

# Listening to the Concerns of 'Black Lives Matter' Shows Pro-Lifers Care

Whether you love them, hate them or find yourself indifferent, the Black Lives Matter movement is at the center of the national discussion on race.

The death of an unarmed black man, Terence Crutcher, at the hands of a Tulsa police officer stunned many in our nation. That same week, the shooting of an armed black man, Keith Lamont Scott, sparked protests and rioting in Charlotte.

These followed a series of shocking deaths over this summer, particularly the shooting of Philando Castile while his girlfriend Diamond Reynolds looked on from the passenger seat.

Most recently, an unarmed man was killed by police in San Diego—after his sister called officers to help him because of his mental state. Although we don't know all of the details of these cases, we can still discuss how we should respond to them. Specifically, how should pro-life advocates respond to cases of police brutality and growing frustrations in the African-American community?

When many discuss police brutality, I've heard fellow pro-life advocates shift the dialogue towards the high abortion rates in the black community. "If black lives matter, why are you aborting your children?" they will ask. The underlying message given is that it's hypocritical for the black community to care about men and women dying from police brutality, if they don't care about those in their community who choose abortion.

It is true that statistics show there are more black pre-born children who die from abortion than black people who die at the hands of the police. However, those are two separate

issues—both deserving of attention, without being pitted against one another.

I've read countless comments about police brutality where abortion statistics in the black community are brought up solely to make a point that there's a bigger issue worth being concerned about. While the issue of abortion is surely 'bigger' in numbers, it doesn't negate the fact that any life lost through violence is a tragedy.

### **#BlackLivesMatter Should Be a Pro-Life Message**

I remember when #BlackLivesMatter first began surfacing after the death of Trayvon Martin. When I saw the hashtag, it spoke a powerful truth to me. The message that black lives are valuable is one I identify with and believe in.

I have worked for over a decade to let my people know how high abortion rates have devastated our communities. I've educated others on the racist history of Planned Parenthood and how its founder Margaret Sanger sought to decrease the black population.

Black Lives Matter activists were communicating a truth I believed in—but for a different purpose. I remember feeling conflicted that I couldn't reconcile our different messages around a mutual desire to preserve and value life. I too was grieving over the tragic deaths of Eric Garner, Sandra Bland and 12-year-old Tamir Rice, among others.

At the same time, I was broken over the 16 million black children in the womb aborted since Roe v. Wade became legal. It's why I spent years praying at the Supreme Court for innocent lives, and it's why today I serve in a local pregnancy resource center.

I wanted to join the causes and the messages together. I longed to see my black brothers and sisters take to the streets in protest for the lives of babies as well as those

impacted by police brutality. That desire to fight for life in every stage is good and right.

However, what became problematic was the growing judgment in my heart towards those in the black community who were passionate over lives lost through police brutality—but seemingly apathetic towards preborn lives lost through abortion.

### **Both Movements Seek to Protect Life**

As the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement continued, I began to listen more attentively. Listening to another person doesn't mean I must agree with everything they say or do. Listening is an act of love—an opportunity to be humble and hear the heart cry of another. As I listened to both friends and strangers, I heard stories of discrimination, decades of pain and legitimate fears.

In the process of listening, a thought came to me. I realized I wanted my people, the black community, to hear my pain over the children dead through abortion—but they wanted others to hear their pain over the loss of their own sons and daughters through police brutality. That powerful realization led me to understand, in a deeper way, that the black community as a collective group is mourning.

This new level of empathy inspired me to commit to speaking to my people with compassion and hope. I made a decision to look at police brutality and abortion as separate issues, both deserving of attention. I challenged myself to not interject abortion into the discussion on police brutality in ways that would serve to accuse or shame the black community.

This does not mean I am unaware of the reality that Black Lives Matter as an organization supports abortion rights. For example, BLM leaders partner with the pro-choice women of color organization Sister Song. This is one of many planks in the BLM platform that clearly I do not support.

## **How to Empathize With a Cause That's Pro-Choice**

That puts me in an interesting place. How can I show empathy to people in a movement when I know they are advocating for something I disagree with? I've found the best way to do that is to see the movement for what it is: a broad group of people with varying levels of involvement, all trying to raise awareness and bring action mainly concerning the issue of police brutality.

The person who leads a BLM march and the teenager who tweets #BlackLivesMatter are different people, with unique ambitions, but they have a common goal of wanting to protect black lives. Black Lives Matter as an organization has initiatives and an agenda. By acknowledging black lives are important, I do not co-sign on to every action members of the Black Lives Matter movement take. I do not agree with every cause they support.

Rather, I look at the people in BLM as individuals in a larger movement—and I show solidarity to them in their cause for justice. I do not agree with every tactic or protest on behalf of BLM, but I believe police brutality is real and should be addressed.

I am glad BLM is having this dialogue and bringing it to the national stage. Perhaps through open lines of communication, we can all work together to bring positive change.

## **Pro-Lifers Shouldn't Ignore Police Brutality**

What does that mean on a practical level? For starters, as a pro-life advocate who cares for the black community, I've come to believe that using certain questions as a knee-jerk response—"If black lives matter, then why are your abortion rates so high?"—is hurtful to the very people I want to reach. It deflects from the issue BLM is fighting and states that if black people don't care about lives in the womb as much as adult lives, then they don't care at all.

The reality is that many in the black community do care about the lives of the pre-born and the lives of adults dying in the streets. The majority of my black friends are strongly pro-life. Even they will admit to feeling isolated amongst white pro-lifers when issues of race are discussed.

Black leaders who've united with the movement for life are at times rejected and accused when they speak out against racism. They are told to move past it, to "not see color" and to focus on more important issues like abortion—even when they already are—or "black on black" crime.

As for the many who care about people dying from police brutality, but not from abortion? Well, those are the ones the pro-life movement is called to reach. As the BLM movement has rallied people, we as pro-life advocates must continue to use our creativity, passion and message of truth to do the same. Instead of accusing the black community of not caring, let's work to help more of them see abortion as a human rights issue worth caring about.

How do we bridge the divide? How do we all, regardless of race, stand for the pro-life message and communicate it to the black community with love?

### **Pro-Lifers Must Display Compassion and Care**

First, we must seek to truly listen and care. We must refuse to use tools of shame and instead uplift people with hope. Many in black America already know the issues that ravage our communities. They are not looking for a lecture, but desiring compassionate people who will work for change.

I work with women daily who make decisions to parent, place their child for adoption or abort. I've never had an abortion-vulnerable women talk about politics, race or movements while making a pregnancy decision. Instead, they share their financial issues, fear of abandonment from a partner and need for practical resources.

Certainly, discussions of movements and politics matter. And I'm also not advocating that we don't discuss abortion with the black community. These discussions are vital, but how we have them and when we have them is important. If we want others to listen to our concerns, we must genuinely listen to theirs as well.

I believe as the black community continues to see the pro-life movement act in ways that show we care about them as people, then they will believe we care about the fate of their children. Black lives do matter—from the pre-born child to the elderly person. As pro-life advocates, we of all people should be making that message clear by the way we care for others.

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