



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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Sharma D. Lewis
RESIDENT BISHOP

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Dear Virginia Conference,

Before our live stream event on March 4, I wanted to share how much I've missed each one of you, my Cabinet and the work of the annual conference. I want to thank those in the conference for the prayers and the expressions of love during my hip surgeries.

Like many of you I watched the last four days of General Conference with anticipation, uncertainty but, ultimately, hope for the future for The United Methodist Church. I was even so bold to believe that maybe a "miracle" could happen on the General Conference floor that would finally unite us to be the body of Christ called United Methodist.

Well, that didn't happen. Instead, I saw deep pain from many delegates, tears that rolled down cheeks and the anger that once again "human sexuality" was the main issue of the denomination.

I know that some of you are pleased with the outcome and others are deeply saddened and hurt by the results. Human sexuality, if we are really honest with ourselves, is a topic that we will never agree upon as evidenced by the votes at General Conference. We must understand that the beauty of our beloved denomination is that we are a global church and in some places the topic of human sexuality is life or death.

Our reactions to the 2019 General Conference legislative proceedings and decisions are as diverse as the theological perspectives of the Virginia Annual Conference. Our reactions and perspectives cross spectrums from convictions that God's will was done to a belief that we've moved farther away from God's will.

As your Bishop, I want to affirm that ALL people are valued and of sacred worth. To the brothers and sisters of the LGBTQIA+ community, know that you are loved and accepted in our local churches. I can't imagine how you must feel once again.

As your Bishop, I want to affirm the evangelical community that often times feel their beliefs are misunderstood and driven by animosity, instead of their deep abiding faith in Jesus Christ.

I want to assure you that I will live my life consecrated as a Bishop to lead the whole Church in claiming its mission in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. (BOD, ¶ 403).

Remember my brothers and sisters in the Virginia Conference that the shared work we do in the Virginia Conference is vital. The work we do as The United Methodist Church is life-giving.

Though our hearts are bruised and our souls have been affected by this General Conference, we remain the Church. We still have a mission, and there are still so many hearts and lives that can be transformed through the work of God.

Let us work together as One. Let us turn to God in these unsettling times. Let us encourage one another and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. Let us stay “United” as the body of Christ called Methodist.

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharma D. Lewis". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis