



September 14, 2025

Friends in Christ,

Our country is more divided than ever. For several years now, I have spoken with you and my previous conferences about these deep divisions and the painful ways they affect our communities, our churches, and even our families. In recent days, these divisions have again been laid bare.

It is our understanding that the National Guard will soon be deployed into Memphis, Tennessee. In our conference, as across our nation, faithful people hold differing views about this development. For many, this raises concerns about escalation, fear, and mistrust between communities and those called to protect them. We must acknowledge that such moments can deepen existing divides and stir strong emotions, even among those who worship side by side.

This past week, we witnessed the tragic shooting of a well-known political activist while in conversation with college students. And once again, our nation mourns yet another school shooting - this time in the suburbs of Denver, Colorado. These events grieve us deeply. They also have the power to widen the distance between us if we are not careful.

As United Methodists, we have historically stood against injustice in all its forms. Our faith compels us to speak truth, to pursue mercy, and to act with courage. Yet just as importantly, our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to be peacemakers. In a world of anger and suspicion, we are to be instruments of peace.

I implore you, therefore, to live into this calling. Reach across the lines that too often divide us - political, racial, geographic, or even denominational. Sit down with someone who does not look like you, vote like you, or pray like you. Listen with compassion. Extend grace. Refuse to let the story of our nation be written only in terms of hatred and violence. Our laity and clergy are called to be spiritual leaders in their communities, modeling the way of Christ through prayer, presence, and action. It is a conference discipleship priority and therefore of utmost importance.

How might you take responsibility for changing the narrative of this country? How might you bear witness to the reconciling love of Christ in a broken and weary world?

The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 12:18, *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* This is both a challenge and a promise. It is a challenge because peace

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requires effort, sacrifice, and humility. But it is also a promise, because when we take even small steps toward peace, God multiplies them for the sake of the Kingdom.

May God grant us the courage to stand for justice, the patience to listen across divides, and the wisdom to be instruments of peace. And may the peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in these days. Memphis Mayor Paul Young stated in his September 12 News Conference for everyone to come together regardless of our differences. He encouraged the Memphis community to be laser-focused on continuing the good work that has been done over the last two years in moving Memphis to become a great city.

May we United Methodists become laser-focused by loving God, loving people, and seeking to be a peacemaker. Use your voice, your influence, and your presence as God leads you.

With hope and prayer,



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