



COUNCIL OF BISHOPS
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

May 1, 2015

To the people of The United Methodist Church:

Grace and peace to the people called United Methodist and all people of good will. I greet you in the name of Jesus, the Christ who is risen. From May 1-7, the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church will hold its 2015 meeting in Berlin, Germany. During this week, we will be praying for the church and taking actions that we hope will help lead the church in a faithful response to the call of discipleship. Please pray with us, for the church and all those the church seeks to serve.

We are a church that practices ministry to the world in Jesus' name. While United Methodist churches are primarily in Africa, Europe, the Philippines and the United States, our ministry partnerships connect us with every continent. So, we grieve when the news of the day reminds us of the many ways the people of our world are hurting and suffering under the weight of tragedy. We seek to respond readily with prayers and aid to the natural disasters such as we have just witnessed in Nepal. And the human inflicted pain also requires a prayerful response that declares that terrorism, human exploitation, bullying and abuses of power will not overcome us.

Please join me and the Council of Bishops in prayer, reflection and action toward overcoming the issues that sometimes divide our societies. Together we can find ways, appropriate to our social context, for healing the brokenness between us.

For those of us in the United States, our attention has been called to the powerful impact of racism on all of us. If we seek healing, we cannot continue to be in denial. Some of us have read the shocking Justice Department report on Ferguson and most have seen the violence that tragically erupted there against police officers. Since then other unarmed Black men have been killed in several cities and now Baltimore has also erupted in violence.

As a Black man who grew up in the very Baltimore neighborhood we have watched explode, this is personal. I grieve over what I see in my old neighborhood. The anger in the community is real because of decades of distrust.

Video documentation has raised expectations that claims of wrongdoing would be seriously considered; so distrust grows because very few police officers have been held accountable.

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A just society cannot be built on violence. Violence and misconduct by either a misguided police officer or an angry citizen will not lead us to beloved community. Reconciliation can occur when we tell the truth and take responsibility for our actions.

Rev. Willis Johnson, pastor of Wellspring United Methodist Church which serves Ferguson, Missouri, said this: "Who is going to become a model for dealing with reconciling and truth? That is the role of the Church!"

In this season of resurrection, the Council of Bishops and I believe that we followers of Jesus are called to lead the way. Let us examine and repent of our own sins of racial bias and abuse of privilege. Let us proclaim and live the Gospel of love and justice for all. Let us become proactive in modeling that gospel in our churches and teaching it to young and old alike. Let us be disciples who are engaged with God in transforming our world, beginning in our own communities, working for justice, judicial reform and good police/community relations. Let us break down the walls that divide us and build relationships that vanquish our fears. When we work together for justice and peace, we will no longer be strangers.

Remember, all who would follow Jesus, he calls us again and again to "love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt.22:39) Even out of the injustice and violence he experienced, Jesus leads us to hope and resurrection. Let us believe in and practice the power of prayer for our world, our church, our neighbors and our own lives.

And, the risen Christ said to his followers, "remember, I am with you always."
(Matt.28:20)

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warner H. Brown, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr., president
The Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church