



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE
303 Mulberry Drive, Suite 100 • Mechanicsburg, PA 17050-3198
Phone (717) 766-7871 • Fax (717) 766-3210 • Email: bishoppark@susumc.org

Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

Christy Mackey
Executive Administrative Assistant
cmackey@susumc.org

Rev. Gregory C. Myers
Clergy Assistant
gmyers@susumc.org

Kristin Sample
Administrative Assistant
ksample@susumc.org

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*“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”
(The Lord’s Prayer)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, Prince of Peace, Healer of our brokenness, and Hope of the world!

In recent days we have witnessed, once again, a horrible manifestation of the presence and power of evil in this world. Our hearts are broken as we hear about the violent death of Ms. Heather Heyer, a victim of domestic terrorism, and the tragic death of two police officers, Lt. Pilot H. Jay Cullen and Trooper Pilot Berke M. M. Bates, in the midst of public service for the safety of the people present in the clash in Charlottesville, VA. I urge the pastors and congregations of the Susquehanna Conference first and foremost to pray for comfort and healing of the families and friends who lost their loved ones and of those who suffered injuries in this horrific act of terror. I also ask you to uplift our nation in prayer this Sunday for God’s spirit of truth, love and justice to prevail and that our leaders seek God’s righteousness to lead our country to shalom for all. Please pray also for the transformation of the hearts and minds of the people who represented racial hatred in the clash.

It is so troubling that in our country we continue to witness the hatred and disregard for all of humanity that was displayed in Charlottesville. We all should find it alarming and disheartening that there seems to be a growing climate that induces such blatant racism. It is also deeply troubling that far too often those individuals who espouse hatred towards persons who look different than them suggest that they are doing so in the name of Christianity. I hear Jesus weep. Racial hatred and bigotry are never in the will of God and have no place in the Kingdom of God.

The ideology of racial superiority for dominance, power and control by one race over others is evil. Racism is a sin. It must be confronted and condemned in the name of humanity. It is also antithetical to what Christian truth stands for. Everyone is created in God’s image and has the same sacred worth as everyone else. All of us are God’s beloved. The reign of God that Jesus Christ came, lived, died, and was resurrected for is for all of the human race. Each one of us is invited to be an equal citizen in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom and our country are being attacked at their foundational vision and values, by many race-based and racism-inspired hate groups. Lamentably, Pennsylvania has one of the largest numbers of hate groups in the United States and many of them are located within the boundaries of our annual conference. There have been reports from some congregations in the Susquehanna Conference of leaflets from the Ku Klux Klan being left under the car wipers of worshippers as they attended church last Sunday. The very core of who we are as people of faith is being challenged. Silence is not an option for such a time as this.

Earlier this week through the QuikLINK, you received the statement on the current and evolving situations out of Charlottesville from Bishop Bruce Ough, President of the Council of Bishops. You might consider reading it in worship or in a congregational gathering for prayer or conversation. Bishop Ough calls upon us that, "We share collective responsibility to turn our thin words into thick action. We share collective responsibility to break our silence." His words connect me to a passage in the Book of Esther: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14)

We need to be ever more determined for such a time as this to continue to proclaim the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God, pursue its vision, and demonstrate its values by our prophetic voice and witness for racial justice and reconciliation with intention and integrity as we continue to commit ourselves to work on racial relations in our community and beyond. At the end of this statement, there is a link to an article titled, "Ways United Methodists can take a stand against racism"**, that was released this week in United Methodist Now from United Methodist Communications. It explicitly offers suggestions for how congregations and individuals can do the hard work of dismantling the walls of racism within and outside of ourselves and of building bridges.

Let's be reminded that our country was founded on the mandate of "E Pluribus Unum" (Out of Many, One). We are to be one out of diversity and difference. It is the foundational identity and irreversible destiny of our nation. It is also the biblical vision of God's future for the human race. No matter what difference we may represent, all are to be honored for who they are with respect and dignity as children of a loving God. Difference is never to be a cause for discrimination and marginalization. Any ideology that justifies racism and promotes hate, fear, and violence is wrong and must be confronted, challenged and defeated.


In closing I offer for your reflection these words from the third and fourth stanzas of the hymn, For the Healing of the Nations. They were authored by composer Fred Kaan in 1965:

“All that kills abundant living, let it from the earth be banned; pride of status, race or schooling, dogmas that obscure your plan. In our common quest for justice may we hallow life’s brief span, may we hallow life’s brief span.

You, Creator God, have written your great name on humankind; for our growing in your likeness bring the life of Christ to mind, that by our response and service earth its destiny may find, earth its destiny may find.”

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is heaven.

With You in Christ’s Ministry,

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Jeremiah J. Park

***Ways United Methodists Can Take a Stand Against Racism -*

http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/ways-united-methodists-can-take-a-stand-against-racism?utm_source=email-&utm_medium=button&utm_term=&utm_content=newsletter&utm_campaign=JM196-UM-Now-08-16-17&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiWkdRMFptTmhOMkZtTnpnMCIlInQiOiI0YzZaaVpBUWg5MmVQcEI1U1ZTUmw2YW5lbn9pRm43ellvdmtZbVV5YkM3R3ZcL2VFUzMwWE9qaXJWcHpQUVNIMElxdnJabCt0U2lhZEZkOCtMWXhaSIZHNXFRT0hEbGFpTHpuUCt4OHkzcDZ2NnRGUHBuMmIZY3BQMU1GeGIkbHoifQ%3D%3D