

## **“Courage Under Fire”**

*Rev. Dr. Edward Davis, Southern Conference Minister*

It is unusual to capture the essence of courage unless you are faced with difficulty, danger, or pain, without fear. We, in the United Church of Christ, in our history, legacy and heritage have demonstrated our ability to rise above challenges and difficulties merely because we were unafraid of any danger or consequences that may cause harm to us. Rev. Robert E. Lee demonstrated what we believe in the church to be a bold witness to the embodiment of courage under fire. It is easy to carry a name that you inherited but it's even harder to embody a spirit that takes on the challenges of society. Rev. Lee saw that the enemies hatred, bigotry and fear, were more important to address than the security of an inherited name. The response to his resignation from Bethany United Church of Christ in Winston Salem, NC has created a “buzz” in such that it has gotten the attention of many including the National Setting of the United Church of Christ. But more importantly, what are we to do with this divine script that has been written for us?

This trial by fire has been experienced by all parties, including Bethany United Church of Christ, where he served as pastor. In the midst of the threats, the harassments and the spirit of mistrust, they too are under fire and it is our collective duty to care for both of them. But Brothers and Sisters, I believe what is truly under fire is our spiritual integrity. So how can we with authenticity love justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God unless we are willing to be under fire? It is our collective challenge to channel our passion around this courageous act and move towards discerning the will of God in the midst of the people. And that is, we have to find a way to love each other in the midst of our differences. We must love Rev. Robert E. Lee and Bethany United Church of Christ, together.

What is God saying to us who are indifferent or passive about these enemies that seek to destroy, demean and dishonor humanity? We are to say that it is more important to speak with truth and to live with the integrity of our faith, than to stand still and hold fast to the comfortable.

His actions were not motivated by the church, but by his courage to make a stand. They did not ask him to resign. He did so, in what he believed, was in the best interest of the church. I believe that he spoke to the times that we are in, to say that all of us, should be moved to act with courage to make a difference in such a time as this.

In the midst of our theological diversity we cannot allow ourselves to be silent in the face of injustice. White supremacy, murder, hatred and bigotry should cause us to stop, reflect and use our individual and collective voices to speak against injustice. For this is the work of the entire Church. Again, God calls us to break our silence and in so doing we will meet the holy requirements to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly even while we are under fire.