

February 20, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We, the undersigned members of the Commission on Ethnic-Minority Concerns and Advocacy (CEMCA), of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church reaffirm our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ. As such, we are called to “loose the bonds of injustice, let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke” (Isaiah 58: 6). Right now, millions across the globe are afflicted, suffering the bonds of injustice, oppressed by the violence of war, and burdened with the necessity of fleeing for their lives. Others, who have come seeking economic opportunity, are now burdened with the threat of deportation. We confess that as a nation, we have slaughtered Native Americans, and acknowledge that we continue to live on the land that was once theirs. We confess our complicity in slavery: that we have held black women, men and children as property, and tortured and killed those who have resisted. And though having been set free from that bondage over 150 years ago, continue to suffer the effects of entrenched racism that denies them the dignity of equality under the law. We confess and acknowledge the national sin of the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. Lord, have mercy, and lead us to new life as children of the Living God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, whom you sent to free us from the bondage of our sins.

Forgiven and redeemed, we pledge ourselves anew to the ministry that has been bequeathed to us by our ancestors in the faith, having been promised that our God will go with us in this holy work. We stand with our brothers and sisters who continue to bear the burden of the oppression of the newly elected government, and pledge our support in a common bond of nonviolent resistance to these policies and practices.

We remember that our savior was once a refugee, and was himself poor, and said, “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me,” (Matthew 25:35). In accordance with the statement made by Bishop Bruce R. Ough, we promise “to see the face of Christ in the refugee.” We condemn policies and practices of a government that would deny the US Constitution, and withhold sanctuary based upon religion. We affirm our common heritage with Jews and Muslims, as “people of the Book” and look forward to the kingdom of heaven in which all peoples will share in the great banquet of God.

We condemn raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers, based on racial profiling, those in our own communities, and stand ready to advocate with our Latinx brothers and sisters in nonviolent resistance to these oppressive practices.

Lastly we call upon the pastors of the United Methodist Church to provide guidance to their congregations, and to advocate with those who have been targeted. We call upon our leaders, both laity and clergy, to educate themselves and others about the call to Christian action in response to the current situation. We call for prayers that our government leaders would recognize that power without compassion creates and compounds fear and that they would open their hearts to God’s grace and love that casts out fear.

May the Peace of Christ be with us all.

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Lori Valentine de Segovia

Lester Kurtz

Patricia Schang

Minoka Gunsekera

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Karen Bragg

Janice Webb

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