

A Pastoral Letter

from Bishop Jung

Along with all of you, I await the results of our national election. This is a tense time, and as I reflect on the vote to this point, I want to call upon our United Methodist Church in Wisconsin to be in prayer for our country and its leadership. I will not say that it doesn't matter who is elected, but I will say that no matter who is elected president, no matter who prevails in the Senate, our country needs the best leadership possible, and that this current election is positive proof how divided and at odds we are. Our country needs healing, and continuing the path we are on simply will do more harm than good. We need empathy and compassion if we are to survive and thrive as a country.

Our political divisions are coming to define us. What we hold in common, what we share in value, what we hope for our future is lost in our differences of opinion and hotly contested arguments. It calls to my mind one of Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* – seek first to understand, then to be understood. On the big maps of Red and Blue states, it is easy to be pulled into simplistic, either/or thinking – that people are all one thing or another. But when race after race comes down to nearly 50/50 splits, there is evidence of a complex and daunting situation. In this country, we are of two minds on nearly everything, and people are looking for candidates that most closely mirror our own thinking and beliefs. Interview after interview highlights people on one side of an issue shaking their head and saying, “I just don't understand *those* people.” But *those* people are all of us!

Please hear me; I am not saying we should “all just get along,” or that we should set aside our differences. I am saying we create more problems than we can solve when we allow our differences to turn us into enemies instead of opponents. I am not sure that we are even trying very hard anymore to understand people who are significantly different than we are. And we are allowing our politics to guide us in unhealthy ways.

No matter who wins and who loses in the current elections, we still have a pandemic, we still have economic challenges, we still have racial injustices and systemic oppression. We still have climate change and natural disasters and global unrest. Our political leaders will continue to make decisions that impact all of our lives – in good and bad ways. But we as Christian disciples should not allow these decisions to determine for us how we will think and respond. Our Christian gospel calls us to a higher standard of conduct and thought. Those of us saved by God's grace and filled with God's Spirit witness to God's values and God's reality through the fruit of this Spirit. Spirit-filled Christians exercise a respectful self-control. They are gentle, kind, generous, and faithful. They are characterized by their patience and love, making peace and spreading joy.

Our election processes turn us all into winners and losers, adversaries at the core. Some will rejoice by the outcomes while others despair. Some will see hope, others violence. Some will see fulfillment of the law of the land, others a deep violation of all we hold dear. But regardless of which side we find ourselves at the end of the election, we are still baptized brothers, sisters, and siblings, and we should use our God given gifts and Christian faith to work together for the greatest good for all of God's people.

Pray with me, my friends, and pray for one another. Pray for our country and our world. Pray that our politics might serve us well, but when they fail, commit to do what is right and good in spite of them. Let us be Christian first, disciples of Jesus Christ committed to bringing light into darkness, hope into corners of despair, and love and grace to the ends of the earth. And remember, God is with us and God is in charge. Let us be kind to each other!

In Christ,

Hee-Soo Jung