



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
N. KY • OH • WV

**Answering God's call to build a just world for all, we commit in our shared life to:
Live the love, unity, and compassion of Jesus**

"I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:26)



Dear Friends in Christ,

Last month I introduced to you the new articulated "Why, Calling and Covenant" for the conference which has been affirmed by the association governing bodies and the Conference Board of Directors. During this past week, as I attended virtually the Synod meeting of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (in Germany) and a global pre-conference on mission, this part of our covenant which I have shared above was very much on my mind.

From Asia, to Africa, to Europe, and North America, we considered together what the mission of the church is in this season of human history given the realities of multi-religious contexts, the profound effects of global migration, and the history of colonialism and its deadly mix of Christianity and culture imported in ways often not reflective of the love of Jesus Christ. Often within our own countries polarization persists as the predominating energy in the common life.

Given these histories and current realities the urgent question that remains is this one: "In what way is the Gospel of Jesus Christ truly good news for the world?" During the pre-conference, the writing of Korean theologian, Andrew Sung Park was lifted up regarding his vital reframing of the nature and purpose of mission. Park reframes mission from a focus on the forgiveness of sin, to a focus on the alleviation of suffering. It is here that the Gospel of Jesus Christ truly becomes good news for the world.

You may remember that this is what it means to be compassionate – to suffer with. To live the agape love of Jesus is to be available to the suffering of others. And it means to seek the other's greatest good as the other, whomever that may be, identifies what their need or desire is. At the mission conference, we remembered together that historically often the church has prescribed for others what the good should look like and thus imposed culture while simultaneously dismantling the culture that pre-existed.

Both history and our current context make our conference covenantal commitment more important than ever. Truly it is counter-cultural to live the love, unity and compassion of Jesus.

In this, we must remember that unity is not about uniformity. Rather it is a discovery of God's joining power and presence which rises when we make ourselves vulnerably available to the sufferings of our siblings of the human family wherever they may be found.

I wonder what kinds of transformation might happen in our congregations and in our life together if we were to ask the question, where is there suffering and how can we be lovingly present to it by listening to the one who hurts? Could it be that this might in fact be the first step in bearing good news in a world bent on brokenness? I give thanks to God that we have been called into this discovery together. May God bless us as we answer call to build a just world for all. Blessings on you!

-Pastor Dave