

The United Methodist Church
Virginia Conference



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Further reflection on Charlottesville

Brothers & Sisters:

As we continue to process the disturbing events from Charlottesville, we need to turn to God for understanding, guidance and strength in our next steps.

As Christians and United Methodists, we are to act. Hatred of any kind, including racism, is intolerable. As faithful people, we are commanded to address it by being witnesses and advocates for the marginalized.

Racism remains in the world. While progress has been made, particularly since the days of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., we must eliminate racism and not stop until it is fully and irrevocably gone.

As such, I ask that you do the following.

Pray. Let us pray for the families of Heather Heyer, Lt. H. Jay Cullen, and Trooper Berke M.M. Bates. Let us pray for the injured, especially those still hospitalized. Whether we come together for prayer vigils or rallies, for Charlottesville, the Commonwealth and even our country, let the foundation of these be rooted in love and concern.

Witness. We need to stand together as the people of God and have our voices heard. Our witness is lost when we as Christians do not stand up and advocate, especially in times like this.

We need to denounce white supremacy, neo-Nazis and the KKK. No race is superior to any other; as Christians we know that all persons are created equal in the image of God.

Our baptismal vows remind us “to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world and repent of your sin. Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”

Preach. Many pastors have already been addressing the events in Charlottesville. We must continue to prophetically speak the truth and address the sin of racism. In our teaching and preaching, we must not browbeat, but rather show the light of Christ.

Combating Racism. While our physical presence is important to our roles as witnesses and advocates at rallies, we have work to do beyond these rallies in our Conference and in our local churches.

I have found in my ministry that racism is rooted in ignorance. In addressing racism, we must be intentional in getting to know our brothers and sisters and address the sin of racism, hate and violence. This is important work for our local churches.

As we go forward, the Virginia Conference is preparing the Convocation on Race and Reconciliation scheduled for April 14, 2018. More information will be shared shortly.

In the days ahead, we know that God, love, peace and prayer will overcome all of this hatred and fear. We must be vigilant in our witness and peaceful in our advocacy.

I pray for you and our nation as we seek to do this hard work ahead.

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharma D. Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, decorative initial 'S'.

Sharma D. Lewis
Resident Bishop
The Virginia Annual Conference