



BISHOP JANE ALLEN MIDDLETON

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THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

HARRISBURG AREA - CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE

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Dear Friends,

We have all been stunned by the terrible brutality on Monday morning as children assembled in what they unquestionably considered to be a place of safety, their school house. As of this writing five girls are dead and others gravely wounded. I know you join me in praying for these victims, for their families, and for the Amish community.

When the Amish families in Strasburg gathered Monday evening at the local fire house, they had already begun to talk about forgiving the man who had committed the atrocities against their children. They were making plans to reach out to his family with food and other acts of kindness. Surely, this is the essence of being Christian: even in the time of horror, to respond with forgiveness. How many times must we forgive our neighbors? Seven? "Not seven times, but, I tell you seventy-seven times," says Jesus in Matthew 18:22.

This dreadful event raises questions about the safety of our children. Even those who were not threatened by this incident may well be living with doubts and questions regarding their own security.

Our children are our treasures, but our children are also exposed to many dangers not faced 25 years ago. Incidents of school shootings have increased. A culture of violence seems to spawn more violence.

October 22 is designated as Children's Sabbath. You can find worship and program suggestions at [www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageNavigator/Childrens\\_Sabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageNavigator/Childrens_Sabbaths) and also from Discovery place at [www.cpcumc.org](http://www.cpcumc.org) The October date may not be a convenient time for you to observe this ministry to and with children, but I encourage you to use these resources sometime.

We in the Central Pennsylvania Conference are committed to keeping our children safe, encouraging them in their walk with Jesus, and supporting their families. They are not merely the future of the church; they are our present and deserve our love and protection.

In Christ's service,

Bishop Jane Allen Middleton