

## APPEAL TO THE CHURCHES To Seek God's Beloved Community

In January of 2002, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, nine Christian communions will inaugurate a new relationship with each other called Churches Uniting in Christ. As the first step in this journey toward unity, we issue this appeal to every member of our churches, "that we all may be one" (John 17:22).

The struggle for unity among the races and among the churches has a common denominator: racism. To envision unity, without addressing racism, is to ignore our history in North America and deny the insidious nature of that which divides us.

If we are to overcome both the sin of disunity, including the sin of racism, then we must hold a common vision of God's Beloved Community:

- a community in which all people and their particular gifts are included, respected and valued;
- a community that seeks alternatives to violence to settle its differences;
- a community whose core values stand in sharp contrast to a culture in which violence, obsession with profit, and the maldistribution of wealth and power is the norm;
- a community committed to eradicating racism and making no peace with oppression;
- a community in which God is given the glory.

To this vision, many known and unknown have given their lives in the hope that we shall overcome our separateness, heal our divisions, and ensure justice for all. It is fitting, therefore, that this Appeal calls us to begin our new life as Churches Uniting in Christ on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2002.

Our struggle is with principalities and powers. We affirm that love, repentance and forgiveness are powerful sources of unity, and reject the values of distrust, envy and personal institutional survival. We affirm that power is perfected in weakness, and reject any idea that the strong may do what they will and the weak are left to suffer what they must. We affirm the values of principle, human community and equality over against the values of profit, property and status. We affirm that Christ died for all people, (see John 3:16). We proclaim that we are all children of God, made in the divine image, and accountable for our individual and collective actions. We engage in this struggle with the radical hope that springs from our resurrection faith, and the belief that those who seek to save their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives for Christ's sake will save them.

Emboldened by this vision, we appeal to you, to join us as participants in Churches Uniting in Christ, as sojourners toward the Beloved Community. We will engage in a process of overcoming racism as we seek to demolish the institutional barriers which keep us from being a united Christian community that is truly catholic, truly reformed, and truly evangelical. Together, we will seek to find the common ground where we can all sing with integrity that it is on "Christ the solid rock we stand." We will do the painful work of honestly facing our history, seeking mutual compassion, developing a common vision and identifying the sacrifices we must make. Our purpose is to see the vision realized, to raise from the bedrock that is Christ the sure foundation for all our houses. We believe that God is calling us to this vision and to this task, and we know there is a balm in Gilead that heals the sin-sick soul.

Our appeal to you is to join in the audacious and prophetic quest to incarnate this vision and, with God's help, renew our faith, proclaim the good news, unite our churches and heal the nation.

In Christ,

Bishop William P. DeVeaux  
Presiding Bishop  
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Bishop George E. Battle  
Presiding Bishop  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

The Rev Dr. Richard L. Hamm  
General Minister and President  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Bishop Nathaniel L. Linsey  
Senior Bishop, Second Episcopal Dist.  
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold  
Presiding Bishop and Primate  
The Episcopal Church, USA

The Rev. Michael E. Livingston  
Executive Director  
International Council of Community Churches

The Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly  
Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Rev. John H. Thomas  
General Minister and President  
United Church of Christ

Bishop Melvin G. Talbert  
Ecumenical Officer  
United Methodist Council of Bishops  
The United Methodist Church