

January 31, 2022

Dear U.S. Attorney in the Western Pa. District Cindy K. Chung, Pa. Attorney General Josh Shapiro, and Venango County District Attorney D. Shawn White,

An acquaintance of Peter Spencer described him saying, "Peter always had a smile on his face, ... joy in his spirit, and the melody of his island accent was as charming as anything I've heard. ... I will never forget him. He was just that kind of human being."

The last week of December 2021, we learned that Peter Spencer, a 29-year-old Jamaican immigrant and a Pittsburgh, PA resident, had been brutally murdered while visiting a former co-worker in Venango County for a hunting excursion on December 11<sup>th</sup>. According to the reports we have read, Peter was shot nine times in what appears to be a modern-day lynching of a Black man.

It is our understanding that:

- An autopsy was performed in Venango County but the findings have not been released to the public or to Dr. Cyril Wecht who is investigating this murder at the request of the family.
- It has been over seven weeks since this horrendous murder occurred, and no one has been charged.
- The Pennsylvania State Police Heritage Affairs Team has been notified about the case.
- Little information has been shared by law enforcement since December 12<sup>th</sup> about this case, leading to speculation about how the investigation is being handled, that the family and the community may never know facts surrounding the case, and that justice may not be forthcoming.

As members and leaders of communities of faith, faith-based groups, and community organizations in the Pittsburgh area and Northwestern Pennsylvania, we are distraught by this horrific death of another Black man from our region. We are writing today in support of the Spencer family, the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP), and others who are seeking justice in the death of Peter Spencer.

Specifically, we are asking that:

- The Venango County District Attorney immediately refer this case to PA Attorney General Josh Shapiro.
- The Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, the FBI, and the Office of the United States Attorney in Western Pennsylvania, either collaboratively or independently, conduct a thorough, transparent, and expedited investigation of this case to ensure justice is forthcoming.
- The Venango County Coroner immediately release the results of the autopsy and forward all photos and relevant information to Dr. Cyril Wecht.
- The Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office and the Office of the United States Attorney in Western Pennsylvania, either collaboratively or independently, conduct an investigation of the handling of this case by law enforcement to identify appropriate procedural and systemic changes.
- The jurisdiction(s) which will be handling aspects of this case on an on-going basis be announced, including the names of the senior person responsible for the case in each jurisdiction.

- Periodic public briefings be conducted by the appropriate law enforcement jurisdictions to inform the public of general progress, instead of continuing to operate under a shroud of secrecy.
- Long overdue charges be brought against those responsible for the murder of Peter Spencer so that they can be prosecuted for what appears to be a hate-based crime, and
- Processes be developed for future cases such as this in Pennsylvania for:
  - Rapidly identifying and deploying an appropriate cross jurisdictional law enforcement team, and
  - Effectively providing updates to the family and the public.

To provide more information, we have attached two documents to this letter:

- The December 26<sup>th</sup> letter sent by B-PEP regarding this case.
- The January 19<sup>th</sup> press release issued by the family's attorney.

If you have questions about this letter, please feel free to contact either Tracy Merrick ([tracyrm@aol.com](mailto:tracyrm@aol.com)), a member of the First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh, or Mary Parish ([maryjparish@gmail.com](mailto:maryjparish@gmail.com)), a member of Pittsburgh friends Meeting (Quakers).

Sincerely,

First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh:

Pastor and staff: Rev. Tracy Cox, Rev. Anais Hussian, Joseph D Smith,  
 Leadership Council: Stefan Fremngen, chairperson, Mary M Brand, John Detwiler,  
 Phil Gibbons, Becky Hynek, Karen Jacobs, David Krackhardt, Sharon McCarthy,  
 Karen Merrick, Tracy Merrick, Bob Normann, Susan Petersen, Joshua Popson,  
 Nancy Ross, Lee Shaw, Fred Watts, Glenna Wilson  
 Members: Bob Bell, Sue Bell, Ron Brand, Neala Dawson, Claudia Detwiler, Jeff Miller,  
 Olivia Migliori, Lisa Morse, Kim Normann, Betsy Shaw, Sam Procter

Pittsburgh Friends Meeting (Quakers), Working Group Against Racism: Mary J. Parish, convener,  
 Alan Guenther, Joe Guthrie, Wanda Guthrie

Pittsburgh District (United Methodist) Antiracism Team: Rev Don Blinn, co-convener,  
 Rev. Thomas Barnicott, Jane Black, Lyndall Huggler, Tracy Merrick, Nancy Ross,  
 Rev. Jeffrey D Sterling,

Wrestling with Racism Team sponsored by Warren United Methodist Church and First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh: Rev Don Blinn, convener, Fran Blakley, Tony Brown, LaVerne Diggs,  
 Karen Merrick, Tracy Merrick, Jeff Miller, Olivia Migliori, Lisa Morse, Sue Oerkvitz, Nancy Ross,  
 Betsy Shaw, Lee Shaw, Jean Snyder

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church pastor: Rev. Dr. Dale B Snyder

Calvary United Methodist Church pastors: Rev. Larry Homitsky and Rev. Kelly Smith

Council on America Islamic Relation (CAIR) Pittsburgh and Christine Mohamed

East Liberty Presbyterian Church and Rev. Dr. Randall Bush, Senior Pastor

Erie-Meadville District of the United Methodist Church:  
District Superintendent: Rev Dennis Swineford

Franklin District of the United Methodist Church:  
District Superintendent: Rev. Jodie Smith  
Pastors: Rev. Les Hutchins, Pastor Dan Miller, Rev. Megan Berkebile

Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community and Rev Erin Jones, Pastor

Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church member: Louanne Baily

Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and ANSWER Coalition: Kit Baril, community organizer

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (P.I.I.N.) and members: Ronnie Cook, Bob Maddock

Pittsburgh Mennonite Church, Peace and Justice Commission: Delo Blough, Ryan Johnson-Evers,  
Paola Scommegna, Phoebe Sharp

Racial Justice Task Force members, First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh: Kirsti Adkins, Mary Denison,  
Eleanor B. Emmons, Linda Fleming, Margaret Fuhrman, Denice Galpern, Joan Harvey,  
John C. Hooper, Barbara Litt, Kathy Miller, Margaret Noether, Susan Oerkvitz, Jean Schmidt,  
Kate Snow, Holly Stewart, Rebecca Studer, Sonia Wellington, Sandra Woolley

Rodef Shalom, Pittsburgh member: Gary Sorok

Stone United Methodist Church, Meadville, PA:  
Pastor: Rev. Sarah Roncolato  
Members: Jan Emblidge, Church Council, Gloria Shields

Temple Sinai Emeritus Rabbi: Jamie Gibson

Warren United Methodist Church:  
Pastor: Rev. Raphael Koikoi  
Members: Fran Blakley, Ira Ross

Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church:  
Assistant to the Bishop: Rev. Renee Mikell

Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church Retired Clergy:  
Rev. Donna Anderson, Rev. Thomas Barnicott, Rev. Dr. David L. Morse, Rev. Robert Wilson  
Rev. Dr. Jane Ellen Nickell, Chaplain Emerita, Allegheny College

Rev. Richard Freeman

Rev. Dr. Kate R. Walker

CC: U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland, Gov. Tom Wolf, and Lt. Gov. John Fetterman