



Beloved Community - An Antidote to Extremism
A Pastoral Letter to All United Methodists

Christ is our peace. . . With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us. Eph. 2:14 CEB

September 19, 2024

Dear United Methodists:

Polarization and hatred are dividing nations, communities, and even families. We are losing our ability to speak with humility and treat others kindly. We know this is not how God intends us to live. All are beloved children of God, who beckons us to care for not only those we love, but those God loves, even those we may not know or whose lives are different from our own.

Climate change, global migration, growing economic disparity, and other factors are causing us to feel more vulnerable and alienated. This can increase the appeal of authoritarian leaders who rely on rhetoric and policies that divide, creating a fearful environment that dampens participation in civic life and gives rise to political violence.

We strongly denounce political violence, which severs community bonds and supplants the rule of law. We equally denounce authoritarianism and secular and Christian nationalism, which foster centralization and abuse of power, accompanied by racism, xenophobia, tribalism, and misogyny. Nationalism is a political ideology that defies God's love by pitting the interests of one group of people against others.

Christian nationalism demands laws, culture, and public policies be based on a distorted interpretation of the Gospel that elevates power and control over love. These ideologies are in direct contradiction to our Christian faith because our "love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and the renewal of life in the world." ("Our Doctrinal Heritage" BOD p 53).

No one person or political party should ever hold complete power. As people of the Wesleyan tradition, we know that God alone holds power and dominion over all of creation. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we depend on Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience to ground our social conscience and compel us to seek justice and global relationships as followers of Jesus Christ. With his body, Christ breaks down the barriers of hatred that divide and invites us to build a worldwide community of love. He calls us to see strangers and even enemies as neighbors. Let's join conversations in our pulpits, pews, and the public square that advance justice and build up our communities in love.

In our baptismal vows, we promise to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sins. We promise to accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. We confess that Jesus Christ is our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and vow to serve him as Lord in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.

The Council of Bishops walks with you as we faithfully live out these vows in a period of unique peril around the world. Soon, we will share a learning resource for deeper engagement with these topics. Let us love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves.

Grace and Peace,

Bishop Tracy S. Malone
Council of Bishops, President
The United Methodist Church