



HIGHER EDUCATION & MINISTRY

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

John Wells, Ph.D.
Associate General Secretary

To the Schools, Colleges, and Universities of The United Methodist Church,

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) is pleased to provide to the institutions of our Connection “A Faithful Witness,” a resource for discussion on the issue of civic engagement.

Winston Churchill’s famous statement that “democracy is the worst form of government, except for all of the others,” remains as resonant today as it did in 1947 when he delivered these words on the floor of the House of Commons. Indeed, the entire system seems to be gaining even more centrifugal forces, seemingly pushing citizens away from common ground. And yet, the students of today are arriving on our campuses with deep passion about the world. Many bring with them impulses toward inclusion, environmental responsibility, and a concern for issues of individual liberty. Unfortunately, we find that we are in a time when the political institutions of the country are viewed with deep suspicion by our students, thus leaving them with the choice of either finding new outlets for their political sensibilities or abandoning the commonweal altogether. It is for the purposes of encouraging our students to explore their civic responsibilities in a fresh and empowered way that we at GBHEM release these videos. Our goal is to help equip the leaders of our campuses with the tools necessary to ward off all-too-easily acquired apathy and cynicism and to create spaces for conversation and healthy debate.

Our heritage as United Methodists is one of encouraging participation in the public realm. During the life of this country, Methodists have participated in the debates from abolition to child labor to issues of war and peace. They have brought a theology of hope to numerous discussions and have been leading voices for cooperation, reform, and civic improvement. Today’s matters of discussion are complex and will require the professionals of tomorrow to have an educational background that does not merely reflect technical knowledge, but one that is also grounded in the notion of social justice so long championed by The United Methodist Church. The schools, colleges, and universities of the Connection are uniquely situated to provide the spaces where difficult dialogues can move past inflammatory rhetoric and real solutions explored.

We encourage the presidents of our institutions to take time to view these videos with your leadership teams. Review the recommendations and ideas that are presented, and then invite leaders of student groups to view it with you. When students come to regard their campuses as places of rich debate and possibility and when they come to regard the administration and faculty as partners in civic engagement, a robust and healthy conversation will take place. The Division of Higher Education at GBHEM is always available should you wish to engage the resources of the agency further. We want the years ahead to be formative ones for our students so that they might take the skills they have learned and become agents of change.

Thank you for taking the time to make our campuses unique places of learning where our students are engaged intellectually, socially, spiritually, and as citizens. Our prayer is that our Connection might be a bright light where the trained mind and the warm heart are both achieved and nurtured.

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