

UMC musician's protest hymn goes viral

by [Sam Hodges](#) in the [July 1, 2020](#) issue



(Video screengrab)

Many United Methodist clergy gave Pentecost Sunday sermons on the scourge of racism, prompted by the latest high-profile killing of a black man in police custody. But DeAndre Johnson may have outreached and outreached them all by offering his own protest hymn, "It Is Enough!"

The video of Johnson singing for online worship at Christ Church Sugar Land, in Texas, had about 19,000 Facebook views as of June 2, with hundreds of shares.

At least eight other churches across the US, from Maine to Hawaii, used the song as well after Johnson and Discipleship Ministries—the UMC agency that provides resources for church leaders—posted the words and music online.

"I continue to be overwhelmed by how this has resonated with so many," said Johnson, pastor of music and worship life at Christ Church.

An ordained deacon, Johnson is perhaps best known in UMC circles as coordinator of music—leader of the band—for the 2016 general conference.

Weeks after that event, on July 5, 2016, Alton Sterling was shot dead by police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The next day, Philando Castile was fatally shot by an officer in Falcon Heights, Minnesota.

After watching a video of the aftermath of the latter killing, Johnson couldn't sleep. The first lines of "It Is Enough!" came to him as he lay in bed, and he rose and found his iPad.

The text echoes a passage in 1 Kings 19. Elijah has fled Jezebel and finally cries out, "It is enough." The different stanzas of Johnson's hymn elaborate on racial injustice, each ending with either *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) or *Christe eleison* (Christ, have mercy).

Johnson said the phenomenon of civilian videos of police brutality against African Americans was part of what moved him to write.

"There's outrage over just the loss of life, period, but the larger narrative is that it is making public something that has always been a part of the black American experience," he said. "Suddenly, there was evidence beyond our anecdotes that helps others to be able to say, 'Oh, I guess there is something to what you've been saying.'"

Johnson shared his hymn text over Facebook in 2016 but did not then compose music for it.

When the Ahmaud Arbery killing became a major news story in early May, Johnson posted the text again. At the urging of his wife and others, he also wrote music for it—a simple, haunting, minor-key melody.

Only after the George Floyd killing in Minneapolis did Johnson post the music and text together on Facebook. He added a verse, drawn from the specifics of Floyd's death: "It is enough! We cannot breathe! / Will you stand there and watch us bleed? / Are you not moved by cries and pleas? / Christe eleison!"

Cynthia Wilson, executive director of Discipleship Ministries, quickly contacted Johnson and got permission to add the hymn to the agency's website.

Between that and Johnson's own Facebook post, requests began to come in for permission to use the song on Pentecost Sunday.

Johnson's own church had its lineup set for worship, but the senior pastor, Chappell Temple, made a Saturday night decision to add Johnson's hymn.

"I thought if other people are going to use it, he should certainly sing it in his own church," Temple said.

Johnson had never sung completely through the song before performing it on camera, accompanied by Beth McConnell on piano and GT Mangum on guitar.

But the Facebook raves and shares began immediately and haven't let up.

"This right here. This right here," posted Maria Dixon Hall, a Southern Methodist University professor and UMC deacon in Dallas. "My brother DeAndre Johnson using his prophetic gift through the art of music . . . IT IS ENOUGH!"

Paula Moore watched her church, Kailua UMC in Kailua, Hawaii, do its own online rendition of Johnson's hymn.

"His piece is a powerful gift," she said by email.

In Morgantown, West Virginia, Natalie Shaffer played the piano and Juwan Johnson sang the words as part of Avery UMC's joint online worship service with the city's First Presbyterian Church.

Shaffer, who also teaches at West Virginia University, said the two churches' Facebook pages have had more than 1,300 views of the performance.

"Members of both congregations, other professors from WVU, friends and family, and people I have never met have left comments or sent messages of support," she said.

DeAndre Johnson says he's still coming to terms with the response to "It Is Enough!" He thinks of himself more as an arranger than as a composer but will be glad if his hymn can have a long life as a change agent.

"I do hope that whoever might be bold enough to sing it, that it would inspire some deep reflection, some honest dialogue, and some sincere action." —United Methodist News Service

