

January 14, 2018

Subject: **Where Do We Go from Here? A Pastoral Call to Action**

Peace to you Sisters and Brothers,

I pray all is well with you. On the eve of celebrating the birthday and legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr on Monday, January 15, 2018, the current President of the United States Donald J. Trump made disparaging, racist, irresponsible, demeaning, insensitive, xenophobic and bigoted comments this past week. I was and continue to be hurt, angered, insulted, and saddened by his comments.

Fifty-one years ago, Rev. Dr. King Jr. wrote his last book "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?" King words challenge us today to answer the question, "Where **do we** go from here?" Do we choose to live in chaos or do we choose to live in community? King's concept of community was the realization of an egalitarian community where all of God's people regardless of race experience God's love and live in hope.

Despite King's challenge to us, the reality is that we still live in a culture of white supremacy that gives power and privilege to the majority white culture. King's question to us and especially to the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. is, where are **WE** going. Trump's recent and previous comments only keeps alive the reality that as we live in these United States, the American community has **not yet** realized King's concept of the beloved community.

Sisters and brothers, we are reminded that we are on a battlefield. Not only for our Lord but on the battlefield to realize the vision of an egalitarian community. King reminds us that "No great victories are won in a war for the transformation of a whole people without total participation. Less than this will not create a new society."

Are we still complacent? Have we forgotten how we got to the battlefield for our Lord? How is it that our behavior is considered more complicit to chaos than to a better community? These are questions that confront us today. King said we must engage and confront white supremacy power in order to realize a beloved community.

Dr. King also said, "A time comes when silence is betrayal." Sisters and brothers for such a time as this we cannot remain silent. Therefore, I am asking all Black Presbyterians, White Presbyterians, ruling elders, teaching elders, all Presbyterians, and all persons of faith in God to **publicly reject** Trump's recent comments.

In addition, I am asking all of you to participate in your local, regional and national councils of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. by **publicly** voicing dissatisfaction with Trump's comments and requesting a **public apology** from President Trump to all the peoples of Haiti, El Salvador and African nations he demeaned in his recent comments. In addition, I continue my call to you to no longer tolerate and accept actions that demean and exclude any of God's children.

Sisters and brothers, where do we go from here? Speak truth at the table, in your session meeting, at your Presbytery meeting, at the Synod Council meeting and at the General Assembly. Address the pervasive impact of a White supremacy culture. Trump's comments are not about inappropriate language but about the reality of a prevailing racist attitude that permeates God's church, God's beloved community, God's society, God's country and God's world.

At stake is the unity of the church. "How should the church respond when sin disrupts the church's unity, creates division among the children of God, and constructs unjust systems that steal life from God's creation"? The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. took a stand in its response to add the Confession of Belhar as part of its Constitution, it believed the clarity of Belhar's witness to unity, reconciliation, and justice might help the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. speak and act with similar clarity at a time when it faces division, racism, and injustice. Sisters and brothers that time is now!

Where do we go from here? King's legacy calls us to exercise our voice, our vote, our witness, to do what is right to realize the beloved community. On the eve of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, let us not realize a white supremacy culture, or a minority Black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Middle Eastern culture but a beloved community culture.

Sisters and brothers, I call you to action. I call you to participate in the governance of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. exercising your voice and vote to do what is right, to do what is just, to do what is kind as we humbly walk together with Jesus.

Bearing Faithful Witness to God's Radical Hope that We Love One Another,

*Thomas H. Priest, Jr.*

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President

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