Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

February 18, 2026

A Lenten Message from Bishop Tracy S. Malone, President of the Council of Bishops

As we enter the sacred season of Lent today, we are invited into a time of returning—returning to prayer, to God's word, to simplicity, trusting God beyond what we can see.

The Lenten Season reminds us that discipleship is rooted in connection and relationships. Lent draws us into community—into shared prayer, shared repentance, and shared hope. We bear one another's burdens, encourage one another in faith, and remind one another that God's promises are trustworthy and true. The apostle Paul urges us, *"Encourage one another and build up each other"* (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Lent strengthens our communal witness as we seek to embody Christ's love together.

Lent also invites us to remember the wideness of God's mercy. In a world often marked by division, harshness, and fear, we are called to be signs of God's reconciling grace. We are called to forgive as we have been forgiven, to love as we have been loved, and to extend compassion even when it is difficult. Jesus' words echo through this season: *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"* (Luke 6:36). Mercy is not weakness—it is the courageous work of those who trust in God's transforming power.

This sacred season challenges us to confront the idols that compete for our attention and allegiance. Whether it is the idol of certainty, the idol of control, or the idol of self-sufficiency, Lent calls us to lay them down. We remember the words spoken through the prophet: *"You shall have no other gods before me"* (Exodus 20:3). Lent is a time to re-center our lives on the One who alone is worthy of our devotion.

Lent also teaches us to hope with resilience. Hope is not naïve optimism; it is the steady conviction that God is faithful, even when circumstances are not. It is the assurance that God is working for good in ways we cannot yet see. The apostle Paul reminds us, *"Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us"* (Romans 5:3–5). Lent shapes us into people who can hold hope with courage and generosity.

As we journey toward Holy Week, we are invited to walk more closely with Jesus—to listen to his teachings, to witness his compassion, and to follow him even when the road leads toward sacrifice. Lent prepares us to stand at the foot of the cross with humility and awe. It prepares us to recognize the depth of God's love revealed in Christ's self-giving. And it prepares us to receive the joy of resurrection with renewed hearts.

This season reminds us that our faith is lived in communion with the worldwide church. Across nations, cultures, and languages, Christians are observing Lent with prayer, fasting, and acts of service. We join our voices with theirs, trusting that God is at work in every corner of the world. We pray for peace where there is conflict, for justice where there is oppression, and for healing where there is suffering. We hold fast to the promise that *"the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it"* (John 1:5).

Lent invites us to imagine the world as God intends it to be—a world where justice rolls down like waters, where mercy is abundant, and where every person is treated with dignity and love.

Our Lenten practices are not ends in themselves; they are pathways that lead us toward God's vision for humanity. They shape us into people who can participate in God's work of renewal and restoration.

And as we look toward the promise of Easter, may we hold fast to the truth that resurrection is not only an event but a way of life. It is the assurance that God brings life out of death, hope out of despair, and joy out of sorrow. It is the promise that God's love is stronger than every force that seeks to diminish or divide us.

May this Lenten season renew our spirits, deepen our faith, and strengthen our witness. May we walk with courage, humility, and hope, trusting that the God who leads us through the wilderness will also lead us into the fullness of life.

Blessings on your continued Lenten journey.

Prayer

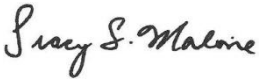
May the God who calls us into this holy season guide your steps and steady your spirit.
May Christ, who walked the wilderness road before us, strengthen you for every challenge and sustain you in every moment of doubt.
May the Holy Spirit breathe courage into your prayers, compassion into your actions, and hope into your waiting.

As you journey through these forty days,
may your heart be renewed,
your faith be deepened,
and your love be widened for all God's people.

Go forth in the peace that surpasses understanding,
in the mercy that knows no bounds,
and in the hope that does not disappoint.

And may the blessing of God—
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—
be upon you, remain with you,
and lead you toward the joy of resurrection life.
Amen.

With Christ's love,



Bishop Tracy S. Malone
President, Council of Bishops
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