

**Grace United Methodist Church
Pastoral Letter**

June 3, 2020

Caring Together, Growing Together

*The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."
Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

- Luke 10:37

Greeting in Christ's name!

We are writing to share a letter regarding recent events in the life of our nation. The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota has catapulted our common life as Americans to a whole new level and revealed yet again the long and tragic history of racism in the United States. It has thrown more uncertainty onto an already anxious moment in time. We lament what has occurred. As Christians, we believe we are called to demonstrate God's reconciling love and patience in all we do and affirm the dignity of all people, addressing the underlying conditions that affect the lives of God's children everywhere, regardless of color (2 Cor 5:19).

As pastors, we are especially mindful of our call to live out Christ's commandment to love God and neighbor (Mt 22:34-39). As parents, we are particularly distressed with how far we have fallen short of Jesus's teaching. What are we leaving our children? We decry the violence, but we call upon all Christians to engage in the important work of listening to others. As our Social Principles state, and as we affirm with other Christians around the world, we affirm the worth of every person.¹ We all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

And yet, the problems we face run deep. Racism is not simply about personal prejudice but long-standing institutional practices, practices that are contrary to the Gospel. We deplore the ways in which we have witnessed these throughout our nation's history, but especially over the last week. They run against our baptismal commitment to "resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves" and to live in the freedom we have in Christ.² In this season of Pentecost, we recall how God's Spirit was poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:17).

Over the last several weeks, during the pandemic, we have sought to practice the three simple Rules of Methodism - of doing no harm, doing all the good you can, and staying in love with God. We have tried to communicate a vision of the Christian life that is keeping with having the mind of Christ. Anything less is missing the mark.

¹ The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline* (2016), 116.

² *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 34.

Indeed, drawing on our own heritage as Methodists, we believe that the Bible reveals as far as it is necessary God's Word for our salvation. It is to be received by the Holy Spirit as the true guide and rule for faith. It is not to be used for partisan advantage, but for the searching God's divine will and the practice of Christian love.³ In addition, we believe that the government, and all institutions, including the Church, stands under God's judgment. No one person, no one leader, no one party is above the law. When basic human rights are neglected, we all pay a price. It is why we draw on our "Confession of Faith" to remind ourselves that it is the duty of all Christian citizens to give moral strength and purpose to their respective governments.⁴ Prayerful sobriety will take us farther along the path God intends than pride and selfishness. It is why we pray for leadership that will unite and heal.

As we stated at the beginning, we ache over what is taking place in our country. There is great pain in our land. A convergence of forces has come upon us. Our concern for our families in our church is first and foremost. Our hearts go out to those whose children of color face hardship and fear in our community. Our love for our neighbors and coworkers of African descent are front and center. We pray that Grace Church will serve as a light in a time of darkness. And we pray for the safety and well-being of all as well as for the openness to listen to God's voice as we seek direction in our own lives, families, and communities.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that parable Jesus has a powerful exchange with a lawyer about the definition of neighbor. He instructs the lawyer at the end to "go and do likewise," that is, go and do God's work of repairing a broken and hurting world (Lk 10:37). It's our message as well.

Peace and grace,

Pastor Andy Kinsey

Pastor Jenothy Irvine

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1 The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline* (2016), 116.

2 *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 34.

"Confession of Faith," *The Book of Discipline*, 71.

4 "Confession of Faith," *The Book of Discipline*, 74-75.