

Pentecost 23 –
Accompanying the Letter from
Bishop Whayne Hougland, EDWM

The Bishop's letter is relevant for our times, especially in light of the bomb plantings and the shootings and murders in the Tree of Life synagogue. Divisiveness is literally killing us.

In the first reading from Jeremiah, we hear God's promise
"See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame, those with child and
those in labor, together;
a great company, they shall return here.
With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back..."

And even as we hear that promise, we must remember that we are the hands and heart and feet of Christ now... Christ has no body now but ours. The mission of restoring all people to unity with God and each other is ours.

But we cannot restore what we are unable to see.
In this week's Gospel, we hear Jesus ask Bartimeaus the same question he asked James and John which we heard two weeks ago: "What do you want me to do for you?" Remember their answer? Let us sit at your side, one at your right and one at your left, in your glory. Give us power and prestige and "creds"... When Jesus asks Bartimeaus the same question, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimeaus says, "Let me see again." We're told that Bartimeaus is a blind beggar... he made his living by begging, and people gave him alms because he was blind. So know this – when he asked Jesus to restore his sight, to open his eyes, he was doing so knowing it would change his life. He would no longer be able to earn his living from the alms of others... he would lose his identity, his sight would *change* him.

When the diocese, when this parish of St. John the Evangelist, when we as individuals pursue the objective of dismantling racism in our own lives, we are essentially saying with Bartimeaus, "Lord, let us see." It is a bold prayer – and one that has the power to change us. In heeding the Bishop's call, we are asking to have

our eyes opened, so that we might indeed take up our mission: “to seek restoration and unity by fully giving ourselves to the work of dismantling racism in our lives.”

Let me repeat the Bishop’s words:

“This will not be easy work. It will require humility, vulnerability, honesty and courage. It will take graceful listening with gentle responses. It will require patience and prayer, lots of prayer, as we seek to shift our awareness and our actions, so we might become agents of healing and reconciliation in our communities and in our time.”

Especially in these days of grief in our nation, in these days before the election, and on this day in which we move closer to welcoming Jonathan Korpi into the Episcopal Church, the bishop’s call to and reminder of our mission is right on time.

Let us continue to support one another on the journey toward wholeness.

Amen.

LETTER FROM THE BISHOP:

Dear Friends,

As we make final preparations for the 144th Diocesan Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan, I request your fervent prayers for our diocese, for the communities we serve, and for our nation. We need God’s help - and your support - to expand and energize our work of healing and reconciliation to address the growing divisions in our American life.

A little less than 3 days after the gavel closes on our 144th Diocesan Convention, America’s polls will open for the 2018 midterm election. When the polls finally close Americans could end up more bitterly divided than we are already. No matter who “wins” all of us might end up losing.

I am concerned about this growing chasm of distrust and fear amongst us and the increasing hostility being expressed towards entire segments of our varied communities. This distrust and fear is the opposite of the spirit of reconciliation embodied in the work of the Episcopal Church. As Episcopalians, our mission is, “to restore all people to unity with God and each other, as we pray and worship, proclaim the Gospel, and promote justice, peace and love.” (BCP p. 855) The challenges facing the Jesus Movement in Western Michigan are enormous and among the most urgent is the need for racial reconciliation.

This is also an area where we are well positioned to take important new steps toward effective action. In 2017, our Diocesan Convention passed a resolution calling for the development of a policy and procedure requiring that, “persons running for any elected diocesan position must have completed an approved course of study on racial reconciliation.” Our Diocesan Commission on Dismantling Racism has done great work. Working in conjunction with your

bishop, they have developed a policy and procedure that was passed unanimously by your diocesan council at its September 2018 meeting.

Regardless of who you are - your background or your beliefs - we are all shaped by systems, including within the Church, in which attitudes, social practices, and power dynamics intentionally and unintentionally create unfair advantages or disadvantages for groups of people based on race.

Simply put, racism is prejudice coupled with power. Racism in all its varieties exists to help those holding power and control to maintain power and control.

It is only when we see and recognize the overarching role of racism as a system that we can begin to examine its consequences and seek ways to change. Our sincere engagement in dismantling racism is a necessary step toward making visible God's likeness and goodness in every person.

As your Bishop, I now call upon us to take up our mission - to seek restoration and unity by fully giving ourselves to the work of dismantling racism in our lives.

The attached policy and procedure for Dismantling Racism in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan outlines a course of study on racism awareness and reconciliation.

- Phase One - Understanding the history of racism: US origins of racism, institutional racism, awareness of personal bias.

- Phase Two - Committing to intentional personal and public change.

- Phase Three - Creating a parish plan and determining outcomes to be measured and follow-up activities to maintain momentum.

This will not be easy work. It will require humility, vulnerability, honesty and courage. It will take graceful listening with gentle responses. It will require patience and prayer, lots of prayer, as we seek to shift our awareness and our actions, so we might become agents of healing and reconciliation in our communities and in our time.

I look forward to taking up this work with you and moving deeper into our relationship with God as we move deeper into relationship with one another.

I am honored to be your bishop.

May the blessing of God Almighty be with us now and always,

The Rt. Rev. Wayne M. Hougland, Jr.

IX Bishop,

The Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan