



**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 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 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 Robert T. Hoshibata**  
*Phoenix Area*

**Bishop Janice Huie**  
*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 Hope Morgan Ward**  
*Raleigh Area*

**Bishop Peter Weaver**  
*Retired*

**Bishop Woodie White**  
*Retired*

**Bishop Richard B. Wilke**  
*Retired*

**Bishop Richard J. Wills, Jr.**  
*Retired*

**Bishop Joe A. Wilson**  
*Retired*