



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



March 1, 2019

A Pastoral Letter to the United Methodist Church from the President of the Council of Bishops

+Where possible you are asked to read this brief letter in your morning worship service.

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. (James 5:13-16 NRSV)

To the Faithful Disciples of Jesus Christ who are the People of the United Methodist Church,

I read this passage of Scripture on our Day of Prayer, in St. Louis. I then reflected on these words with the Council of Bishops on the day after the Special Session of the General Conference, and I share them with you. In a time of division and challenge, with “fightings and fears, within, without”, we are in need of healing. The healing ministry of Jesus takes pain and suffering seriously. The scripture calls for the elders of the church to pray and anoint. In the ancient spiritual traditions, anointing is about setting apart and healing, receiving power and gaining courage.

Every church I have known in my life has had spiritual elders, mature spiritual leaders who care for the body, that is the people God has called together in a place. I pray in this moment for mature spiritual leadership among the clergy and laity of our global church. I pray that we will move toward the pain and grief, and especially among our members in the LGBTQ community.

James does not call us to identify the sins of one another. He calls us to confess our sins to one another, and to pray for one another, so that we may be healed. Our mutual prayer and confession is for a larger purpose: our healing. And our healing is for an even greater purpose: that we might be “repairers of the breach” (Isaiah 58:12).

Through the power of the cross and the flame of the Holy Spirit, God demonstrates his love for all. May we be a means of grace to one another in these days.

The Peace of the Lord,

+Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.
President, Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church