



January 15, 2021

## **A Call to Action for The United Methodist Church in Times of Challenge**

Grace and Peace to you, Sisters and Brothers in Christ. These are challenging times that we live in. The continued rise of COVID-19 infections and deaths around the world, the attack on the US Capitol last week, and the undeniable expressions of racism, white supremacy and systemic inequity in our communities have provided a sobering start to the new year. And yet, I find that the upcoming commemoration of the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Inauguration Day in the US provide us, in the midst of turmoil, with much needed opportunities for reflection and rededication.

The images of insurrectionists storming the hallowed halls of the Capitol cannot be unseen. For the first time in history the President of the United States has been impeached for the second time. The deployment of thousands of National Guard troops to Washington, DC for the inauguration appear as scenes from a movie. As one who sits in a state capitol preparing for further disruption, I grieve for America, for democracy and for our Christian witness.

I ask myself, “what would Dr. King say? What would he do?”

Dr. King lived during challenging times as well. In his sermon, *Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution*, he says, “One of the great liabilities of life is that all too many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change, and yet they fail to develop the new attitudes, the new mental responses, that the new situation demands. They end up sleeping through a revolution.”

Dr. King proclaimed and demonstrated a picture of peace for our world that has been so deeply violated. Those who participated in the act of sedition last week wanted the world to believe that it was a revolution, but it was not. It was insurrection rooted in racism.

The majority of persons on the capitol grounds were white.  
The slurs shouted were not Christian.  
The signs invoking the name of Jesus in the midst of these violations offensive.  
The destruction of property is inexcusable.  
The Confederate flag waving in the Rotunda was abhorrent.

All were signs of white supremacy that runs rampant in America today.

Despite this disheartening event and the history of violence and harm that has been fueling it for generations, I believe that we are in the midst of the revolution that Dr. King references. Social change is happening. Peaceful protests for racial justice which declare that Black Lives Matter are helping to make our voices heard and are changing the way we live together.

The lectionary gospel lesson for this Sunday (John 1:43-51) finds Jesus issuing a call to one of the disciples, Philip, to “follow me” and another, Nathaniel, deciding whether or not to say yes. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nathaniel asked. There are many who look upon the blemished history of our denomination and wonder if we will sleep through this revolution. They wonder if anything good can come from The United Methodist Church in the movement to dismantle racism. As members of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, we have rededicated ourselves to this work and are responding to this query as Phillip did saying, “Come and see.” We invite you to join us as we take seriously the call to follow Jesus during these challenging times by renouncing the spiritual forces of wickedness, rejecting the evil powers of this world and repenting of our sin. In the coming weeks we will be offering and highlighting opportunities for spiritual formation, dialogue, and action so that we might, like Dr. King, serve as the ambassadors of love, grace, peace and justice that once and for all tear down the strongholds of hatred, oppression, and division among us.

My prayer is that the people of The United Methodist Church will not sleep through this revolution. We must be willing to adopt the new hearts, minds and skills necessary to build a church and world where all belong and are embraced as beloved of God.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cynthia Fierro Harvey". The signature is written in black ink and includes a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey  
President-Council of Bishops  
The United Methodist Church