

Grace and peace in the name of Jesus Christ!

We, the bishops of The United Methodist Church, feel compelled to renew our commitment to work to become the beloved community of Christ. We, as a Council, desire to deal with the crucial and critical issues of racism and the sacredness of every human being. Therefore, as the spiritual and administrative leaders of the church, we issue an urgent call to the whole people of God, lay and clergy: to speak the truth in love in public and private discourse, to act with compassion, and to work for peace and justice in the world.

In order to transform the world, in faithfulness to Christ's command, we must model respect and kindness and extinguish the fires of animosity. And thus, we call on all churches to engage in genuinely honest dialogue and respectful conversation, such that others who observe the action in our lives might declare "See how they love each other!"

As people of faith, we are charged to build the beloved community because Christ has broken down the dividing walls and ended the hostilities between us. Yet, we continue to build walls in the church and in the world which separate us and cause our hearts to grieve.

On the continent of Africa and in many parts of Asia, including the Middle East, the Philippines and India, the historical and contemporary impact of colonialism, racism, tribalism, hostility and religious persecution continue to affect human relationships.

The challenge in the Philippines is to break down the barriers between mainline society and tribal peoples. Meeting this challenge will accord equal rights such as land possession and free education for all.

By nature, colonialism in Africa thrives on hostile, violent and demeaning human relationships. Racism and tribalism cut deep wounds, not only in one's flesh, but also on the soul and the spirit. These gaping wounds leave permanent scars.

In Europe racism is a growing issue, with political parties openly working against minority, ethnic and religious communities. Prejudice is overtly articulated in the media, in politics and even in churches.

Throughout the United States, there has been a rapid escalation of violence related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religious preference. This escalation includes personal attacks, bullying and vicious and criminal acts of violence to the mind, body and spirit of persons. These actions diminish life for the victims and their families, as well as for the perpetrators and the whole community. They are the ultimate insidious and irreverent attacks on the sacredness of God-given life.

Across the world, terrorism -- as demonstrated by wanton acts of violence against innocent persons -- leaves a trail of loss of life, limb, home and community. Discriminatory treatment is widely practiced against immigrants and refugees everywhere around the world. All of this creates a universal atmosphere of suspicion, mistrust and fear. Often this is the result of religious persecution of various faith communities, including Christians, which threatens the capacity or hope for reconciliation and peace. The church is called to decisively and directly counter these acts and engender and empower a "perfect love that casts out all fear." (1 John 4:18, NRSV) Through intentional action we can "overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21, NRSV)

It is incumbent upon the bearers of this vision of a beloved community to do whatever we can today to hasten the day of a just world with peace. This is our hope, our prayer and our commitment.