



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



Lent Message: Time to Reclaim, Revive and Renew our United Methodist Church

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10

Friends, the journey to Easter has begun today as we once again mark Ash Wednesday. These forty days (not including Sundays) have traditionally been focused on repentance, prayer, fasting, and reflection in preparation for the celebration of Easter and the risen Christ. It is a time to pray that God will create within us a clean heart and a renewed spirit.

There is no doubt that as we absorb the realities of splintering, disaffiliation, and post-Covid, it is time for us as United Methodists to make the pivot away from what was into new and concerted efforts to reclaim, revive and renew The United Methodist Church throughout the world.

The approach to this season of Lent varies from person to person. Some see it as a time to “give up something.” Others see it as a season to “take on something new.” Perhaps in this unique season of our lives as a church, it is time for us to do both. Could it be that it is time for us to discipline ourselves and to breathe out that which has consumed us and breathe in that which will renew us?

As we reflect and pray fervently this Lent, let’s breathe out anger and disappointment, and breathe in once again our calling and identity as United Methodists. Let’s **Reclaim** that we are a people called to love all; a people called to serve all; and a people called to openly worship our loving God with joy and anticipation. (John 13:35)

Let’s breathe out hesitations and apathy and breathe in a desire to **Revive** our belief in the love of God, our creator; the grace of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior; and the communion we have with the Holy Spirit, our ever-present guide and inspiration. (2 Corinthians 13:13) Let’s revive our belief in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Let’s revive our belief in one another and the power of God to use even us to transform a broken world.

Let’s breathe out any focus on our ourselves and breathe in a deep desire to **Renew**

our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Let's renew our commitment to reach out to all who need the saving grace and love of Jesus Christ with joy and enthusiasm. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Friends, this is the time for The United Methodist Church to **pivot** away from old behaviors into a new vision for how God can use this church to be a beacon of God's love for all. It is time to move from division and focus on the unity of the beloved community given to us by our loving God.

It is time to move from a rhetoric that tears down and focus on the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ. It is time to move from paralysis and fatigue and focus on the life-giving mission and ministry we are called to offer as guided by the Holy Spirit. It is time to move from sadness over what has been and focus with anticipation on the future with the hope that God will open to us.

It is time.

This Lenten Season, may we let go everything that has discouraged us and held us back and pray that God will guide us as we Reclaim, Revive, and Renew our beloved United Methodist Church.

We, in the Council of Bishops, renew our commitment to pray for you as we journey through the days that lie ahead. In turn, we ask for your prayers as we attempt to faithfully lead in your midst.

It is time to once again reaffirm our belief that God has not left us alone and will walk with us as we move forward. So as the liturgy for Ash Wednesday so simply states, *"I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent."* This is my prayer for you.

May it be so.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas J. Bickerton". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name of the signatory.

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton
President, Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church