



Robert Schnase
Resident Bishop

The United Methodist Church Missouri Conference

3601 Amron Court, Columbia, MO 65202
phone 573.441.1770 • toll-free 877.736.1806 • fax 573.441.1780
Bishop@moumethodist.org • www.moumethodist.org

A Call for Prayer

I've preached twice in recent weeks in St. Louis and as I visited in our churches, the tension is palpable as people await the news from the grand jury in the Michael Brown case. Fear runs deep that there will be more violence. The tragedy has left the community on edge as it copes with the anger, frustration, and mistrust felt by so many people following the shooting of Michael Brown by police officer Darin Wilson.

The issues involved are far larger than Ferguson, than St. Louis, and than Missouri. The entire country and the whole church need to engage these issues. The focus for law enforcement and the legal processes is on what happened on August 9th. But the tragedy forces people of faith to confront a larger question: What happens now? What happens next? What do we learn about ourselves and our communities that will cause us to change so that such events are less likely in the future? What kind of preferred future does God intend for our communities and for our world?

Followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and believers in the God who is the lover of justice must come together for prayer and dialogue to address the deeper and more intransigent issues that have been too long repressed in our communities. These are issues such as racial profiling, mistrust of authority, violence in our communities, underemployment, quality education, fear of one another, white flight, inequalities in our justice system, family breakdown, and under-representation of ethnic officers in law enforcement. There are hard issues and issues that require deep commitments and changes of attitudes, values, and behaviors. These require changes in systems. These require long-term work and a willingness for community and church leaders to stay engaged for the long haul.

In the short-term, the role of the church is to be the purveyor of peace. The sin of racism must be dealt with, but not through violence. Violence rights no wrongs, heals no harms, and leads to no positive change. As the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

What can United Methodist Christians do?

First, pray. Pray for peace. Our faith finds its roots in the hope for a day when "the lion shall sleep with the lamb." We serve a Lord who said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you." For nearly two thousand years, we have offered "grace and peace" to one another when we gather in Christ's name. Peace is our hope, our prayer, our yearning, our aim, our end, and it is our gift to the community.

A number of our United Methodist churches in St. Louis and across the conference are already planning prayer vigils on the day the grand jury decision is announced. Other of our churches are working with Metropolitan Congregations United to plan "safe places" for the

community to gather for dialogue and to offer support to one another. These churches are also planning to offer a variety of worship experiences and other services needed by the surrounding community.

Second, call upon officials to work for ways so that people can express their frustrations and voice their concerns peacefully. People need a way to participate, to speak out, to gather for mutual support, and we need leaders willing to give room and space for it in a way that reduces the possibility of violence rather than ratcheting up tensions.

Third, support the efforts of two of our United Methodist Churches near Ferguson, Wellspring and The Gathering at Clayton, who are developing extensive plans to be open and available to the community as places of peace and respite. These two churches are collecting supplies and gathering individuals with the needed skills sets to be helpful. Manchester United Methodist Church has volunteered to be the drop off point for supplies. We are collecting a pool of volunteer pastors to be sent to Wellspring and the Gathering in Clayton to offer support as requested and needed by those two churches. The Metropolitan Clergy Coalition, an interfaith group, has also offered suggestions to area congregations on how they can be helpful.

Along with other religious leaders in Missouri, I renew my call to everyone in Ferguson and the greater St. Louis area to be an instrument of peace amid chaos, a calm voice in the turmoil, a sign of grace when the world needs most the message we offer in Christ.

Yours in Christ,

Robert Schnase Bishop
The Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church