



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



August 6, 2019

“A Call to Discipleship: Living as Disciples of a Non-Violent Lord in a Time of Violence”

To the People of The United Methodist Church:

As president of the Council of Bishops, but more fundamentally as one who professes faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, I write with a call to discipleship.

What is God’s dream for us? How can we become the answer to the words we say in worship, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done”? (Matthew 6). In Wesley’s words, we are being called *“to reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”*

The United States has witnessed a steady occurrence of mass shootings across our nation, this past weekend in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio. I commend the statements of [Bishop Gregory Palmer](#) and [Bishop Earl Bledsoe](#) to the people of their residential areas (West Ohio, New Mexico/Northwest Texas). The carnage following these acts of violence reminds us of Sandy Hook and Orlando, Sutherland Springs and Charlotte, Las Vegas and Parkland, Charleston and Pittsburgh, and on it goes.

Underneath the violence is a culture of white supremacy and a fear of immigrants (xenophobia). These are expressions of our sinful nature, and deny the image of God (Genesis 1) that is in every person. Christ died for all (2 Corinthians 5), and in this he loved us and gave himself up for us (Ephesians 5).

I also join my voice with [Bishop LaTrelle Easterling](#) of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The president’s disparaging comments about an honorable congressman and a major northeastern city (Baltimore) are rooted in a cynical desire to divide us along racial lines. The use of the presidential role granted for the purpose of serving an entire people for white privilege does great harm to us. According to counterterrorism experts, the president’s racial rhetoric is fueling an incipient and violent white nationalist movement in our nation.

The majority of our membership in the U.S. is Anglo. If you are a white person reading this and you find it troubling—in my own self-examination and confession, I do, as I am under the same judgment—I urge you not to write me, but to contact a friend who is African-American or Latino/a and ask them, “What did you hear in these statements?” and “What do you perceive in these mass shootings?”

I write less to reinforce our very real political partisanship and more to say that we can have a better civil dialogue, and perhaps United Methodists who are Democrats *and* Republicans in the United States can contribute to this. We are in desperate need of leadership that does not pit us against each other. And we are in need of a dialogue that is deeply rooted in our discipleship in the way of our non-violent Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is calling us to love our neighbor (Mark 12). To love our neighbor is to work for a church that does not exclude anyone, that welcomes immigrants, that reckons with the systemic realities of racism and that honors the faith of people across the political aisle from wherever we are sitting.

To love our neighbor is the cost of discipleship (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). To love our neighbor may be our most powerful form of evangelism at the present moment. To love our neighbor is to move beyond our fragility toward repentance and reform. And of course, all of this leads to the question asked of Jesus by the lawyer in Luke 10, and his surprising and unsettling response. For Jesus, questions of eternal life had nothing to do with separation from or superiority toward the other. As disciples of Jesus in the Wesleyan tradition, holiness is not separation; holiness is love of God and neighbor (*Plain Account of Christian Perfection, The Almost Christian*). And we cannot love God, whom we have never seen, if we do not love our brother or sister whom we have seen (1 John 4).

It turns out that the neighbor we are called to love is the one we have profiled and labeled as our enemy. And it turns out that by teaching us to love our enemy (Matthew 5), Jesus is forming us in a holiness without which we will not see the Lord (Hebrews 12).

The Council of Bishops is a global body and The United Methodist Church is a global church. I call upon our brothers and sisters in Europe, the Philippines and Africa to intercede for us in this struggle (1 Thessalonians 5), that we would be faithful, non-violent and courageous in our discipleship.

And so, I call us to be the people we profess to be: disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (*Book of Discipline*, Paragraph 120). We pray for healing among those who are grieving, amendment of life among those who have done violence, and judgment upon our human hearts when our spoken words have contributed to violence (Matthew 12). We commit ourselves to the transformation of systems and laws that reflect the life that Jesus promises (John 10).

The good news is the very peace of Christ that breaks down the dividing walls of hostility (Ephesians 2), and the promise that disciples of Jesus who are peacemakers will receive the blessing of God (Matthew 5). And in this way, we will bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12).

The Peace of the Lord,



Bishop Ken Carter
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The United Methodist Church