

February 10, 2026

Re: Salt & Light in Tumultuous Times

In the past week, many of us have felt the weight of witnessing fear shaping public life, dehumanizing rhetoric gaining traction in headlines, and celebrations of cultural expression met not with curiosity or joy, but with racialized contempt and division. At the same time, many families and communities are living with real anxiety as immigration enforcement actions disrupt daily life, separate loved ones, and deepen distrust.

I was recently taught by Rabbi Sam Rose that while the Torah teaches us to love our neighbor once, it tells us to love the stranger thirty-seven times. Loving what is unfamiliar or uncomfortable has always been the greater challenge.

I'm always hesitant to release public statements, because too often we convince ourselves that a public statement is all we need. Yet Jesus calls us to be both salt and light—and he speaks directly into moments like this.

In Matthew 5, just after blessing the poor, the grieving, the meek, and the marginalized, Jesus turns to the community and says, “You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world.” The “you” in the Greek text is plural. This is not an individual calling. It is a communal one.

Salt does not exist for itself. Salt must make contact to work. Light does not shine to draw attention to itself, but to expose what is hidden and help others find their way. When faith becomes only language, ritual, or online commentary—when it stays safely in the salt-shaker or hidden under a table—it loses its power to heal, preserve, and transform.

As United Methodists, our baptismal vows commit us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. That resistance requires more than outrage. It requires formation, relationship, and faithful action.

continued on next page

Being salt and light in this moment looks like this:

Learning and Formation

We cannot resist what we do not understand; and we cannot dismantle what we do not name. Engage in learning opportunities. Some can be found through the Virginia Conference by visiting vaumc.org/immigrantadvocacy, where you will find resources, toolkits, and upcoming trainings focused on immigrant justice, accompaniment, and faithful response. But this is a prime opportunity for community partnership especially with local immigrant justice organizations as well.

This also includes ongoing cultural competency formation—engaging the Bias learning curriculum and other resources offered through the General Commission on Religion and Race—so that we are not only reacting to harm, but by responding dismantling the patterns and assumptions that allow it to persist. Reactions are for moments, but responses can change the matter.

Relationship and Presence

Countering hate and division does not begin with arguments; it begins with proximity. Be present in your community. Build relationships across difference. Show up consistently with and for people who are being marginalized, targeted, or pushed to the edges. Listen before speaking. Learn names, stories, fears, and hopes. Light shines most clearly through trust.

Advocacy Rooted in Relationship

Advocacy that reflects the Gospel grows out of partnership, not saviorism. Walk alongside those most impacted. Always listen first. Let relationships shape how and when you speak, write, organize, and engage public leaders. Advocate not for people, but with them—addressing both immediate harm and the systems that make that harm possible.

Jesus does not call us to shine light on people in judgment, but to shine light on systems that dehumanize and divide. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against forces and principalities that normalize cruelty, reward fear, and obscure basic human dignity.

Public Witness

An opportunity to share our public witness together is coming up on February 25 in Washington, DC. People from all across the nation will be coming together for Faithful Resistance: A Public Witness to Immigrant Justice. Information to register and other details can be found at www.vaumc.org by clicking the “Join Feb 25 Faithful Resistance Public Witness” button on the homepage. If not here, find ways to join in public communal witness wherever you can.

Beloved, this is not the time to retreat into neutrality or comfort. It is the time to live out our faith boldly with courage, humility, and love.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

Now more than ever, make contact with the world and let the light shine.

-Lan

**Reverend Lan Davis Wilson - Director of Belonging & Advocacy
Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church**