



College of Bishops

North Central Jurisdiction

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

March 6, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ in the North Central Jurisdiction,

We, the bishops of the North Central Jurisdiction, greet you in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit. As we shared thoughts with you heading into the St. Louis General Conference, we would like to do so again. We offer these words with a measure of fear and trembling. Each of us has and will continue to communicate in our respective areas, and we are all painfully aware that no single communication expresses all that we might say.

The General Conference has acted, affirming portions of the Traditional Plan which maintains current language around LGBTQIA inclusion and ordination, which keeps traditional language about marriage and the limitations on clergy officiating at weddings, and which adds enhanced enforcement provisions. The constitutionality of some petitions passed has yet to be determined, and none of the rules will take effect until January 1, 2020. We would encourage patience amid this uncertainty and lack of clarity. We would also encourage you to take a measure of care when reading materials about the General Conference, for they may not all be accurate.

What is clear, however, is that the General Conference affirmed current language around marriage and human sexuality. We see the pain and anguish created by this language among LGBTQIA persons, their families, and friends. We see the deep disappointment among those who hoped for a more inclusive church, one which created more space for LGBTQIA persons and included traditionalists, centrists, and progressives. We see the grief among those who supported the Traditional Plan and who know that this General Conference is leaving deep wounds in the church.

The language in our *Book of Discipline* affirming “that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God,” and that “God’s grace is available to all” (§161.G) also remains. We affirm that most strongly. We do so recognize that those words are lodged in the same paragraph as the statement about incompatibility. The actions of General Conference seemed to provide a megaphone for that language, and only a whisper for the expression of sacred worth. We live and lead amid that painful tension.

We also live and lead in the tension of being bishops who hold “a passion for the unity of the church” and who also hold “a prophetic commitment for the transformation of the Church and the world” (§403). We reaffirm our commitments to seek a vital and renewing spirit, cultivate an inquiring mind, offer a vision for the Church, and be shepherds of the whole flock. We pledge to work with you and journey with you, learn with you

and think creatively with you about the future, a future that more adequately embodies God's inclusive love for the world.

As we fully acknowledge and experience the pain and anguish within the church, we also know that we cannot neglect the pain and anguish in the world which God loves. The ministry to which we are called in our churches, making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world continues. Hungry people need food, those mired in poverty need help, addicted people need freedom, frayed relationships need mending, broken lives need healing, lost lives need saving, injustices need to be righted. This work of God in Jesus Christ still calls to each of us and to our churches, even during our tensions, even if our hearts are broken.

As we approached General Conference, we were in the season of Epiphany. Leaving General Conference, we are moving into Lent. Lent invites us to slow down and dig deep, to reflect, ponder and pray, to allow God's Spirit to touch our broken places, expand our imaginations and give us renewed courage for life, ministry, and the future.

Grace and Peace,

David A Bard

Bishop David Alan Bard
President of the North Central Jurisdiction
College of Bishops, on behalf of the College