

Bishop Ough Issues Statement on Charlottesville

Dakotas-Minnesota Area Bishop Bruce R. Ough, in his role as president of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, issued the following statement about last weekend's events in Charlottesville, Virginia:

My shock, dismay and grief over the clashes between white supremacy advocates and counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, continue to grow. I grieve for the lives lost, and pray for the family of Heather Heyer, the families of the two state troopers killed while monitoring the Charlottesville demonstration from the air, and for the healing of all the injured. I am shocked by the blatant resurgence of white nationalism, neo-Nazism and racially motivated domestic terrorism in the United States. I am dismayed (and frightened) by the animosity, division, extremism and evil that is spiraling out of control in the U.S.

Let there be no excuses or political justification for the evil that was on full display in Charlottesville last Saturday. Nor, let us forget that many such displays of white supremacy, racism and hatred go un-reported or under-reported in many places. White supremacist and neo-Nazi ideologies are abhorrent and entirely inconsistent with the Christian faith.

Jesus called his followers to “love your neighbor.” It is clear this key spiritual imperative means all neighbors without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. And, Paul taught that “enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions and factions” are among many works of the flesh that are antithetical to the kingdom of God. “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5: 19-23) These works of the Spirit lead to peace-making and the kingdom of God.

The Social Principles of our United Methodist Church are a clarion call and powerful witness in times such as these. “We affirm that no identity or culture has more legitimacy than any other. We call the Church to challenge any hierarchy of cultures or identities.” (Para. 161A, The Nurturing Community, page 110, 2016 Book of Discipline). And, from Para. 162A The Social Community, page 120: “Racism, manifested as sin, plagues and hinders our relationship with Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself ... Therefore, we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons ... We commit as the Church to move beyond symbolic expressions and representative models that do not challenge unjust systems of power and access.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. echoed a similar sentiment when he challenged the United States to transform the thin paper of the Declaration of Independence that affirms the self-evident truth “that all men are created equal, are endowed with certain inalienable rights” into thick action.

I pray that the shock, dismay and grief of Charlottesville will be a turning point for the U.S. and even our global United Methodist church. We share collective responsibility to turn our thin words into thick action. We share collective responsibility to break our silence. We share collective responsibility to restore health to the communities and relationship out of which extremism, hatred and racism grow. We share collective responsibility, as followers of the Prince of Peace, to create non-violent communities where people with different political and religious views respect each other. We share responsibility to articulate the vision of the Beloved Community where no person feels endangered on account of their social, racial or cultural identity.

This collective responsibility begins by each of us examining our own hearts for the prejudice that contributes to attitudes of supremacy or hatred, or to violence, or silence or fear. Peacemaking and reconciliation always begins within.

This is the moment for The United Methodist Church and all peoples of faith to be bold in our witness against racism and white supremacy. The vision of the Beloved Community lies not behind us, but before us. I urge us to pray for the Holy Spirit to break through and work through The United Methodist Church to heal our broken world and make tangible, visible the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Bishop Bruce R. Ough, President
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