



In Response to L. Brooks Patterson's Racially Harmful Remarks (August 13, 2018)

As a white person leading a 77-year-old human relations and racial justice organization, I am mindful of the fact that I will be spending the rest of my life examining the consequences of my privilege and complicity with structural racism. As one doing "the work," I am deeply troubled by L. Brooks Patterson's most recent series of remarks targeting Detroit business leaders and his comment about joining the Ku Klux Klan rather than the business leaders. At a time when hate toward people who are not white or white Christians nears record levels, aligning with the Klan is harmful to our black neighbors and neighbors of color, and problematic for efforts to unite our region across that which divides us. Our organization formed nationally in 1927 when the Klan also targeted Catholic immigrants and Jews, who today find themselves experiencing near record levels of anti-Semitism. This is truly a matter of life and death, with black folk being shot simply because of the color of their skin or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Growing up in a racially homogeneous community, listening to messages of white superiority, my path to awareness and becoming part of the solution has in large part been accomplished by years of humbly listening to my black neighbors and coworkers. Through listening, I have learned about the consequences of our racialized history, the continued life expectancy disparities between blacks and whites, and the many vexing social, health, and wealth inequities connected to present-day spatial racism. Racial awareness and healing takes work, lots of work. Disingenuous apologies and explaining away one's harmful remarks only further offend our black neighbors and insult the intelligence of the many open-minded people in our region.

I trust the people of Oakland County want to live in a community where difference is honored and efforts are made to help foster inclusion instead of a continued spewing of hateful rhetoric. At the Michigan Roundtable, we believe all people can make progress in this area but must be willing to turn toward the racial other with humility and an open mind and heart. We provide diversity training for organizations, leadership development for young people, public spaces for difficult conversations, and opportunities to learn about our region's racialized history which has left many "relationally challenged" folk needing to speak less and listen more. With that in mind, I encourage the groups of citizens and community leaders who are meeting in communities throughout Oakland county to discuss this matter as it simply cannot be excused away or left unaddressed.

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