

October 2018

“HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE”

In preparation for an upcoming spiritual formation retreat, I have read a book entitled, “The Little Book of Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security Is Threatened” by Carolyn Yoder of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, my alma mater. I am convinced that working for peace with justice in all our relationships is at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I was struck by the following quote included in the final chapter:

“The earth is too small a planet, and we too briefly visitors upon it, for anything to matter more than the struggle for peace.”

-Coleman McCarthy

Like each of you, I want to leave a better world for our children and grandchildren. Some of us are actively engaged in causes and actions that we believe will lead to a healthier and more peaceful tomorrow. Others of us are eager to find our place and lend our time, talent and energy but are unsure where to begin.

The following suggestions gleaned from Yoder’s book may help us sharpen our focus and give us meaningful ways to engage in “the struggle for peace”:

- 1. Recognize ourselves as leaders.** Our Virginia Conference bishop, Sharma Lewis, urges us to be disciples of Jesus Christ who are life-long learners and who influence others to serve. Each of us has a sphere of influence, be it as a small family unit or as large as a nation. Intentionally study and actively participate in efforts to bring peace while working to right injustices in our homes, communities, nation and world.
- 2. Challenge one another as the church, Skipwith UMC, to live up to the highest ideals.** As people of faith, we have a key role to play. We have the responsibility to hold one another accountable in our Christian discipleship. We must speak the truth in love with a desire to be drawn closer to the heart of God and to be reconciled to one another. We must challenge attitudes that espouse hate, inequality and provincialism.
- 3. Learn to wage peace.** When we study and employ strategies for living in peace, we effectively prevent traumatic experience from occurring. Finding our voices to speak against violence and acts of war is a step in the right direction, but more is necessary. We must learn about and promote viable options in our communities that teach non-violent problem-solving and conflict resolution.
- 4. Commit to self-growth and community growth.** Healing and peace have to begin with us as individuals. We must look carefully at our own pain and trauma and determine to love ourselves enough to get the help we need to find peace and healing. Consider what this means if we are to “love our neighbors as we love ourselves.” Will we love ourselves better so that we can love others better?
- 5. Be informed.** Don’t take my word as your sole source of truth and information. Don’t take a particular newspaper, or television network or website as your exclusive

information source either. Read widely and ask questions. Study God's Word, especially the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John... pay close attention to the Jesus' teaching, and the descriptions of Jesus' interactions with people – He is the one we call "Lord"; Jesus' life, teaching, and ministry is our measuring stick. WWJD or "What would Jesus Do?" is still a valid tool to gauge our faithful response to violence, hate and injustice.

- 6. Remember that we are not alone.** This life is not a solitary journey. We often act like it is. We allow fear of the "other" to keep us separated. Sometimes we choose isolation as a defense mechanism, thinking that we'll be able to shield ourselves from being hurt or unduly challenged. Yet we are created to live in relationships and relationship take work and intentionality. We find joy and richness and creativity and hope in relationships. Yes, we also find hate, and greed, and selfishness, and jealousy that can lead to all manner of dis-ease, violence and trauma.

The question remains: How then shall we live?

STRUGGLING FOR PEACE,
PASTOR TODD