

Bishop Easterling's statement following the violence in Charlottesville, Va.

August 12, 2017

Beloved,

I greet you in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. The wisdom of Scripture teaches us that there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:9). As we watched the rally unfold today in Charlottesville, Va., we were reminded that hate, bigotry, bias and prejudice are not new to the American landscape. These vile concepts have reared their ugly head in every generation. While we should not be surprised, those who are Christ-followers should find it repugnant and incompatible with our core beliefs.

Scripture expressly states that, "God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Gen. 1:27) These words captured in the first creation story proclaim that we are all created in the image of our Creator. This Scripture does not reserve that sacred image for a privileged group, or claim it for just a few; rather, it pointedly affirms that every human being on earth is created in God's image. Out of this common heritage, we celebrate that we are one in image, likeness, soul, and spirit. Our sacred writ also calls us into practices of unity, fellowship, peace and reconciliation.

As United Methodists, we have also taken vows and entered into a covenant that compels us to act in the face of evil. In our baptismal vows we affirm, when asked:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?

I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

I do.

These questions do not presume that we will simply reject evil, injustice and oppression quietly in the confines of our own hearts and homes. Rather, these questions imply, in true Wesleyan fashion, that we will actively resist this wickedness. We are called to action through prayer, standing in solidarity with those being persecuted, preaching and

teaching love and inclusion, and denouncing acts borne out of hatred.

Recently I read about the actions of one person leading to a collective movement to silence messages of hate. New Yorkers boarded a subway car to find swastikas and other symbols of fear and intimidation drawn on the windows and walls. As the passengers looked in quiet disbelief, someone said, "Well, hand sanitizer has alcohol, and alcohol removes Sharpie." Soon everyone in the car was using this liquid on napkins and tissues to remove the symbols. The actions of one person led to a moment of constructive community activism and engagement. One person can spark a movement of love and healing.

I am attending the 25th Celebration of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry, and the 46th Assembly of MARCHA. During our opening worship, we sang the beautiful song by Hezekiah Walker, *I Need You To Survive*. This gospel song reminds us that we are all a part of God's body, and it is God's will that we care for one another. May we all join in caring for, praying for, supporting, encouraging, and loving one another. But even more so, may we work, actively work to resist hatred, prejudice and discrimination in our heads, hearts, homes, congregations, and communities.

Your servant in Christ,

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling