

MOUNTAIN SKY OUTLOOK

By Bishop Elaine J.W. Stanovsky

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View from the Mountain Sky Area of The United Methodist Church

Pastoral Letter to the Rocky Mountain Conference,

For three years the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences have been studying how Jesus sent the disciples out to meet people on their doorsteps. To learn their yearnings and sorrows, their aspirations, and to help them follow their imaginations to a new and faithful future.

Today people throughout our area, but especially in Aurora and Littleton, Colorado, have come out onto their spiritual doorsteps in dismay and grief. Once again precious children of God have fallen at the hands of a lost soul bearing powerful firearms. The deaths are senseless. And so people who love God and God's children pause speechless in their wake. How can it be that a person would wander so far from God that he failed to see the miracle of each one whose life he took? How could God, who created and animated, and loved and nurtured each one, let a lost soul strike them down? And so, spiritually the human community has come out into public in search of solace.

The question for the church today is, how do we venture into the world to meet the collective grief of the community in its many guises: anger, denial, depression, fear. I challenge you, leaders of the church, to use your biblical imagination to generate creative responses to this crisis. Where does the biblical story intersect the public story of this day? How might this intersection lead us into a ministry of healing and hope?

- When Jesus died on the cross, his followers lost their bearings. They wandered away from the place without a sense of direction. Might our churches open and invite the whole community in for prayer and song and sharing?
- When Jesus died on the cross and was buried in a tomb, his beloved went there to honor and tend his body. We know that right now people are drifting together somewhere near the site of the shootings, to pray, to weep, to leave flowers and letters of sorrow. Is the church there? What if a big sign were left saying, "The United Methodist Church is praying with you." Could we offer tracts with words of hope? "I lift my eyes to the hills. . ." or "Jesus wept."
- After the devastation of the flood, Noah's family planted new crops. They invested in the future. Could one of our churches host a neighborhood tree-planting to remember this tragedy with life and beauty and hope?

The whole community is hungry and thirsting for a word of hope, for a communal experience of care in the face of reckless disregard. This is a moment Christ has prepared us for. God's spirit "has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." (Isaiah 61:1) We have been touched and nurtured in faith for such a time as this.

Bishop Elaine J.W. Stanovsky

