



Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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Dear United Methodists of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, Prince of Peace, Healer of our brokenness, and Hope of the world.

The 2016 General Conference has just ended. I would like to thank you for holding the highest legislative body of our church in your thoughts and prayers throughout its time of Christian conferencing. Our deep appreciation goes to the delegates, leaders and many others who faithfully fulfilled their very demanding responsibilities, roles, and tasks in their places of serving the conference on behalf of the whole church.

There were unexpected and extraordinary moments, as well as predictable and regular routines. However, celebrating who we are as a global church with amazingly rich diversity among us was so uplifting, particularly in and through the inspiring worship and powerful preaching. There were many exciting and heart-warming witnesses of life changing and world transforming missions that we, as a connectional church, are able to do all over the world. We rejoiced in an unequivocal affirmation that, united as one body, the United Methodist Church is doing mighty works showing God's love to the world.

At the same time, the General Conference reflected the anxiety and fear over the undeniable differences that threaten the unity of our church. The body heard clearly from the young people that they do not want a divided church and urged the church to "be in unity even if we do not have unanimity." Realizing that the future path of the United Methodist Church could decisively be determined by the actions to be taken regarding the language about human sexuality in the Book of Discipline, the General Conference asked the Bishops to

lead the church to the best possible way forward in unity. The Council of Bishops responded with the recommendation that called for preempting the debate and decision on those items relating to human sexuality to allow the Council to organize a special commission that would bring proposals to the General Conference, possibly even in a special called session before the 2020 General Conference. The most surprising moment came when the General Conference adopted the recommendation. I understand that people are having very different reactions to this decision. Yet I commend the General Conference for its willing spirit to move together for unity as best as possible for such a time as this by creating an unprecedented space for God to reshape our church.

The 2016 General Conference met with the theme: "Therefore, Go!" As disciples of Jesus Christ, we were refreshingly reminded of the charge given to us from the Lord who has all the authority in heaven and on earth: Go and make disciples of all nations for the transformation of the world. Now the question still to be answered is: "Where to go from here as the United Methodist Church?" The destiny of our beloved church is at stake with the discernment and decisions yet to be made by the church. Ultimately the way forward in unity depends on who's in charge. Are we willing to let go and let God? In the meantime, we cannot afford losing our perspective and being distracted. The mission of the church is clear. We are to continue to give our best ever more faithfully to making disciples and transforming our communities and the world.

The Council of Bishops met in prayer and Bible study the day after the General Conference to seek the wisdom and guidance from God and each other to proceed with the mandate from the General Conference. During the Bible study, we were invited to many different stations where we were to have a time of reading scripture, reflection, and a certain activity in response to the selected scripture. One of the stations I visited had the scripture of Jesus calming the storm (Matthew 8:23-27). I believe our church can identify with the disciples who were terrified by the storm. However, the presence of Jesus with them made all the difference. My spirit was calmed with the assurance that, no matter how furious the winds blow and the waves rage to crush the boat, the way forward is possible with Jesus whom even the winds and the waves obey. We are to wake up Jesus as the disciples did. The only way for our church to move forward in unity is to have Jesus in charge. The spiritual way of faith, hope, and love must lead the legislative process.

The General Conference was surrounded by prayer before and during its sessions. Our prayers are to be intensified even more now. We are to surround the Council of Bishops with prayer as it names the commission. We are to continue to lift up the commission that is to come in prayer so that its task would be fulfilled, persuaded, and compelled by the Spirit of God according to God's desire.

So let me end with a prayer:

O God, our help in ages past and our hope for years to come, we give you thanks for your steadfast love and faithfulness throughout the generations of your people called United Methodist. We celebrate the diverse missions and witnesses of our church that are making a huge difference in so many lives in so many places. As a connectional and global church, we are making your disciples in so many nations for the transformation of so many communities all over the world. We ask you to continue to bless our beloved church so that it will be relentless in expanding its ministry and witness in your name in an even more transformative way than ever before.

As our church is facing the challenging agenda of finding a way of moving forward in unity over the most dividing and unsettled difference regarding human sexuality, we have to totally depend on only you. You are the only Lord of the church. Show us the way to be your instrument of hope and implementation of unity. Knowing that this is your church before it is ours, enable us to surrender to you. Let our church be the answer to your ardent prayer: "They may be one as we are one." By your grace and mercy, power and might, and love and truth, make us one with you, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, all to your glory. Let this be our mantra until we move beyond the storm. Amen.

In Christ's Service with You,

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Jeremiah J. Park