



The mission of Idlewild is to pursue, personify, and practice, as Presbyterians, the Good News of reconciliation and salvation in Christ, through worship, formation, nurture, and outreach. As a congregation in midtown Memphis, Idlewild took an active role in the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. Since then, our clergy and congregation have sustained a variety of initiatives to serve the needs of greater Memphis, with a particular focus on the needs of the Black community. It is in our DNA to stand with those who are suffering. Not only is it in *our* DNA, but it is fundamental to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

After a morning Adult Forum with Perre Magness, June 7, 2020, I discovered that a prior associate, the Reverend Dr. Bill Alridge, resigned under pressure from Idlewild elders for his public advocacy for the striking garbage workers. His work was with Memphis Presbytery's Christian's Relation Committee and included a letter written on Idlewild stationery. The Session minutes reveal systemic racism at play at Idlewild. I lament this learning of a difficult part of our history.

We affirm that Jesus is Lord. Jesus modeled going to the edges of society, to the margins, to practice his ministry. He intentionally went to places of suffering and pain, to places of exclusion, and advocated for the least of these. Jesus often lifted up specific groups of people – women, the poor, lepers – because they had been deemed inherently less worthy by the dominant culture, and objectified by the religious. By lifting them up, Jesus was stating that each is a beloved child of God and a part of God's family.

Later, the Apostle Paul would write that when one member of Christ's body suffers, all suffer together. For centuries, dominant cultures sought to avoid this biblical truth by simply creating social structures that made it easy to pretend that "others" were not actually part of *their* body; problem solved. This is the embodiment of systemic racism.

It is Christ's model we follow when we place a sign in our churchyard that reads, "Black Lives Matter." Black lives matter to God. Black lives matter to our church. In saying so, we lay claim that we are all part of one body. This happens to be one time and place where words can speak as loudly as actions.

Our sign, Black Lives Matter, is an endorsement that Idlewild Presbyterian Church affirms the dignity, beauty, gifts, and wholehearted lives of Black people.

Our sign, Black Lives Matter, is a recognition that Black lives are suffering and when one member of the body of Christ suffers, the whole body suffers.

Our sign, Black Lives Matter, is a commitment to listen with Black brothers and sisters, to confess the sin of systemic racism, to study racial inequality, and to act upon our complicity in such matters.

