“We Believe in the Church.” But, Do We Really?

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Good morning. I am pleased to be here with you once again, I’m particularly honored to have been invited twice in a row to address you. Although the title of my address may not show it, the original invitation asked me to speak about “perspectives from the past.” (I am not clear whether that was because I am a historian, or simply because I am old, and perhaps a relic of the past!) But the fact is that one cannot speak of the past without referring to the present and particularly to the future. As I have said repeatedly, history is never written merely from the past, but rather from the present in which the historian stands and the future for which one hopes or which one fears.

This is particularly true when it comes to Christianity. Our faith is deeply rooted in events in the past, but it is also equally rooted in the promises of God, in the future for which we hope and which we seek to preenact. Therefore, allow me to speak of the past, yes; but to speak of the past in the light of our present and of our hope for the future.

Then, allow me also to connect what I shall be saying today with what I said to this assembly not quite a year ago. At that point, as we gathered to celebrate among other things the 25th anniversary of the National Plan, I was given two directives. One was to speak of the future from the perspective of the past. Hence the title for that address, “Consecrating Our Future: Consecrating the Church.” So, I believe I have sufficient grounds today to speak not only about

the past, but also about the future.

Secondly, on that other occasion I was asked to dwell on the all-important matter of leadership development. As we stop to think about it, we realize that leadership development always takes place looking toward the future. Leadership development is like a relay race in which one generation passes the baton to another. Or perhaps we should say that it is like passing the Olympic torch in a long race, knowing that the torch we pass to others will eventually reach its goal and light a flame to be seen by the entire world.

For these reasons, today I have decided to focus on what I deem to be the crucial theological issue in our day, and one that should be at the heart of all our leadership formation and indeed of all our decisions and planning – a theological issue that will be the context of the debates looming for the upcoming extraordinary session of General Conference.

That subject is a doctrine of the church.

For some time, many of us have been saying that the main contribution of the 20th century to Christian theology was the refocusing on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This has been fostered not only by a return to a number of early Christian writings, but also by the explosive growth of Christianity throughout the world, which can be explained in no other way that as a work of the Holy Spirit, and where, thanks to the Holy Spirit, it continually takes shapes that may amaze us.

Now, however, I feel that it is necessary to take the matter a step forward, and to relate the doctrine of the Holy Spirit with the doctrine of the church. I daresay that when future historians speak of our age they will refer to the 20th century as the century of the Holy Spirit, and to the 21st as the century of the church. If there is a doctrine that requires a new emphasis and a new analysis it is the doctrine of the church. Without a solid understanding of the nature of the church, our view of the work of the Holy Spirit is misguided and truncated.

Significantly, in all the ancient creeds of Christianity the two – the Holy Spirit and the church – are intimately connected. What we now call the Apostles' Creed affirms that we believe "in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church…." The Nicene Creed, which is the most universally accepted creed throughout the Christian church, says that we believe in the Holy Spirit, and in the "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church."

This is as it should be, for there has always been a connection between the events of Pentecost and the birth and growth of the church.

Unfortunately, in much of the renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the 20th century there was also an individualistic undertone that obscured the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the church. We came to think that the Holy Spirit comes to me as an individual, and that the church is simply a place where those of us who have been so moved by the Holy Spirit gather in order to praise God for that gift. Furthermore, the notion soon developed that the

extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit should also give people extraordinary authority in the church, somehow making them better Christians than the rest.

As common as such views are, particularly among Latino and Latina believers, they are still unbiblical. In the crucial narrative in Acts 2, the Spirit comes upon the church when they are all gathered together. And, contrary to what we often think and to what we also see in depictions of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit does not come only to the apostles, but to all who are gathered there together. And they all heard, each in their own tongue; and sons and daughters prophesied; and the young saw visions; and the old dreamt dreams; and people generally marginalized by society, slaves, received the power of the Spirit, so that they too would prophesy. No matter what present-day self-named apostles may say, the Spirit has never been about giving power to some so they can lord it over the rest, but rather about sharing power so that all can hear and all can speak – and this, in their own tongue!

At any rate, if it is true that Pentecost marks the birth of the church, it is also true that the church is the main manifestation and result of the coming of the Spirit. This is why the ancient creeds, immediately after affirming faith in the Holy Spirit, and as part of that third clause, affirm faith in the church.

Today, as throughout most of its history, the church is embattled. This certainly is true of the United Methodist Church, as we look to the next General Conference both with expectation and

with dread. But it is also true of the church at large, oppressed in some parts of the world by hostile governments, and in other parts of the world — I might even say in our part of the world — held hostage to supposedly friendly governments that seek to co-opt it for their nefarious agendas. Furthermore, the church is embattled not only from outside, but even more so from the inside, by threats of schism, by obnoxious language that we seem to have learned from the political arena, and by lack of charity.

Given such circumstances, I suggest that we begin by clarifying what we mean when we say, "I believe in the one holy catholic church." It is my hope that as we come to a clearer understanding of the nature and calling of the church we shall also be able to find new ways to respond to the challenges before us – ways that are more congruent with the nature and the calling of the church. And it is also my hope that as we develop new leadership we guide it into a fuller understanding of the nature and mission of the church, and away from the errors of the past.

I. Let us begin with catholicity. As early as the second century, even before the New Testament was completed, Christians were beginning to refer to their community of faith as "the catholic church." What did they mean by that word? We are often told that catholicity is the same as universality, and as a result many of us grew up affirming our faith in "the universal church."

This is particularly true of those of us who grew up in Latin America, where the Roman Catholic

Church employed every means at hand to oppose Protestant preaching. In that setting, since the word “catholic” referred to a particular form of Christianity, we were taught to say, “I believe in the universal church.”

But the truth is that catholicity is not the same as universality. Indeed, in some ways the two are opposed, and something important is lost when we cease speaking of the “catholic” church. Clearly, both catholicity and universality refer to a church that knows no geographic boundaries, to a church that is present or at least seeks to be present throughout the world. But there is a difference in the etymology and therefore in the actual meaning of the two words. While universality implies sameness throughout the world, catholicity affirms the differences within the whole.

As I have written elsewhere, the word “catholic” is the result of combining two Greek roots. The first of these two roots is the preposition *katá*, which means “according to.” This is the preposition that is employed in the titles of the gospel such as “the Gospel according to Matthew,” or “the Gospel according to John.” In Greek, *To euangelion **kata** Matthaion* and *To euangelion **kata** Ioannen*.

The second root of the word “catholic” is the word *hólos*, which means “the whole” or “the totality.” It is the root that we employ in words such as “hologram” and “holocaust” — the first meaning an image that includes a variety of perspectives, and the second a totally burnt

offering.

When put together into a single word, cath'holic, these two roots mean the "according to the whole" or "according to all." (And, in order to make that meaning clear, allow me to pronounce the word as "cath'holic," according to the whole.)

When we take this into account, we realize that, while there are many points of contact between the universal and the cath'holic, there is also a significant difference. Universality is a uniform presence everywhere, with little or no change. Cath'holicity requires a diversity of perspectives and interpretations.

One of the earliest Christians to use the word "cath'holic" was second-century bishop Irenaeus of Lyon. Arguing that there should be four Gospels, he affirms that just as there are four "cath'holic" winds, there should also be a "cath'holic" witness to the gospel. At this point, the difference between the universal and the cath'holic is obvious. If there were only a North wind, it would be universal, but the wind itself would not be cath'holic. What makes the wind cath'holic is the fact that besides the North wind there are also winds from the South, the East, and the West. Likewise, Irenaeus argues, the cath'holic witness to the gospel is the fourfold witness that we now have. If we had only the Gospel of Matthew, it would be universal; it would still be fully orthodox; but it would not be cath'holic. The full cath'holic witness to the gospel requires the difference in perspectives that we find in the canon. As Irenaeus says, "the one

who was made manifest to humans has given us the gospel under four aspects, but all bound together by one Spirit."

To this one should add in passing that it is not only in the Gospels that we find a variety of perspectives. It appears throughout Scripture, and already in the first two chapters of Genesis, where we find two accounts of creation that, while agreeing on the essential theological points, are quite different from one another.

When the church decided to put four Gospels together into a single canon, they knew quite well that these four Gospels differed on many points. While today this may seem a disadvantage to us, the early church was quite cognizant of the well-known fact that in a court of law a plurality of witnesses who differ on details but are agreed on the main point under discussion are much more valuable than several witnesses who agree on every detail, as if they had been coached to say exactly the same.

Likewise, when we say that the church is "cath'holic," we are not saying simply that it exists throughout the world, but also and most importantly that within this church there is a variety of perspectives and experiences of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. To put it bluntly, a church that includes a single perspective, and insists that this perspective is the only proper understanding of the gospel and of the Christian life, is not cath'holic. No matter how large it may be, it is actually a sect. I say this because the word "sect" is derived from the same root as "section" or

"sector," and refers to those who take their own section of truth and their own perspective as the whole. This is precisely what any monolithic church that excludes other perspectives does, and what true cath'holicity does not allow us to do.

Thus, when we United Methodists affirm that we believe in the "cath'holic church," we are declaring on the one hand that we are fully aware that United Methodism is just one part within the full scope of the church cath'holic. But we are also declaring that we believe that this portion of the church that calls itself United Methodist, in order to be truly cath'holic, also needs the various perspectives of people in different walks of life, with different experiences of the gospel, representing different cultures and races. More concretely, this means that the function of MARCHA and other minorities within the United Methodist Church is not just to advocate for people who would otherwise be underrepresented and underestimated in the church, and not just to advocate for other minorities in our society and throughout the world, but also to make certain that the United Methodist Church is more fully and clearly cath'holic. A church that excludes or marginalizes people because of their culture, class, doctrinal perspectives, or understandings of the nature of Christian life loses its cath'holicity and rapidly becomes a sect. Therefore, keeping the United Methodist Church from becoming a sect is part of the calling and ministry of MARCHA as well as of the many other minority groups within the denomination. We are certainly grateful for all that the United Methodist Church is doing among Latinos and other minorities. But we must also affirm and insist that in order to be truly cath'holic the United Methodist Church needs us just as much as we need it.

And, given the connection between the work of the Spirit on the life of the church, we must affirm and we must also trust that the same Holy Spirit who on that Pentecost made all one church as they each heard in their own tongue will today lead the church to be truly cath'holic as it embraces within itself a variety of perspectives, emphases, and understandings of Christian life.

II. To this we must add that in the creeds we affirm belief not only in the cath'holic church, but also in the *holy* cath'holic Church. And here again we need to clarify what we mean by such words, and to make sure that the new leadership being developed by the National Plan has a clear understanding of the holiness of the church. Unfortunately, as I visit our United Methodist Hispanic churches I find among many of our members and even our leaders a misunderstanding of the holiness of the church. And this is a serious matter, for such misunderstandings have repeatedly led to countless divisions and schisms. We all know the story. Within a denomination or within a local church there are some who consider themselves purer and holier than the rest, and therefore decide to secede in order to create a truly holy church. But this is not the end of the story, for soon within that holier church another group appears that is holier than the rest, and therefore leave in order to become an even holier church. The result is an imaginary scale of holiness that reminds one of the old Sears catalogues, where items were classified as "good, better, best." And, since the best can always be improved, we continue dividing over and over again.

In a way, some of the bitter debates among us as General Conference approaches have to do precisely with this misconception of the holiness of the church. Some seek to make the church holier by expelling from it those whose personal lifestyles they find unacceptable. And, even though we find it difficult to confess it, those of us who insist on the primacy of the commandment of love also seem to think that the more loving a church is the holier it will be.

But the truth is that the holiness of the church is not based on the purity of its members, nor even on their love for one another. The church is holy, not because its members are holy, but because its Head is holy. We may find this difficult to accept and understand, but this is what the New Testament leads us to believe. Very briefly, take a look at Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, where he begins by calling his intended readers "saints" and then proceeds to describe a church whose inner life and personal morality leave much to be desired. What makes the Corinthians saints is not their moral purity They are not saints because they are so good. They are saints because God is so good that through the power of the Spirit they have been made part of this body whose Head is holy.

And the same is true of the church today. Were I to believe that the holiness of the church depends on my goodness and virtue, there is no way I could say that I believe in the holy cath'holic church.

So, let us not deceive ourselves. Whatever the outcome of the General Conference might be, it

will not make the church a whit holier. One group may claim that it has taken a stand because it holds to a stricter morality. Another group may claim that it holds to a wider understanding of love. And each of us will be convinced that we are holier. But we are not. We are holy only because the grace of God is such that it has seen fit to join us to this holy body of the Holy One.

III. But then, as we look again at the credal affirmations about the church, we come to realize that, if there is a division, we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that there will be two churches. The Nicene Creed clearly affirms that we believe in "the one, holy, cath'holic, and apostolic church." No matter how much we may dislike it or how difficult it is to believe, the church is one and will never be more than one. As a fairly conservative brother in Buenos Aires once told me, if the church is the bride of Christ, we must remember that Christ has a bride, and not a harem.

In order to understand what is meant by the church being one it may be good to turn to an image frequently used by Latinos and Latinas when speaking about the church. Quite often, we refer to the church as the family of God – an image taken from the Epistle to the Ephesians 2.19 in its traditional Spanish version, where believers are called "miembros de la familia de Dios" – literally, "members of the family of God." While most Spanish translations say "familia," most English translations say, "the household of God." And this is as it should be, for the English "family" usually refers only to parents and children, while the Spanish "familia" – like the Greek *oikeios* in Ephesians – includes aunts, uncles, in-laws, first, second, and third cousins, and other

cousins up to the umpteenth degree, *compadres, comadres, entenados*, and many others. In its most common usage, when someone speaks in English about a "family," this includes only a very limited number of people, while the Spanish-language "familia" is widely inclusive and open-ended. Thus, while speaking of the church as a "family" has the danger of giving the impression that the church is only for a limited number close to us, speaking of the church as a "familia" implies a view of the church as a widely inclusive community – a cath'holic community – with rather blurred edges.

On the other hand, there is one point in common between the English notion of a family and its Spanish counterpart: both are given to us, and we can neither opt out of them nor expel those whom we do not like. We may not like a relative who is obnoxious, or irresponsible, or even violent. But he is still a relative. We can reject him. We can expel him from our gatherings. We may even take action against him. But he is still our relative. In a word, we are stuck with him!

The same is true of the church as the *familia* of God. We may disagree violently. We may claim that the other is not a real Christian. We may feel that they are not as pure as they should be. We may feel that they are not as loving and forgiving as they should be. But they are still part of our family. We are stuck with them!

This is what we declare when we affirm that we believe in the one holy church. Just as the church is not holy because it is pure, so is it one not because it is in full agreement, or because it

has a single government, or because it bears a single denominational name, or because we like one another. The church is one because by the work of the Holy Spirit it is the one and only body of the one and only Head, Jesus Christ. We are one body because we are baptized into the same Christ. We may be sufficiently rigid and unforgiving, to divide the United Methodist Church. But no matter what we do, we have no power to divide the one holy cath'holic church. In a word, just as in the family, we are stuck with one another, and we might as well realize it. And, no matter how much we act as if this were not the case, we are still all members of the same church, for the same Spirit who brought us into the church will not let us go.

This is what makes divisions within the church so tragic — as tragic as divisions within a family. When we reject one another we also reject and deny who we are and who we are called to be. When a part of this one, holy, cath'holic church splits, we must look upon it in the same way in which I look at news of siblings suing one another over their parents' inheritance. They are still family, but in the very act of claiming the inheritance only for themselves they disgrace both themselves and their parents' memory. When we claim that the inheritance of faith is only ours, or belongs only to those who agree with us, we not only disgrace ourselves, but also disgrace the inheritance that is ours, and probably even blaspheme against the One who has bequeathed us that inheritance. And the same is true if we come to measure our success on the basis of how many people from other churches join us. When we do this, it is akin to a situation in an extended family where uncle Pedro and aunt María cannot get along with each other, and convoke two different Nochebuena dinners, vying to see whose party is better attended.

All of this sounds so easy. We must accept one another's contribution in order to be truly cath'holic. Holiness does not depend on us; it is a gift of the Holy One. Unity is also a gift of God that we cannot destroy no matter how hard we try. So, apparently, being part of this one holy cath'holic church is not all that difficult. All we have to do is be nice to one another and live happily ever after.

IV. But then we come to the fourth mark of the church that is affirmed by the Creed of Nicaea: "we believe in the one, holy, cath'holic, and *apostolic* church." "Apostolic." This word too needs to be redefined. In most discussions as to how the church is "apostolic," the emphasis falls on apostolic doctrine. According to this understanding, the church is "apostolic" because its teachings are essentially the same as those of the early apostles. As a historian, I can tell you that in this sense no church is absolutely apostolic. In other Christian traditions the word "apostolic" refers to an uninterrupted line of succession that connects the episcopal leaders of today's church with the first apostles. As a historian, I can also tell you that most such claims are rather shaky. More recently, the notion has appeared that the church is apostolic because it is led by a network of self-appointed "apostles." As a reader of Scripture, I can also tell you that this is thoroughly unbiblical.

All of these various interpretations leave aside the true meaning of apostolic calling. If we look back at the original meaning of the word "apostle," *apóstolos*, we may be surprised to find that in classical Greek literature it often referred to a naval expedition or to a ship about to leave

port. It derives from a verb meaning “to send.” In the classical use, referring to ships leaving harbor, it implied a sending into a risky future. This is what the Risen Lord does at the end of the Gospel of John, where he appears to his disciples and says to them “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” The church is apostolic not because it is led by people with the title of “apostles,” but because it is sent. It is sent out into the world in a manner similar to those early naval expeditions in the classical Greek world, that were also called apostolic. But even more, the church is apostolic because it has been sent into the world in the same way as the One who sends it was sent by the Father. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

It is because it is apostolic that the church finds it so difficult to express its true nature as one, holy, cath’holic. It is in its being apostolic that the church meets the world with all its tragedies, its injustices, its oppressions, and its ambiguities. Or, as we would say today, it is here that the rubber meets the road. What makes it difficult for the church to live out the fact that it is one, holy, and cath’holic is that it exists and must exist within the messy world, and for that world. Precisely because the church is apostolic, its members have to make decisions in the context of the complex, ambiguous, disorderly and perplexing world of which the church is a part and to which it is sent.

It would be quite easy for us United Methodists to withdraw into our own shells, to ignore all the struggles of the world around us, and thereby to avoid controversies and preserve some semblance of unity. It would be easy, but it would be untrue to our apostolic calling. We are

called into the world. We are called to be with the world. We are called to rejoice in the joys of the world and of society, to mourn the tragedies of the world, and to rebel against the injustices of the world. And, since people do not always see those joys, those tragedies, and those injustices in the same way, we are called to struggle within ourselves and among ourselves with the ambiguities of the world, and to seek to practice love and to do justice in the midst of those perplexing ambiguities.

This is not a new problem for the church. Already in New Testament times Christians clashed among themselves regarding the manner in which Gentiles were to be added to the church. During times of persecution they disagreed as to what should be their attitude vis-à-vis the state, and about how and under what conditions those who had denied their faith in the face of persecution were to be readmitted to the faith. In the fourth century, many of the greatest leaders of the church clashed with society and with the authorities because they perceived the order of society and the injustices within it to be irreconcilable with the demands of the gospel.

That fourth century was characterized by a number of leaders who sought ways to promote justice in every sphere of society. While they certainly dealt with matters of sexuality, they were much more concerned with issues of exploitation and the plight of the poor – on which point they simply followed the example of the Bible, where for each verse referring to sexuality there are thousands referring to social justice.

Just to clarify what I mean, allow me to quote a few very brief passages from some of those leaders:

> Basil of Caesarea: "When their time comes, seeds germinate and animals grow; but capital begins to reproduce from the moment it is begotten. The beasts become fertile soon, but cease reproducing equally soon. Capital, on the other hand, immediately produces interests, and these continue multiplying into infinity. Everything that grows stops growing when it reaches its normal size. But the money of the greedy never stops growing."
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> Ambrose of Milan, preaching to a wealthy congregation, says: "You strip people naked and dress up your walls. The naked poor cries at your door, and you do not even look at him. It is a naked human being that begs you, and you are considering what marbles to use for paving. The poor begs you for money and gets none. There is a human being seeking bread, and your horses chew gold in their bits. You rejoice in your precious adornments, while others have nothing to eat… The people are hungry, and you close your granaries. The people cry and you show your jewels. Woe to one who can save so many lives and does not!"
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> And finally, John Chrysostom, preaching before the richest and most powerful people in the Empire, said: "The gold bit on your horse's mouth, the gold bracelet on the wrist of your slave, the gilding on your shoes, mean that you are robbing the orphan and starving the widow. When you have passed away, each passerby who looks upon your great mansion will say, "How many tears did it take to build that mansion; how many orphans were stripped; how many widows wronged; how many laborers deprived of their honest wages?" Even death itself will not deliver you from your accusers."

Preaching in such terms was not an easy thing to do, and the price that Chrysostom had to pay included both exile and death.

Such preaching was so difficult and so costly, that by the next century the church had become accommodated to the existing order of society, such prophetic words were seldom heard, and when they were heard they were immediately crushed by church authorities. Either wittingly or unwittingly, Christians began avoiding conflict with the state and with society by concentrating

on the more private aspects of sin and not saying much about its social dimensions. In a word, sin was individualized and sexualized. Sin now had to do mostly with an individual's actions vis-à-vis other individuals. While violence was still decried, this usually referred to the violence of one person on another, and not to the violence done by society at large to the poor, the powerless, and the marginalized. What came to be known as the seven deadly sins all had to do with individual behavior: pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth.

At the same time, sin became increasingly sexualized. The church became the guardian of morality – that is, of morality understood mostly as sexual behavior. (And, let it be said in passing, since women were often seen as mere sexual objects, they too were considered particularly sinful. Thus, for instance, it was commonly held that Mary Magdalene's seven demons must have been demons of sexual misbehavior, even though the New Testament does not say a word to that effect.)

In a way, that inheritance remains to this day. In the popular mind, when one talks about "sin" one is actually referring to sexual misconduct. We all know what a "sinful woman" is, and it has nothing to do with exploiting the poor or practicing injustice.

This has led to a tragic situation in which debates about sexuality obscure important issues in Christian obedience. A Jesuit priest once told me of an eye-opening experience when an elderly member of his parish said "If we were fetuses, the entire church would be defending us. But

since we were born and are poor nobody cares." Clearly, if one reads between the lines, one realizes that the defense of the unborn often takes overtones of punishing women for their sexual behavior. But since being poor and not having enough to eat has little to do with sex, many Christians are content with defending the unborn and forgetting the born.

For similar reasons, many churches today are suffering schisms over issues of sexual morality. Those issues are important, and the church certainly must debate them. But if the church is to be truly apostolic, truly bringing the message of God's grace and God's justice and God's salvation to the world, we cannot allow such debates to obscure other burning issues of our time.

It is often said that when the Turks were besieging Constantinople Byzantine theologians were debating the nature of the angels. This may or not be true. But I fear that a few decades from now people might say that at a time when children were being wrenched away from their parents as a means of torture to prevent their seeking asylum from unbearable dangers, at a time when tyrants were poisoning their enemies even in distant lands, at a time when supposedly democratic leaders declared their admiration for such tyrants, at a time when the ecosystem of the entire planet was being threatened for the sake of profit, churches were debating the nature of homosexuality and the place of homosexuals within the life of the church. And I even fear that they will also say that in those debates we in the 21st century showed just about as much understanding of the nature of homosexuality as the Byzantines in

the 15th century understood the nature of angels.

As we look at our present responsibility in the light of the past we remember and of the future for which we hope, as we pass to a new generation the torch that our ancestors bequeathed to us, we need to develop a leadership that is fully aware that it is not enough for the church to be one, holy, and cath'holic. The Holy Spirit who created the church also requires that it be apostolic. As an apostolic church, we must reject all forms of injustice and idolatry, including the idolatry of nation and of citizenship, remembering that Paul, who held the most coveted citizenship of his time, was able to say that "our citizenship is in heaven," and that Peter declares that Christians are "a holy nation, God's own people."

The full proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ requires that the church engage society at large, point out its inequities and its iniquities, and continue proclaiming its hope for a new reign of love, peace, and justice when the glory of the Lord will cover the earth and no one will have to leave the land of their birth fleeing death or famine; a new reign of peace in which nations will turn their swords into plowshares, and their budgets will include more resources for health and education that for weapons of mass destruction; a new reign of justice when they will sit each under their own fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid – not any demagogue, not any tyrant, not any Border Patrol.

Until that time, even in the midst of pain, and even in the midst of bitter disagreements, thanks

to the presence of the Holy Spirit, we live by faith, we live by hope, we live by love. And the greatest of these is love.

So be it. Amen.