



## LAY DELEGATES TO THE 2020 GENERAL CONFERENCE

March 1, 2020

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

As General Conference delegates from Virginia, we write to send our love and share that we are praying mightily for you and your communities through this prayer.

*Loving God, we give thanks for our United Methodist family across Virginia and the many ways in which they seek to be your hands and feet on earth. May your constant presence be felt in these times of uncertainty, your guidance more acutely heard, and your call in our lives be sought more and more each day. Amen.*

We write to you to share our hopes for The United Methodist Church and try to dispel some fears. Just as the geographic makeup of the Commonwealth of Virginia boasts sandy beaches to the Appalachian Mountains, rural havens to growing suburbs to busy cityscapes - the Virginia Conference celebrates the beautiful tapestry of United Methodists as varied as our geography. Together we seek "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

As the Virginia Conference, we have and will continue to follow the teachings of Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 27:37-40). We also faithfully follow John Wesley's teaching, "*Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.*" (Sermon 39 Catholic Spirit from the 1872 edition of Wesley's Complete Works - Thomas Jackson, editor)

We recognize that as United Methodists, we are at an impasse which requires us to bless those who would like to depart the denomination. A proposal called the *Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace through Separation* was announced publicly on January 3, 2020. Two members of the Virginia Conference, Rev. Tom Berlin and Rev. Keith Boyette, were part of the global team that developed the proposed Protocol legislation which will be presented at the General Conference in Minneapolis in May 2020.

If the Protocol legislation is passed at the General Conference, it will allow churches and individuals to part with a blessing. The post-separation church would be free to fully embrace all of God's children. The post-separation United Methodist Church that remains in Virginia will resemble our current Conference including, embracing, and celebrating individuals and local churches who hold a variety of views.

In times of great uncertainty, it is important for us as leaders in our Conference to take great care to choose our sources of information wisely.

- The [United Methodist News Service](#) is always the best option for clear and up to the moment information.
- With regard to legislation for the 2020 General Conference, [ResourceUMC.org](#) will be your most helpful and accurate resource.
- Most specifically, there are concerns about what local churches actually have to do within the [Protocol legislation](#). While this legislation was finished outside the typical cycle, there is provision for it to arrive differently [which you can read about in this article](#).

To be clear, should the Protocol legislation be adopted by the General Conference a congregation in an Annual Conference that remains in the post-separation United Methodist Church and wants to continue as they are with no changes of denominational status to the local congregation DOES NOT NEED TO TAKE ANY ACTION. Action by a congregation will only be necessary if it intends to join a newly formed denomination pursuant to the Protocol legislation or become independent of The United Methodist Church. Appointment of clergy will continue to be made just as it always has with the Cabinet seeking to find the very best fit for all.

It is our prayer that each United Methodist in Virginia will enter this season with a spirit of charity, that is with goodwill. As we have all experienced relationships that change or end in different life seasons, we recognize this season will include a measure of pain and perhaps even mourning. Still, we know that if we enter into it with love for one another at the center of what we say and do, then perhaps we can minimize the hurt we all experience. We look forward to being better equipped to focus our efforts on our shared mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

We urge you to offer your positive and faithful leadership to your congregation in sharing open and respectful conversation as we move toward the General Conference in May. Your lay leadership teams and committees need to be knowledgeable about what is taking place in the life of the denomination. Those who actively participate in the life of your congregation need to be aware of the beliefs and principles that make us uniquely United Methodist. We need to journey through the months ahead with a high level of discussion about the upcoming General Conference and who we are as United Methodists so we can move into the future with hope and courage.

From now through the summer, we will be sharing additional resources, reflections, hopes and dreams for our beloved church with you. We also ask for your prayers for our entire delegation as we make our way to General, Annual and Southeastern Jurisdiction Conferences. Pray for us as we continue to pray for you.

#### Virginia Conference Lay Delegates to the 2020 General Conference

Warren Harper  
Martha Stokes  
Shirley Cauffman  
Darlene Amon  
Beth Christian  
Alison Malloy

Marshall Bailey  
Jill Gaynor  
Joshua Blakely  
Jacob Paysour  
Mark Elder