

SBC leaders call for prayer after George Floyd's death

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MINNEAPOLIS (BP)—Southern Baptist leaders lamented the death of George Floyd, an African American who died in Minneapolis after a white police officer used a knee to pin his neck to the pavement for several minutes.



Marshal Ausberry, first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention

“I am disturbed, brokenhearted and deeply grieved when I see and read that another black man’s sacred life has been unjustly snuffed out,” said Marshal Ausberry, SBC first vice president and president of the National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention. “The life of George Floyd was ended by those charged to protect and serve. They became judge, jury and executioner.”

In a video taken by a bystander May 25, an officer later identified as Derek Chauvin pressed his knee into the back of Floyd’s neck as Floyd lay face down on the pavement. “I cannot breathe,” Floyd is heard saying several

times as the pressure continues. After seven minutes in the hold, Floyd is limp and unresponsive. He is placed on a stretcher and put into an ambulance.

Ronnie Floyd, president of the SBC Executive Committee, tweeted that he was “astounded by what happened in Minneapolis relating to the death of George Floyd. ... This is ungodly and inhumane.”

The video begins with Floyd pinned by the officer. The Minneapolis Police Department said officers were responding to a report of forgery and that Floyd “physically resisted officers.” Four police officers involved in the arrest were fired after the incident. Chauvin was arrested and charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter.

As Floyd’s death has sparked national outrage, it inflamed tensions locally. Thousands of protestors marched May 26 from the scene of the incident to a Minneapolis police precinct station. Some chanted “I can’t breathe.”

According to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, the march was peaceful, but tension grew when the protestors arrived at the precinct station, where windows and a police car were damaged. Police wearing riot gear fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Protestors threw rocks and water bottles.

‘A striking racial problem in America’

Chris Reinertson, director of missions for the Twin Cities Baptist Association in Bloomington, Minn., said local pastors are leading their congregations in prayer and discussing ways to respond. Reinertson pastors Southtown Baptist Church.

“It’s so fresh, and of course, we want to help people connect with Christ, and that deals with all of the situation at hand,” Reinertson said. “Don’t ever think I’m saying this is a fresh racial issue. I’m saying this African

American man, George Floyd, being arrested and then the white police officer putting his knee right on his neck — that specific incident. I’m not talking, ‘Oh, this is the first incidence of racism.’”

Ausberry, who is pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax, Va., pointed out the sanctity of human life.

“Ultimately, the lack of respect for the dignity and sacredness of all human life is sin,” he said. “If we hold that all human life is sacred, then why is it that black and brown lives are ended way before their time? The facts speak for themselves. There is a striking racial problem in America.”

SBC President J.D. Greear noted several black Americans who have died tragically in 2020, including Ahmaud Arbery, who was pursued and killed by two armed civilians as he jogged on a neighborhood street, and Breonna Taylor, who was killed in her own bed by police who had entered her home in the middle of the night while searching for someone else.



“#ahmaudarbery, #breonnataylor, #georgefloyd - Hashtags that represent people made in God’s image — souls tragically lost,” Greear [tweeted](#). “These tragedies move us to lament ongoing racial tension and the severe and lasting damage racism has caused in our

country.”

In a subsequent [tweet](#), Greear added: “If we want to join in the gospel movement against racism and toward equality, our struggle must continue well after these hashtags fade. Lord, help us search our own hearts and commit to bear one another’s burden.”

Greear went on to co-author a public statement with Jamie Dew, president

of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, that was signed by all SBC officers, entity heads and state convention executive directors.

“We grieve to see examples of the misuse of force and call for these issues to be addressed with speed and justice,” the statement read. “While we thank God for our law enforcement officers that bravely risk their lives for the sake of others and uphold justice with dignity and integrity, we also lament when some law enforcement officers misuse their authority and bring unnecessary harm on the people they are called to protect. We further grieve with our minority brothers and sisters in the wake of George Floyd’s death, pray for his family and friends and greatly desire to see the misuse of force and any inequitable distributions of justice come to an end.”

Read the entire statement [here](#).

EDITOR’S NOTE: On June 4, three former police officers were charged with aiding and abetting murder in the death of George Floyd, and the charge against Derek Chauvin, who pinned his knee to Floyd’s neck, was upgraded to second-degree murder.