

A response to acts of violence and racism

The Bishops of the Jurisdiction made this statement at the NEJ Conference, July 11-15, 2016 in Lancaster, PA. Delegates approved asking all NEJ churches to include the statement in their newsletters and/or on their bulletin boards.

As we gather for this Jurisdictional Conference many persons have been confronted and consumed with the overwhelming reports of shootings and violence. Life taken! Trust broken! Anger and fear growing. Frustration and despair looming. We believe that God's heart breaks as our hearts break with these acts of violence – fed and complicated by fear, prejudice, racism, and privilege. We pray for each family and each community affected by profound loss and grief. We pray for the ripple effect of these acts of violence that strip away certainty of safety, sanctuary, value, and trust.

The death of young black males in encounters with white law enforcement officers calls for response. The loss of life within our Hispanic/Latino community and among our brothers and sisters identifying with the LGBTQ community in Orlando, calls for response. The death of police officers protecting the rights of persons to peaceably protest, points to a destructive cycle of violence and retribution, and calls for response.

We, the College of Bishops of the Northeastern Jurisdiction (www.nejumc.org/bishops.html) stand together to respond, and our response is not just for the moment. Our response is a commitment to acknowledge our participation in the sin of institutional racism and to have ongoing conversations within the College about racism, privilege, and oppression. Our response is to give leadership and develop plans to continue these conversations within and among the Jurisdiction and with the leadership of the annual conferences to which we are assigned. The purpose of these dialogues will be talk about our own racism and prejudices, to heal the wounds that have been caused by racism, privilege, and oppression, to train our leadership and churches in intercultural competency; and lead them to celebrate diversity. We will lead and offer training for leaders in the craft of building bridges across cultures and ethnicity so that all those whom we profess to acknowledge as created in the image of God and persons of sacred worth, will truly feel welcome and find the safety, sanctuary, value and trust these recent and ongoing acts of violence have robbed from them. We in the college will hold one another accountable for this action, reporting to our Conferences at their annual sessions and providing a report to the 2020 Jurisdictional conference. At the Jurisdictional level we will partner with both the Multi-ethnic center and the Vision Table in our on-going response.

Together, we claim the need to listen more deeply and to

seek greater understanding for those who cry out for justice. We commit ourselves to seeking justice, supporting faithful law enforcement officers, and empowering the movement of people toward more healthy community engagement within the areas we serve.

Because we believe that all persons are created in God's image, from our United Methodist faith perspective, all people matter, all are valuable. In these particularly violent and life taking incidents and times, however, we need to intentionally lift up that black lives really do matter and the lives of all persons of color really do matter. The lives of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters really do matter. The NEJ College of Bishops believes that in the midst of the chaos, fear, and violence, there is a rich opportunity for the church to be the church. We seek to be the leaders of this church. We seek justice, repentance and reconciliation. We seek not just to love peace, but to be peacemakers. God's people need us to be bearers of peace.

At the beginning of this Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, we ask you to join us. Join us as we make this response not just for the moment, but effecting the future. Our hope is that, together, Bishops, clergy, and laity, we might be quilted together more strongly in our work of allowing God to transform us, so that we might go out with God's great transforming love – to bring healing, hope, and peace to the world.

As a beginning, we would ask that you think and reflect with us on these questions? How will you be a peacemaker in the midst of the storms of violence and destruction? How can you be a peacemaker and at the same time work for justice? What can you do to help develop a sense of well-being and harmony in your life, in the lives of neighbors, strangers, friends, and communities? What social problems move you to want to make a difference by building bridges, making connections, valuing people? Blessed are the peacemakers! Blessed are the peacemakers! Blessed are the peacemakers! In the midst of all the storms encountered and perpetuated in this life, please think on these things! This work begins with each one of us – first individually and then collectively. We your bishops, will not only be thinking on these things, but are moving in response. We seek your prayers and support as we take this action.

“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.”
– Ephesians 4:15-16