



Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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*God also said, "When the time's ripe, I answer you. When victory's due, I help you.
I form you and use you to reconnect the people with me,
To put the land in order, to resettle families on the ruined properties.
I tell prisoners, 'Come on out. You're free!'
and those huddled in fear, 'It's all right. It's safe now.'
(Isaiah 49:8-9, The Message)*

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed, to proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor. . . .
Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."
(Luke 4:18-19, 21, NIV)*

June 19, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness,
and Hope of the World!

Today is known in the United States as "Juneteenth." It is on this day that we remember and celebrate June 19, 1865, when African Americans in Texas learned that they were freed from the bondage of slavery. That day—two and a half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation—Union Major General Gordon Granger informed them of the freedom they had already been granted.

Unfortunately, a simple declaration did not end the racial oppression. The journey from that date in 1865 to today has been long and rocky. Some 155 years later, racism still clings to the very fabric of our communities, and freedom from racism is still a very challenging, demanding, and unfinished agenda.

Racial injustice and pain cannot be ignored or set aside. No more. Systemic and institutional racism is real and powerful. It is destroying the soul of who we are as God's children and chipping away at the foundation of our country. No matter what differences we may represent, we cannot disregard and dishonor what God has ordained for humanity: Each one is created in the image of God, has inalienable rights, and deserves respect with dignity. Racism is incompatible with the Beloved Community.

I plead with you to join millions of others, across all races, ethnicities, and nations, who are taking the current movement for racial justice, prompted by the cruel death of George Floyd, to be the historic God-moment for change—real change.

The Council of Bishops, with the general agencies of our denomination, are speaking with one voice to extend conversations regarding racism, white privilege, and the work that lies before the church in order to be fully inclusive and just. We must join our denominational leaders in their commitment. Over the next year and half, leading up to General Conference, The United Methodist Church will offer numerous opportunities for guided conversation, worship, and prayer as we take a stand against racism. Please give attention to the following recent article from United Methodist Communications ([“Dismantling Racism: Pressing on to Freedom,”](#) June 16, 2020):

“United Methodist Church leaders will launch a plan of action to galvanize church members and others to actively stand against racism in the wake of the death of George Floyd and protests across the U.S.

“The ‘Dismantling Racism: Pressing on to Freedom’ initiative is a multi-level effort throughout the church to initiate a sustained and coordinated effort to dismantle racism and promote collective action to work toward racial justice. The church-wide effort will kick off on June 19, 2020, to coincide with Juneteenth, the commemoration of the end of slavery in the U.S. An announcement from members of the United Methodist Council of Bishops will be broadcast at 11 am CT [noon ET] on [UMC.org/EndRacism](#) and [Facebook](#).

“Participating in the event will be Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey of the Louisiana Episcopal Area, president of the Council of Bishops and the [first Hispanic woman](#) to hold that post. . . ‘Words are great, words are important—but action is really important,’ said [Bishop Harvey](#). ‘Pick up your pen, pick up your voice, pick up your feet, and do something.’

“A day of prayer and worship will follow on June 24, 2020, with an online service to be broadcast at noon CT [1 p.m. ET] on [UMC.org/EndRacism](#) and [Facebook](#). There will also be a denominational virtual town hall event on July 1.


“Regional and local worship events and town hall meetings involving community partners will subsequently take place, either online or in keeping with social distancing protocols.

“United Methodist Communications has launched a national advertising campaign on social media and news websites across the U.S., as well as digital billboards in Atlanta, Minneapolis, Houston, and Louisville. . . . The denomination has a long-standing history of [advocating for justice](#). The [Social Principles](#) of The United Methodist Church recognize racism as a sin and commit to challenging unjust systems of power and access. Additional information and resources are available online at [UMC.org/EndRacism](#).”

This is the time and we are the people to commit ourselves to breaking the wall of hostility and building a bridge to dismantle racism, disparity, discrimination, and distrust. The time is ripe for God's people to proclaim in words and acts the year of the Lord's favor for racial justice. You and I, who claim the name United Methodist, can and must join together to eradicate racism. We cannot let this moment in history pass us by.

Are we the people for such a time as this?

With You in Christ's Ministry,

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Jeremiah Park