

December 17, 2018

Brothers and Sisters of the Susquehanna Conference,

Merry Christmas! Peace to you and your families and your congregations!

For the past two and a half years we have been preparing for the special called session of General Conference 2019. The intent of this conference is to address one thing: a Way Forward. As a denomination we have struggled to find unity regarding our understanding of Same Sex Marriage and ordination of LGBTQ persons.

We have prayed. We have studied. We have had conversations in our homes, and in our churches, and in our districts. We have paused daily for prayer from 2:23 to 2:26 PM. We have had listening sessions and round table discussions at Annual Conference. And we have written letters to our leaders and our delegates. Now there's little left to do other than wait.

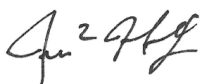
But waiting is stressful. Waiting produces anxiety. Waiting gives room for our fears to grow. Fortunately, "perfect love casts out all fear" (1 John 4:18). The apostle Paul advises us in times like this, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Therefore, I ask you, on the eight Sundays leading up to General Conference (from January 6 through February 17), please take the time in worship to pray for our church. Consider carving out five minutes every Sunday that we can intentionally and collectively bring our prayers before the throne.

To help guide this time of reflection, we have created some resources for your use. Pastors from across the Conference have written prayers—some are one voice while others are responsive reading. In some churches, you may discern that your congregation simply wants to observe a time of silent meditation. Our team has created a template for a candle or collection of candles that may be displayed in your altar area as a visual reminder. Finally, there is also a small group resource that your prayer team might consider using over the eight-week period.

We do not know the outcome of General Conference, or the future of our church, but we do know that in uncertain times the people of God pray. Our prayers are with you.

In His Grace,



Rev. Jason R. Mackey
Director of Connecting Ministries

A Prayer for the Church

By Rev. Laura Minnella

Lord, help to quiet our thoughts, our minds
And put aside our egos, agendas, and designs
Instead allow for our prayer to simply be
An act of holy listening

Your precious bride is most distraught
Divided by differing and opposing thoughts
Surely you must hear her anguished plea
For a way forward only you can see

Your wisdom exceeds that of our greatest minds
Your theology is higher; it's wholly divine
Your vision and plan is holy perfection
Beyond our collective imagination

So we place our trust and hope where it belongs
In your willing, able, nail-scarred palms
Letting go of our own will
Waiting for your voice still

As we place our faith and trust in you
Grant that your promises will break through
And carry us across this valley wide
Lead us to the other side

Lord, behold your hurting church; don't delay
Hear us as we choose to unite in prayer this day
Deliver a dream we thought impossible
Unleash love unstoppable

Bring an end to our fighting, fear, and strife
Breathe into us once more the breath of life
Transform us by grace divine
And a love undefined

Lord, help to quiet our thoughts, our minds
And put aside our egos, agendas, and designs
Instead allow for our prayer to simply be
An act of holy listening

Gathered as Church

By Rev. Kathy Harvey Nelson, Director of the Center for Spiritual Formation

Gracious God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of us All,

As we gather in your presence, we rejoice in your love for us and your church.

We give thanks for all those who, over time, have worked tirelessly and given the best of themselves to bring honor and glory to you through the community called church - gathered together in worship, sent out in mission and witness. We remember our ancestors of the faith who guided our church through the process of becoming United Methodist and we pray for those who still guide us today. We pray for our Bishops, for the delegates of our General Conference, and for each of us as we lead and guide within our own congregation. Lord, grant us wisdom, grant us courage, help us always to choose to do your will and love with the heart of Christ that we might continue to be a body united to bring glory to your name.

And now as we worship, lead us, by the power of your Spirit into a time of renewal, a time of praise, and time of celebration, that we might be filled and sent out from this place, equipped to be your church and your people in the world.

Amen.

Nothing is Impossible

By Rev. Dr. Debbie Heisley-Cato

God of power and grace, when the angel Gabriel came to Mary,
part of his message was "nothing will be impossible with God."
As we look toward the special session of General Conference and
the decisions before our delegates,
we pray that they would be so open to You
that they will discern your perfect will
and even what seems impossible will be done.
Keep our church ever true to your call to be the Body of Christ,
loving one another and the world in His name. Amen.

A Prayer for Holy Conferencing

By Rev. Robert Stump

Lord of the Church,
as your United Methodist Church prepares for our 2019 General Conference,
we pray for the strength to make this a time of Holy Conferencing.
Help us to speak to one another straight from the heart.
Grant that we may listen deeply to one another,
so we can hear each person's story
and understand each other's hopes, fears, and dreams
about the future we are building together.
Enable us to be open to the leading of your Spirit,
that we might see your vision
for a reformed and revitalized United Methodist Church,
fully equipped for ministry in the twenty-first century.
Only then will we live into your call to be a global church,
fulfilling your mission to make disciples of yours
for the transformation of the world. Amen.

Prayers for Presence

By Pastor Bobby Jones

Now God as we gather to discuss the future of your church, let us do so with you in mind. Let us remove self and begin to seek and ask you what is it that you want to do with your church. God, we know that too often we mess up things, by trying to place our hands and or input on things that you have already constructed a plan for. God remove us and begin to reveal that plan to us. Move us God so you may work. I pray that you be with us as you were when other big decisions came up in our church such as slavery. God you were with us then, and God we declare that you are with us now. Hear us now in Jesus' name, Amen.

Praying through the Waiting

By Rev. Charles Johns

Good and gracious God, source of our life and hope of our life eternal, hear our prayer for our beloved United Methodist Church. As a family of faith we are struggling to find a way forward to a common sacred ground we can claim and share together in the face of deep differences. You alone know, O God, if this ground can be found and embraced by our family.

We wait in hope and in faith, trusting in your presence in the hearts and minds of those we have asked to carry the heavy responsibility of our life together. May the words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts be acceptable in your sight. Bless them with discerning spirits, wise minds, and loving hearts.

We pray especially that as the future of our family is being decided we will give witness to an angry, polarized and unbelieving world that God's people can disagree on principles and still embrace one another in love. May that broken world be drawn to our Christ by the love they see incarnate in us.

You hold the future, O God, and you hold us. In that confidence we await the leading of your Holy Spirit.

In the name of our Christ we pray. Amen

Prayer to Find the Way Forward

By Rev. Rebecca L. Holland

Great Creator-
You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life
We are lost in the darkest valley
We wander amongst the dry bones
Our hearts cry out to you
O God- How long?
Gather Your church, as a hen gathers her chicks
Gather our hearts, teach us to walk in Your way
May Your Holy Spirit be a lamp to our feet
And Guide us home.
Amen.

Responsive Prayer for the Way Forward

By Rev. Rebecca L. Holland

Leader: Holy One, on this day, we remember the words of John Wesley:

“In essentials, unity; In non-essentials, liberty; And in all things, charity.”

Response: Set our feet on the right paths. May Your justice roll down like waters and Your righteousness be an ever-flowing stream-

Leader: But may we always remember that Your justice is rooted in love. May we show the same forgiveness to others that You have shown to us. Wipe away our tears, O God.

Response: Lead us into the light of a New Day Great Creator- Help us to find our Way.

Litany for the Way Forward

By Rev. Rebecca L. Holland

Leader: Almighty Triune God-You are the Alpha and the Omega. You are sovereign over our end and our beginning.

People: Loving Creator- we rejoice that we are beautifully and wonderfully made. We give thanks that we are your children.

Leader: Wonderful Counselor- You formed each one of us to be a beautiful part of the body of Christ; however, we confess that we are tempted to judge one another.

Response: Like sheep, we have all gone astray. We have all turned to our own ways. We are tempted to think that we know what is best for us.

Leader: We beseech You- Send Your light among us. Help us to find our way in the darkness. Do not let us fall into the pit. Do not let us break the precious Body of Christ on the rocks.

People: You have called each one of us by name. Please be with those whose names we boldly lift up to you now:

Larry Leland, Matthew Lake, Beth Jones Thomas Salsgiver, Anne Layman-Knox, Lisa Bender, Milton Loyer, Layne Miller, Anne Horton, Kirby Hickey

We believe that you have called them for such a time as this.

Leader: Wipe away our tears, O God. Turn our brokenness into beauty. We have faith that you are doing a great thing among us. Let Your Kingdom Come upon the Earth.

All: Help us find our Way. Amen.

A Prayer for Reconciliation

By Rev. Dr. Dennis Keller

So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of a new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave to us the ministry of reconciliation.

(2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

Adoration:

Eternal God, you are the great Bridge Builder. Out of the great love with which you have loved us in Christ, you opened to us the way of salvation. You love us even before we can respond to you. You love us without exception and without condition. When in our brokenness we turn to you, you forgive our sin and welcome us home. You give us your Holy Spirit, who teaches us to love like you love, calls us into a new community where old barriers tumble down, and gifts us to join in your great ministry of bridge building. With all our hearts we glorify you!

Confession:

Gracious God, we confess that though you have given us the ministry of reconciliation, we have too often put up walls instead of building bridges. We have failed to love our neighbors, forgetting that the good news of great joy is for *all* people. Even in the church, we have for too long focused on differences that divide us rather than love that unites us. Forgive us, we pray. Give us hearts full of compassion for all people, and grace to walk in the Spirit who breaks down every barrier.

Thanksgiving:

God, our Peace, our hearts are filled to overflowing with gratitude that we are the Church together. We are grateful for each local church, for the proclamation of the Gospel in every community. For opportunities to pray and worship, to study and enjoy fellowship, and to build bridges as we serve together, we thank you. We praise you for our connection as United Methodist Christians, and that each of us is a unique part of Christ's Body. For the hungry that are fed, the naked that are clothed, the un-housed that find shelter, the imprisoned that are visited, the broken that are healed, and the souls that are saved in Christ, we praise you!

Supplication:

Lord God, we pray for unity in the Body of Christ, including our United Methodist Church. We pray for the leadership of our Bishop Park and our Cabinet, and for every bishop, district superintendent, conference staff and leader in our church. We pray for pastors and congregations. Unite us to carry out the ministry of reconciliation. We pray for our upcoming Special Session of General Conference. By the power of your Holy Spirit, show us a way forward so that, amid our differences, we may embody the love that builds bridges in a divided world. May the vision that in Christ *the old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!* be realized in and through us!

Through our one Lord, Jesus Christ, we pray, Amen.