

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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A Word of Encouragement to Our Children

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Let me begin by saying that this column is generally read by adults. It is my hope that after you read this, you will share its contents with young people whose lives are touched by you.

I am a sixty-two-year old, southern, African American man. Schools were segregated when I was in what is now called elementary and middle school. I did not have equipment, supplies or anything else like some of the other schools around me. I could go on about the inequities, but I do not think I need to. In spite of that, I was able to excel. After ten years in the all Black school, I transferred to the previously all white high school. I graduated from High School and college. Later, I graduated from a well known predominately white university with a Master's Degree.

There are serious injustices in the educational systems that continue to exist today. It is sad that in almost fifty years, this has not changed very much. There are many persons, like Jan Resseger, Minister for Public Education and Witness and organizations like Justice and Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ, who are fighting to right the wrongs and make a more just educational system for all. I call upon you to join in that fight either on a local or national level.

In addition, our youth must be reminded that they cannot use the inequities in the educational systems as an excuse not to do their best and to succeed in life in spite of what they may face. Life is rough, tough and sometimes it is unfair. "It is what it is." My life's story is not unique. Many, many minority, oppressed or poor people have similar stories. We have learned to take lemons and make lemonade. I know that some schools will not have proper equipment. Some parents cannot afford basic tools, like pencils and paper. I also know that some parents and students have misplaced values and

spend their money on items that they want rather than on what they need. I know that some teachers are racist. I know that the immigration laws work against some students and the list goes on.

However, as OUR CHILDREN go back to school, I challenge each of us to work to make this the best school year possible. We can do that by anointing our children with our love, prayers and support. We can also do that by working to make the educational system better and by supporting local schools and teachers. Further, we can tell them how we made it over, in spite of the obstacles in life; and if we made it, they can too.

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