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From the Bishop

Time for cease-fire in the worship wars

It is time for a cease-fire in the so-called worship wars which have plagued many of our churches. What are those “worship wars?” They are the seemingly endless arguments about the best way to worship God. Some battles in those worship wars have dealt with differing styles of music, with one side desiring more traditional and formal music while the other side wants contemporary or casual music.



This battle has included arguments about musical instruments, a veritable war of pipe organs verses drums and keyboard and guitars. Other battles have dealt with the location of the worship in the sanctuary, in fellowship hall or in an off-site venue like a movie theatre. Some of the battles even have dealt things as trivial as whether the pastors and worship leaders should wear robes.

It is time for these silly battles and arguments to end, so I am declaring a Cease Fire, and I invite every church to join me. I

“It is time for these silly battles and arguments to end.”

receive a constant barrage of letters and e-mails which bring these worship wars to my attention, and frankly I am tired of it. Cease fire! Stop! Enough!

The wonderful story in the Gospel of John about Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman should remind us, as Jesus says, that “those who worship must worship in Spirit and in Truth.” Jesus was dealing with the question of the Samaritan woman about the worship wars of that time - between the Jews who worshipped God in Jerusalem and the Samaritans (half-breed Jews) who worshipped God at other holy sites. In response to her questions, Jesus says that it does not matter about the location or the style of worship. Worship is about praising God in Spirit and in Truth. And just in case we might think Jesus was being hard on those Samaritans, during Holy Week we read that Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, too, and declared that worship is all being in a house of prayer.

Jesus refused to take sides in the worship wars of that day, and I suspect that Jesus refuses to take sides in the worship wars of our day. Do you really think Jesus cares whether or not the worship leader wears a robe? Can you image that our choice of music really is a concern to Jesus? I just can’t picture that these are real issues for those who follow Jesus.

So, I am declaring a Cease-Fire, and I am asking that we focus, instead, upon worshipping the Lord in Spirit and in Truth, and making our places of worship, wherever they may be, into a house of prayer.

Bishop Michael J. Coyner
Indiana Area of

The United Methodist Church

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