recent column](#) in Baptist News Global,

This is a matter of justice. Those of us who can stay at home must. We must demand that our government provide adequate protective equipment and other resources for medical personnel. We must demand that our government distribute life-saving resources based on need, not on favoritism. We must demand a just response to the crisis of the now unemployed and underemployed. These days are changing us. We must decide what kind of realm

we want to create. . . . Especially for those of us who seek to follow Rabbi Jesus,
now is exactly the time to be political.