



Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church



A Crisis of Faith and Democracy

A statement by United Methodist Bishops in the United States

Signatures below

October 12, 2020

The right of every citizen to vote in the United States is under attack, and with it, the foundation of American democracy and the sacred worth of all persons. We call United Methodists to vote and to protect free and fair elections and peaceful transfer of power.

A faithful retelling of the story of Methodism in America and the history of The United States must consider the influence of each on the other. They came into being alongside one another, and similarities in development of the two are undeniable. The narrative includes noble ideals and shameful actions, astonishing opportunity and disturbing discrimination, ethical vision and moral failure.

Our church and our nation are both democratic institutions. Through a system of conferences, from the local church to a global assembly, Methodists discuss, debate, and vote in order to discern the will of God. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church affirm that we “hold governments responsible for the protection of the rights of the people to free and fair elections.” (BOOK OF DISCIPLINE, ¶164).

As Bishops of The United Methodist Church who reside in The United States, we affirm our democratic institutions. However, we believe that the democratic processes of our country are under great threat. This is particularly evident in the reality of widespread initiatives to obstruct voter registration and to suppress voters from casting their ballots with confidence they will be accurately counted.

The right to vote is rooted in a commitment to the value of all persons, created in the image of God as individuals of sacred worth. This belief in the sacredness of humanity is a foundational principle of many religious traditions present in the American body politic.

The legacy of injustice told in civil rights museums across our country is one of suppression of the vote. And the legacy of white supremacy and privilege continues. At times this suppression has been overt, as when one was required to own property or be a white male

to vote. At other times it is more nuanced, as in moving or eliminating polling places, or in sowing confusion over early voting or voting by mail. Such actions undermine the people's confidence that voting matters. And in some instances, where the people have affirmed the right to vote for convicted felons who have served their sentences, state legislatures and governor's offices have sought to overturn the will of the people in order to suppress the vote.

Efforts by our government or elected officials to suppress the freedom to cast ballots violate the high principles upon which our nation was founded. By contrast, these high principles are affirmed and realized when elected officials and government entities promote, defend, and guarantee the unfettered right of all citizens to choose our leaders in free and fair elections.

The greatest hallmark of a democratic institution is the peaceful transfer of power once the will of the people has been established. This model of democracy has existed within our country for over 220 years. It is incumbent upon those who participate in democratic processes not only to ensure each citizen's right to cast their ballot, but to respect the result of those ballots once counted. When we resist this aspect of our democratic franchise, we undermine the whole and corrupt the foundation of our republic.

We are in a moment of national crisis as we navigate two viruses, COVID and Racism, and suffer the economic consequences of both. In these crises we are reminded that our religious faith and our nation's principles support elections that faithfully reflect the will of the American people. Our faith in God who created all people in the divine image, and our hope that our nation can live into the aspirations of our founding ideals, lead us to pledge ourselves to the fullest expansion of this right to vote.

To that end we call upon the people of the United Methodist Church to use their influence in their states, legislative districts, and local precincts to enable voter registration and to encourage elected officials to provide the resources necessary to support the fullest possible participation in November's elections. This would include the provision of an adequate number of accessible polling sites and the support of an efficient process of counting mail-in ballots. Our identity as a democracy requires no less.

Affirmed by the following United Methodist Bishops in the United States:

Bishop David Alan Bard
Michigan Area

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton
New York Area

Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño
San Francisco Area

Bishop Ken Carder
Retired

Bishop Kenneth Carter
Florida Area

Bishop Ray Chamberlain
Retired

Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher
Retired

Bishop Charles N. Crutchfield
Retired

Bishop Sally Dyck
Chicago Area

Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar
Boston Area

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling
Washington Area

Bishop Elias Galvan
Retired

Bishop Larry Goodpaster
Retired

Bishop William Boyd Grove
Retired

Bishop Grant Hagiya
Los Angeles Area

Bishop Laurie Haller
Iowa Area

Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey
Louisiana Area

Bishop Susan Hassinger
Retired

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson
North Georgia Area

Bishop Robert T. Hoshibata
Phoenix Area

Bishop Janice Huie
Retired

Bishop Alfred Johnson
Retired

Bishop Peggy A. Johnson
Philadelphia Area

Bishop Scott Jones
Houston Area

Bishop Hee-Soo Jung
Wisconsin Area

Bishop Charlene P. Kammerer
Retired

Bishop Paul L. Leeland
Charlotte Area

Bishop Richard C Looney
Retired

Bishop John M. (Mike) Lowry
Fort Worth Area

Bishop Ernest Lyght
Retired

Bishop Tracy S. Malone
Ohio East Area

Bishop Joel Martinez
Retired

Bishop Marcus Matthews
Retired

Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey
Retired

Bishop Michael McKee
Dallas Area

Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi
Pittsburgh Area

Bishop Sue Morrison
Retired

Bishop Fritz Mutti
Retired

Bishop Karen Oliveto
Mountain Sky Area

Bishop Bruce R. Ough
Dakotas-Minnesota Area

Bishop Gregory V. Palmer
Ohio West Area

Bishop Jeremiah Park
Harrisburg Area

Bishop Joseph Pennel
Retired

Bishop Sharon Rader
Retired

Bishop Ruben Saenz
Great Plains Area

Bishop Robert Schnase
San Antonio Area

Bishop John Schol
Greater New Jersey Area

Bishop Ann Sherer-Simpson
Retired

Bishop Dan E. Solomon
Retired

Bishop Elaine Stanovsky
Greater Northwest Area

Bishop Forrest Stith
Retired

Bishop James E. Swanson
Mississippi Area

Bishop Julius Trimble
Indiana Area

Bishop Hope Morgan Ward
Raleigh Area

Bishop Peter Weaver
Retired

Bishop Woodie W. White
Retired

Bishop Richard B. Wilke
Retired

Bishop Richard J. Wills, Jr.
Retired

Bishop Joe A. Wilson
Retired