

Faith leaders call for unity, racial equality during New Albany prayer service

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NEW ALBANY — Leaders representing different Floyd County denominations and churches came together Saturday night to express a message of solidarity when it comes to social and racial justice.

Racism is a real threat, and the faith community has a role to play in pushing for equality and fair treatment of all of “God’s children” said the various pastors and preachers during a prayer service at Town Clock Church.



Pastor Allen Colwell of St. John United Presbyterian Church reads a statement signed by several churches during Saturday’s prayer service at Town Clock Church in New Albany.

- Daniel Suddeath | News and Tribune

“The church has been silent. We have not been in the right place,” said Rev. Leroy Marshall of Second Baptist Church.

“This community and this assembly is long overdue. We should have done this a long time ago. And for us to be here together is actually answered prayer. We prayed for this day. We’ve seen God work in mysterious ways to put this day together. And for you to be here today is not happenstance.”



Members of the crowd listen during Saturday’s prayer service for racial justice at Town Clock Church in New Albany.

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The prayer service for racial justice was organized by several local churches in response to civil unrest that has been growing since the death of George Floyd in Minnesota on Memorial Day. The idea for the show of unity grew out of a Cardinal Ritter Birthplace Foundation board meeting and resulted in 15 Floyd County churches signing a declaration calling for racial justice.

Pastor Allen Colwell of St. John United Presbyterian Church helped lead the organization of the event, and he read that signed statement to a socially-distanced crowd of about 100 people who gathered on the lawn of Town Clock Church for the service.

“As the church we have the resolve to reclaim the witness that no person should be treated as lesser or other, and the lessons of the past should be remembered and repented so as not to be repeated,” Colwell said.

He added that the churches believe that “all persons were created in God’s image” and “should be treated with divine reverence and affection.”

“All are children of God, and as such, are part of one family,” Colwell said.

One of the focal points of the service was that the faith community has an important role in combating racism and social injustice. Rev. John Manzo of St. Mark’s United Church of Christ offered a prayer lamenting past mistakes and recognizing “patterns of privilege and systems of discrimination.”

Rev. Karen McDonald Smith of Mt. Tabor Presbyterian Church said that “scripture tells us that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

“Sometimes our sins are intentional and explicit but at other times we may not recognize our implicit sins,” she said.

In her prayer, she said that the church is complicit through inaction when it ignores injustice. Smith added that society needs to evaluate its priorities.

“We have valued property and profits over the lives of people. Courts and public safety agencies enforce unequal justice. Struggling workers are displaced and pushed into homelessness. Public functions for the common good are privatized and de-regulated.

The cries of those who grieve are muffled. Victims are asked to forgive and reconcile even before their wounds can begin to heal,” she said.

Organizers of the event said it will not be the last service of unity, and they asked that more local churches take part in future efforts.

New Albany Mayor Jeff Gahan attended the ceremony as did Shawn Carruthers, president of the Floyd County Commissioners.

Marshall drew laughter from the crowd when he said he was glad to see so many faith leaders in attendance, as he added he would have tracked them down if they hadn't attended.

“Tonight, this is not the end, this is the beginning, and thank God that you showed up tonight,” he said.