

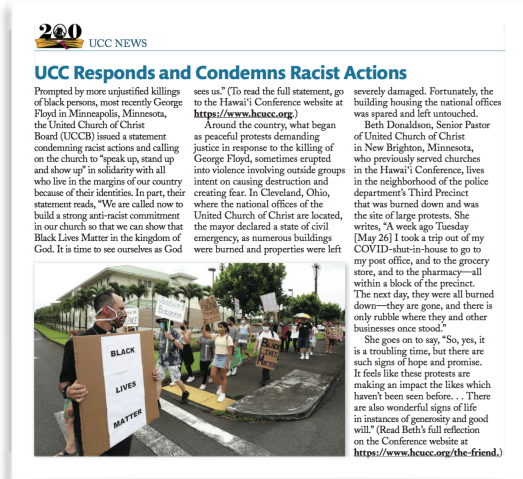
## Reflection by Beth Donaldson

June 2020

Things here are indeed very challenging. As it turns out, I live in the neighborhood of the police Third Precinct that was burned down and the site of the main protests on the first few night. A week ago Tuesday I took a trip out of my covid-shut-in-housed to go to my post office, and to the grocery store, and to the pharmacy - all within a block of the precinct. The next day, they were all burned down - they are gone, and there is only rubble where they and other businesses once stood. There have been 90 arson reports in the cities in the last week. It was quite overwhelming when the National Guard was called in, with helicopters circling over head all night, and small blasts (mostly firecrackers) heard every few minutes. We have now returned to relative calm, though thankfully the protests are continuing, not wanting to let things return to "normal", since "normal" was not actually just.

One confusing aspect of what happened last week was the presence of outside groups that came in to stir up violence. It is believed by most authorities that the initial disruption of the peaceful protests was instigated by literal "rabble rousers", mostly from white supremacist groups (ironically) in an effort to make it look like the protesters were dangerous and to be feared. It is also clear that with that onset, some of the protesters did respond with violence out of anger and frustration, and though I don't condone violence and destruction, I can certainly understand how one might become caught up in it as a response to a lifetime of oppression. However, the areas that were destroyed in the violence are all mostly communities of color - African American, Latino, and Asian American. It makes no sense that rallies in support of Black Lives Matter and resistance to police brutality would destroy their own communities.

So, yes, it is a troubling time, but there are such signs of hope and promise. It feels like these protests are making an impact the likes which haven't been seen before. Powerful discussions are being had between the activists and the powers that be. Many levels of our community have actually cut ties with the local police, and there are strong movements to both dismantle the police all together, and/or deeply reform them. As you can imagine, there is not unanimity about this and there is also great resistance to this level of reform. But there IS movement. And the Governor of Minnesota has made it very clear that it is time for significant change. Because of all of this, and other actions people are taking, it is my hope and belief that we have hit a tipping point, and though we have a long road ahead to dismantle the racism that has been a part of this society for centuries, I think we are taking some good initial steps.



Beth was quoted in the June 2020 issue of *The Friend*.

There are also wonderful signs of life in instances of generosity and good will: A school in my neighborhood asked for help in the form of 86 bags of groceries for families in the community who now do not have a grocery store nearby, and thanks to social media, received over 5000! They weren't able to handle it all and have been able to spread the kindness far beyond their original plan. As I waited in traffic to help out, I saw people with wagons and wheel barrows, on bikes, walking, and in cars, bringing loads of supplies and food! When I got to the school they had so many bags, they filled in all grassy areas around the building completely. And while some may say this kind of giving is just a "band-aid" on a gushing wound, I see it as an expression of people really wanting to do something to help - people recognizing the pain and suffering of others and showing up in the best ways they know how.

It has also been heartening to be gathered with my neighbors as we (along with most neighborhoods in the cities), organized night watches, after reports of incendiary devices being deposited in residential areas, apparently in preparation of more arson. Though it was scary to go through the process of putting away our trash cans, lawn furniture and anything else that could be burned or thrown, getting our hoses and fire-extinguishers ready, and having a bag packed in case of the need to leave the house quickly, it's been wonderful to connect with neighbors I otherwise would not have met, and to be able to communicate with them now easily through texting, etc. As I sat on my front porch for my first two-hour watch, even though the sounds of helicopters and other vehicles hummed all around creating anxiety in my soul, the night was also made beautiful by the singing of birds, the sweetness of lilacs in the air, and the knowledge of being part of a community desiring to make a difference. That same group is now sending around resources and notices of opportunities (films, books, workshops, service opportunities) to learn more about racism and white privilege, alerting each other to further actions, and keeping the efforts alive to help create change. This is really different than anything I've experienced before, because it's not a few activists, or my church community, or a special interest group - it's my neighborhood block, and almost every house is represented in this effort. It's powerful to experience. Perhaps the "beloved community" envisioned by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King is possible. It's worth trying!