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A Pastoral Letter on the Proposed Livestreamed Execution at Fort Hood
From the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church
Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr., President
October 2026

To the people called United Methodists in Africa, Europe, the Philippines, and the United States, and to all who seek the way of Christ:

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

We write about an event in one nation because it holds up a mirror to all of us. Every society, on every continent where our church lives, is tempted to answer violence with spectacle, to bless national power with the name of God, and to make a whole people pay for the crime of one. What is happening in the United States is a local test of a global faithfulness.

On November 5, 2009, 13 people were killed and more than 30 wounded at Fort Hood, a U.S. Army base in Texas. We grieve with the families of the fallen and with the survivors who still carry wounds in body and spirit. Nidal Hasan has admitted to these killings. He must be held fully accountable, and nothing we say excuses what he did.

The U.S. Department of Defense now plans to execute him by firing squad on December 3 and to livestream the execution to the public (BBC). The Council of Bishops opposes this plan. Turning the death of a human being into a public broadcast does not honor the victims. It coarsens the conscience of a people and contradicts the gospel we proclaim.

Survivor Alonzo Lunsford, who was shot seven times that day, supports the sentence and plans to be present. Yet he has said the public should not watch, out of concern for what it teaches the young (BBC). We honor his witness. Justice for survivors does not require a broadcast to millions.

Across our connection, we know this temptation in many forms: crowds gathered to watch public executions, drug wars waged through killings without trial, mob justice in the street, and leaders who claim Christ while dividing neighbors by faith, tribe, or origin. Wherever death becomes theater, people learn that killing is how power settles things. And a livestream reaches every screen in the world. What one nation broadcasts, the whole world is invited to watch.

"An eye for an eye" was given to limit vengeance, not to license it. In Matthew 5:38-48, Jesus calls us further still: do not answer evil in kind; love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of a God who sends rain on the just and the unjust.

Our Lord himself died by public execution, staged by an empire to display its power and frighten the watching crowd. Christians, of all people, should refuse to gather around such a spectacle again.

The United Methodist Church has long opposed the death penalty, because every life bears God's image and remains within reach of grace. We are grateful that Christian leaders from many traditions have also called this plan "a barbaric promotion of a culture of death" (National Catholic Reporter) and a "public spectacle" that fails to uphold "the dignity of every human being" (CBC).

In the United States and in many nations, some voices fuse Christian faith with national power, treating the cross as a banner for the nation rather than the sign of a crucified Lord who loved his enemies. The church of Jesus Christ belongs to no nation. Our first citizenship is in the reign of God, which gathers people from every tribe and tongue.

Where Christians suffer violence for their faith, we stand with them in prayer and solidarity. Where Christians hold power, we must never use it to make others suffer. Hasan claimed to act in the name of Islam, and our Muslim neighbors must not bear the blame for one man's crime. Neither should migrants and minorities anywhere become the scapegoats of a nation's fear.

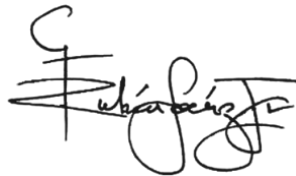
John Wesley called the world his parish, and he did not wait for slavery to become unpopular before naming it. In *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), he declared it "as irreconcilable to justice as to mercy." Days before his death, he urged William Wilberforce to keep opposing "that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion" (Christian History Institute). Wesley knew that when Christians bless cruelty, the scandal falls on religion itself.

We urge U.S. leaders to end plans for a livestreamed execution. We invite every United Methodist congregation, in every land, to pray for the families of the fallen and the survivors, for our Muslim and migrant neighbors, and for all who hold authority. We can hold evil accountable without becoming what we oppose.

A Prayer

God of every nation and every people, comfort the families of the fallen and all who carry the wounds of violence. Guard our hearts from vengeance and our eyes from cruelty. Shield the stranger, the minority, and the migrant from blame and harm. Free your church in every land from false allegiance, and give us the courage of those who came before us to follow your Son, who loved even his enemies. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Walking with You in Christ's Mission,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruben Saenz Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr.
President, Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church