



## THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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*May the Lord give strength to his people!  
May the Lord bless his people with peace!*

-Psalm 29: 11

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

Last Tuesday night, Sally and I attended a midnight Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at one of our churches. When we got out of our car, we quickly noticed that this was one of those rare, beautiful nights. There wasn't a hint of a cloud in the sky. Being removed from the lights of the city, we were able to clearly see the stars shining above us. And it was quiet—so very quiet.

Just two blocks from our home is a major interstate. There is always noise that breaks the holy silence of a quiet night. There is always a city light that drowns out the pure beauty of a star lit sky. There is always something, . . .

Last Sunday a gunman entered the West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, Texas and opened fire leaving two men dead. And, last Saturday, a man with a knife burst into the home of a Hassidic rabbi in Monsey, New York stabbing and wounding five people as they were lighting candles for their Hanukkah festival. These are the two most recent in a successive line of violent actions that prohibit the light from shining. They are horrible events that break the silence of a quiet night. They are yet another obstacle that stands in the way of peace being felt in the lives of good, innocent people. There is always something, . . .

Living in a world where events like 9/11 and Sandy Hook are never far from our minds, stories like these should immediately cause us to intercede on behalf of people with prayers they are unable to pray. We can also express a deep concern that conveys that we truly want to understand. And we do want to understand. The video of the shooting in Texas reveals horror and panic on the faces of the parishioners. *The New York Times* article on the stabbings in Monsey tells a story of fear and anxiety on the part of those in attendance. The people in both settings will deal with the anxiety and

uncertainty now associated with places that for them, up until this point, were sanctuaries and places of peace. There is always something, . . .

The story of the stabbings at the Rabbi's home is somewhat close to our United Methodist family. The intruder, Grafton Thomas, is the son of a long-standing member of the Harriman United Methodist Church, pastored by our own Wendy Paige. Wendy has known this gentleman for years and has visited with him in the hospital and in his home. While it is easy for us to immediately call this just another act of terrorism, Wendy shares a different complexity, *"These tragic events, . . . have shaken our community. Grafton Thomas has a long history of mental illness and hospitalizations."* This should not be seen as an excuse for his actions, but it does cause us to go deeper in our struggle to understand the reasons behind such a terrible act of violence. And it does cause us to pray for a mother, a church, and a community that is struggling to make sense of it all. There is always something, . . .

When we assume there is peace, there is always something that disrupts the calm. When we assume there is silence, there is always a noise that interrupts the solitude. When we are quick to make assumptions about the motives behind someone's actions, there is always something that makes an easy answer far more complicated. There is always something, . . .

In the midst of shootings, stabbings, mental illness, a mother's anguish, and fears now held by people simply seeking a place to celebrate and worship, it seems that we always end up searching for what we can do. We want simple answers. We somehow want to figure it all out. And in the midst of our search, it may seem that simple prayers are not satisfying. So be specific in your prayers today.

Pray for the families of the two men in Texas, their friends, and their church home. Pray for the families, the friends, and the home of the Hasidic rabbi in Monsey. Pray for Grafton Thomas and his mother Kim. Pray for Wendy Paige and the pastoral care she is called upon to provide in this difficult time. And couple your prayers with specific actions. Generate simple acts of kindness. Be a participant in creating the kind of world you dream of being a part of. And don't stop. Because every day, there is always something, . . .

Human "somethings" deeply upset and depress us. They make us feel powerless. They are noises that disrupt any semblance of peace, solitude, and joy in our world. But know that there is something more. There is a peace that passes our understanding. There is a strength we cannot generate on our own. There is a power beyond our human abilities. It is the thing that people of faith like us lean on when there is nowhere else to turn.

There is always something, . . . the presence of our God to give us strength and open the door for peace. In times like these, may we never forget it.

May it be so. May it be so.

The Journey Continues, . . .

Grace & Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Bickerton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small star above the letter 'h' in "Thomas".

Thomas Bickerton  
Resident Bishop