

December 1, 2006

Dear Mayor Bloomberg,

The members of the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches join with you and other New Yorkers in the pursuit of truth, justice and peace in the aftermath of the NYPD shootings of three unarmed young men of color last week in Queens. We appreciate your nuanced response, especially your naming of the NYPD's use of deadly force in this tragedy as "inexplicable" and "unacceptable."

We represent sixteen congregations deeply rooted in diverse communities in Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, and Manhattan. In addition to our regular services of worship and scripture study, we offer Head Start and Early Childhood Education, peace and justice education, classes in English as a Second Language, immigration services, food distribution programs, community dialogue projects, building projects that create low income housing, and close collaboration with local community organizations. In addition, we participate in our national denomination (Mennonite Church USA) in structures and programs that strengthen the integrity and impact of our presence in the city.

As members of "historic peace churches," we deplore the killing of young men of any race, creed, or heritage. We deplore the anguish created for the families of these young men on the eve of an anticipated celebration that will, now and for always, remind them of the horror of deadly force. And we deplore the operation of a system in which "collateral damage" inequitably comprises young men of color.

Some of our congregations have already taken steps to address police violence in our communities. While not victims of such high-profile incidents as the shootings in Queens, some of our members, along with our neighbors, have suffered injustice and indignity at the hands of the NYPD. We are acutely aware of the impact of these encounters on the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

We believe these shootings are nested in a much broader institutional and systemic racism in the form of police violence involving unarmed young men of color across our nation. We believe this same institutional and systemic racism is reflected also in the use of violence against other groups: women, Latinos, Native Americans, gays, and Asians, to name a few.

We believe this tragic incident holds a learning opportunity for us as a city uniquely equipped and positioned to address racism and systemic violence as well as to promote healing for the victims, their family members, and their traumatized communities. We believe that any trauma can be transformational if the appropriate will and skill are utilized in shaping the response, witness the response of the Amish community to the shootings of their children.

As mayor, as leader of this city and of its response to the shootings of these young men, you can help us find the deeper truths waiting beyond the edges of an approach that says we are "guided only by law and facts."

We call on you to demonstrate positive leadership in looking beyond "law and facts" for root causes of this event, both in the immediate situation and in its historical and social context. We call for humility in the search for truth, and the willingness to accept responsibility for errors and injurious police practices. We call for a full investigation into the incident from outside the NYPD. And we call for new efforts to repair hostile relationships between the NYPD and communities of color.

As peace churches, we promote peace with justice. We stand ready to work with you in your efforts to promote peace and justice for all New Yorkers. Specifically, we can muster our professional resources to provide training in anti-racism, training in trauma awareness and resilience, and training in peace-building.

We would like to meet with you as early as possible to explore how we can best serve you and our fellow New Yorkers in bringing about healing for the victims and their families and their communities, as well as systemic forces that perpetuate violence and hostility.

Thank you for your positive leadership. We look forward to working with you to restore our city.

Sincerely,

Monroe Yoder
Bishops Council

Michael Banks
Bishops Council

Nicolas Angustia
Bishops Council

Sandra Perez
Executive Secretary

Ruth Wenger
Council Moderator