



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

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*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble...
“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.” The Lord Almighty is with us...
(Psalm 46:1; 10-11)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers on the Journey Together,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness and Hope of the World!

In anticipation of the pending decisions by the Judicial Council on the legislations adopted at the Special Session of the General Conference 2019 that will be announced at the end of April, the district meetings that were scheduled in March and April are being moved to hold a conference wide event on Sunday, May 5, 2019 from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm. It will be live streamed to many locations throughout the conference. The event is open to all clergy and laity of the Susquehanna Conference. Please reserve the date. More detailed information will be forthcoming. The purpose of the gathering will be to understand and clarify:

- The legislations of the Special Session of the General Conference 2019 in light of the decisions made by the Judicial Council
- How we navigate through the denominational challenge
- How we build up the conference vision of embodying the Beloved Community of disciple-making congregations

We have heard numerous reactions to and reflections on the 2019 Special Session of General Conference that has maintained the current language of the Book of Discipline about homosexuality, same gender marriage, and the ordination of practicing homosexuals with added accountability of imposing penalties for violation. As emotions are raw and high with deep wounds and pain, people in different communities and circles are assessing where our church is and where it is to go from here. Many are looking beyond the Judicial Council decisions at the end of April, beyond January 1, 2020, the effective date of the new laws, and beyond the 2020 General Conference in May. Speculations on the denominational future are rampant and diverse with a sense of urgency and inevitability. Nobody knows for sure what The United Methodist Church will be like beyond the 2020 General Conference. Our church will not be the same.

Under the circumstances, I am hearing that numerous people, particularly LGBTQ persons and their loved ones, families and friends are expressing their hurt and despair by saying, “We no longer have a place in The United Methodist Church. We are leaving now.” It breaks my heart. Jesus weeps.

I would like to plead with all God's people of the Susquehanna Conference to stay on. The mission of bringing people to Jesus and transforming the world is alive! The ministry of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, and caring for the impoverished, underprivileged and marginalized is ongoing. The witness of justice and peace and reconciliation is an unfinished agenda. Even at this moment, countless lives are being served and impacted in our communities and around the world with God's love and in the name of Jesus Christ through The United Methodist Church each day. Many people in hurting and broken places of oppression and abuse find hope through the ministry of our connectional church. The United Methodist Church is not a perfect church. Far from it in many aspects. However, in spite of its limitations, God is using our church as God's instrument for God's redeeming work in the world.

At the Bishop's Retreat held in January, our guest speaker, Rev. Fred Day, General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History, shared with us some historical perspectives on the journey of The United Methodist Church. For him, the most significant word in the journey of God's people was not faith or hope or love; it was "through". He talked about "the power of through". God was with God's people and enabled them to go "through" the wilderness to reach the promised land. Jesus the Christ went "through" the cross to the resurrection. The United Methodist Church represents the former denominations which demonstrated the "power of through" during the most challenging wilderness time in the past. It is in the DNA of our church. Why not this time? I hope and pray that the spirit of "through" prevails for such a time as this.

While our church as a denomination has been in a long and fierce struggle over the question of human sexuality, you have been faithful all along in fulfilling the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. By God's grace, you manifested and demonstrated the spirit and power of through in such remarkable ways.

I remember my first Susquehanna Annual Conference about six and a half years ago met under the theme: "Alive in Christ Together...On a Journey of Faith." God's people, keep the faith. Please stay on. The journey continues. "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" throughout the journey of God's people. God will never ever leave us alone. God has a plan and a future for our church.

Before us, not behind us, is the most critical task in our life time as a denomination. This is the time for our church to stand still to know who our God is. I know that The United Methodist Church is in a labor pain. With a sense of dawn breaking, I plead with you to stay on. Our God is up to something new.

With You On the Journey,

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Jeremiah Park