



Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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*"How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?...
But I trust in your unfailing love."
(Psalm 13:2, 5a)*

Dear United Methodists of Susquehanna Conference,

It was only a few days ago that we met as an Annual Conference for a time of holy conferencing only to return to once again hear about a mass shooting. During the Friday morning session of the conference we had a time of a prayer; "O God, we lift up those places and conditions within our communities, our nation and around the world for which we have great concern. There are so many people who are in harm's way. Every day, O God, we are confronted by senseless acts of violence... So hear our prayers for those places, people, and situations for which we are especially grieving..." Less than 24 hours after we offered the prayer, another horrific act of violence, terror and hatred erupted in Orlando, Florida. Now Orlando joins that long list of places identified by a mass shooting - Newtown, Fort Hood, Aurora, Binghamton, Virginia Tech, and the list goes on and on. This time it is the largest mass shooting ever in our country.

In solidarity with the families and loved ones of the victims, our hearts go out to them with prayers for comfort and strength in their unimaginable pain and suffering. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers in these national and global days of mourning.

It is hard for any of us to fathom how anyone could find such an act of terror acceptable and tolerable. We are left wondering and questioning how such violence continues. In this newest instance the motivation appears to be one of radical Islam along with a deeply rooted hatred directed towards the LGBT community. No matter what a person's opinion and belief is in regards to homosexuality, there is certainly no place for such an act of terror and hatred. This act against the gay community is an act against all of us. There is no room for prejudice and intolerance of this nature. All those involved are beloved children of God, created in God's image. We mourn with those who have lost loved ones. And we weep with those whose lives will never be the same.

I have shared previously that in the aftermath of massive killings we need to be ever vigilant to guard against a condemnation of an entire religion because of the acts of a few individuals and those who falsely claim that they represent the faith. I would remind us of that again or otherwise the spiral of hatred that Jesus spoke of and stood against will continue. Jesus called out for the best within us to learn to love all humanity and to be agents of peace and love to the world.

I would encourage the people of the Susquehanna Conference to do what you can in regards to witnessing to people and our communities what it means to learn to live in peace, justice, and harmony with one another. Speak out against intolerance, discrimination, and hatred. Show that acts of violence and terror are never acceptable. Stand in unity with the oppressed of this world. As people of faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, demonstrate in all that you do what it means to be disciples of love and citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Once again we are living in a time when the good news of Jesus Christ is needed more than ever. When the devil raises its hideous head we wrestle with the question, "How long?" But we put our trust in the unfailing love of God as we follow the Prince of Peace, serve the Healer of our brokenness, and proclaim the Hope of the world. Love wins. Light prevails over darkness. God reigns. We are to embody that good news in all that we say and do. I know that you will because you have demonstrated that in the past. Let us continue to do so even with more resolution, determination, commitment and courage for such a time as this.

I would like to ask God's people of the Susquehanna Conference to surround Bishop Ken Carter and the Florida Annual Conference with our prayers as they start their conference session this Thursday in Orlando, to be in witness on behalf of Jesus Christ to the hurting community and the broken world.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremiah J. Park".

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