



Love Prevails

revolution 3-D: disclose(t), divest, disrupt

Outsourcing Hate An Open Letter to the United Methodist Council of Bishops July 17, 2020

Since 1972, legislation aimed at Queer lives and bodies has become increasingly draconian and punitive. The United Methodist Council of Bishops (COB) has failed to offer a unified voice condemning the sin of heterosexism and transphobia. Your silence betrays the integrity of the Gospel's proclamations of love and inclusion.

In reaction to the uprisings following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department, your recent letter rightly suggests that it is not just shots from an officers' gun, but years of systemic racist policies which sabotage, steal, and shorten BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) lives. However, you failed to mention the United Methodist Church's contributions to and complicity in the "pandemic of racism." Structural change is needed within our institution, too. This will require strong leadership from you.

Additionally, we are acutely aware that your concern extends only to *straight* Black lives. The exclusion, abuse, beatings, imprisonment, and murders (in the United States and around the world) of Queer and Trans people, in general, and Black Queer and Trans people, specifically, continue to be met with your indifference – cruelly framed and dismissed as "theological" and "cultural" differences. Your silence and compromises echo the unholy truth that human lives matter less to you than accumulating apportionments, the ire and retaliation of the religious right, or the appearance of unity.

The movement to defund the police asks us to think about the world we want to create – the world we actually want to live in. Your critique of police violence inspires us to review the ways the UMC increasingly relies on the presence of police and private security firms to lock meeting spaces, limit access to traditionally open meetings, stifle peaceful demonstrations, perpetuate violence in our church, and control the bodies of marginalized people – with no valid justification other than your own fear of impolite disruption and honest accountability.

We are in no way equating or conflating the experience of BIPOC people at the hands of law enforcement and the treatment of Love Prevails. Love Prevails acknowledges that White privilege has allowed our interactions with police to be relatively safe -- carrying little threat of bodily harm and no fear of unjust legal proceedings or long incarcerations -- while police encounters for BIPOC people are often catastrophic. Police presence at church functions, however, raises questions about your commitment to abolishing any societal "ism." We reject the UMC's shared tactics of intimidation and domination that normalize the calling of police on marginalized people.

The following timeline of Love Prevails' experiences highlights the UMC's use of security and police enforcement.

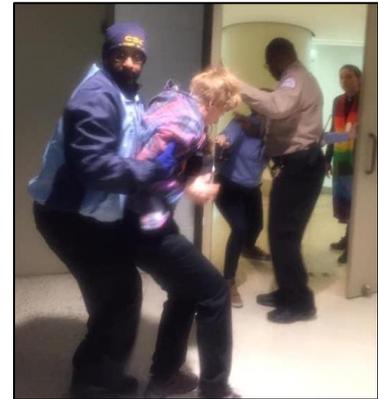
- **November 2013. Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.** Two Love Prevails members arrive at the Council of Bishops' meeting. While standing alone in a hallway outside the meeting room, we are confronted by Lake Junaluska security who demand that we leave the building. When asked why we were being asked to leave, one of the officers opened his vest, revealing his service revolver, and responded, "We are deputized to make arrests." We had been on campus less than an hour.
- **November 2014. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.** Love Prevails members arrive to protest the lack of presence of LGBTQIA+ people on a COB-sponsored panel discussion about Queer people and the UMC. (The previous panel had been open to the public and questions had been invited.) Our members are met by two plain-clothed, off-duty Oklahoma City police. Member, Rev. Sue Laurie, later reports, "Just the idea that the police needed to be in place before Love Prevails got to [the livestream panel on Saturday] perpetuates the fallacy that the church isn't a danger to us, but we're a danger to the church, when in fact we give everything we have to make this church whole." Stephanie Hickson of JustPeace and Amy Valdez Barker from the Connectional Table are present to direct the police.



- **November 2014. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.** Love Prevails members are surveilled by hotel security throughout days of peaceful protest at the Council of Bishops’ meeting.
- **January 2017. Atlanta, Georgia.** Love Prevails arrives to observe the Commission on the Way Forward being held at the General Board of Global Ministries. We are greeted by a team of hired security guards who are hostile to our presence and keep us locked out of the building. We are refused entrance into the building even for restroom breaks. At one point, security guards become verbally abusive and threaten physical violence.
- **July 2017. Glenview, Illinois.** Love Prevails members arrive at the Wespath building where the Commission on a Way Forward is meeting. Peaceful protesters are locked out of the building, refused entrance even for bathroom breaks, and guarded by a uniformed, armed Glenview Police Officer. After an appeal is made to the bishops for bathroom access, we are granted a break every four hours. One person at a time is escorted to the bathroom by the armed officer.
- **February 2019. St. Louis, Missouri.** Uniformed, armed police surround the General Conference Convention site and limit the movements of peaceful BIPOC and White protesters who demonstrate following the passing of the Traditionalist Plan.
- **August 2019. Des Moines, Iowa.** Peaceful BIPOC and White protesters at Rev. Anna Blaedel’s Committee on Investigation Hearing are under constant surveillance by a uniformed, armed Des Moines Police Officer. *(Picture not available).*



Over the years, the church’s dependence on police to suppress Queer people has both increased and intensified. And yet, every time we have made individual bishops aware of our treatment by police or security guards, they feign surprise and ignorance. On one occasion, a bishop even said to us, “We needed to lock you out in order to create sacred space.” The UMC and episcopal leaders have outsourced your hatred of Queer lives and bodies to law enforcement so you can maintain a veil, however thin, of innocence, naiveté, and piety.



Love Prevails calls on the United Methodist Church and the Council of Bishops to stop using law enforcement officers and private security firms to suppress, surveil, and/or disperse members of its own church. This will give you a stronger moral base from which to engage the structural violence that the United States and the United Methodist Church are doing to our siblings who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.



We join our lives with all who are challenging the use of police and weaponry to re-enforce systemic racism and societal harm.

Until Love Prevails,

- David E. Braden
- Joy L. Butler
- Rev. Amy E. DeLong
- Rev. Sue Laurie
- Pastor Laquaan Malachi
- Laura Ralston,
- Dr. Mary Lou Taylor
- Brenda Smith White
- Rev. Wesley White