



COUNCIL OF BISHOPS
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

November 10, 2011

Dear United Methodist Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Grace and peace to you from Jesus Christ who calls us to faithfulness during a time of great and unsettling change around the world that God loves so deeply and also within the Body of Christ where Jesus is both head and redeemer.

We give thanks for each one of you as you seek to be faithful witnesses and fruitful disciples wherever God has called you to live and share the grace that offers salvation to the world. Your faithfulness brings encouragement, inspiration and hope to us and to all who live in the influence of your witness.

In a time when the world seems to be torn apart with division, inequality, injustice, hatred and violence, as Christians we bear responsibility to give witness to "a more excellent way" (1Corinthians 12:31). The church is not exempt from struggles. We are not the first to experience upheaval in culture and church and we are not the first to have serious and deep disagreements about issues of great importance.

One of the deep disagreements and divisions within the church is over the practice of homosexuality, recently heightened by a group of clergy who have declared that they will perform holy unions in opposition to the *Book of Discipline*. This has caused different experiences of deep pain throughout the church. As the bishops of the church, we commit ourselves to be in prayer for the whole church and for the brokenness our communities experience. Furthermore, we "implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons" (par. 161F). We will continue to offer grace upon grace to all in the name of Christ.

At times like these we call upon each other to remember and renew our covenant with God and with one another as United Methodist Christians. As bishops chosen, consecrated and assigned by the Church, we declare once again our commitment to be faithful to this covenant we have made. As the Council of Bishops we will uphold the *Book of Discipline* as established by General Conference.

Even in the midst of our differences, we believe that we can together be about our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We invite all United Methodists, lay and clergy, to join us in strengthening our congregations unto greater vitality for the sake of our mission.

To that end, may we continue to live together in the spirit of Philippians 2:1-5:

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united and agreeing with each other. Don't do anything for selfish purposes but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:1-5).

Your brothers and sisters in Christ,
The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church