



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HARRISBURG AREA – SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE
303 Mulberry Drive, Suite 100 • Mechanicsburg, PA 17050-3198
Phone (717) 766-7871 • Fax (717) 766-3210 • Email: bishoppark@susumc.org

Bishop Jeremiah J. Park

Christy Mackey
Executive Administrative Assistant
cmackey@susumc.org

Rev. Gregory C. Myers
Clergy Assistant
gmyers@susumc.org

Kristin Sample
Administrative Assistant
ksample@susumc.org

July 22, 2016

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”
(Colossians 3:12-15)

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

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

I am glad to return to the Harrisburg Area and am grateful for the extended opportunity and privilege to serve God and our beloved church with such faithful, generous, committed, and dedicated people of the Susquehanna Conference. I look forward to our common journey for another quadrennium to be a church alive in Christ together for the mission of the church: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The recent developments in our denominational church intensify the uncertainty that The United Methodist Church is facing. Its future is most likely to unfold in an unpredictable or even unprecedented way. All kinds of thoughts and scenarios about the future of our denomination may be being played out in the minds of many people. The unity of the church is at stake. But God’s people, it’s not over until it’s over.

Please, pray, pray, pray, and pray. We put our trust in a God who is in charge and who is able. Knowing that this is God’s church before it’s our church and that no one’s love for our church is greater than God’s love for her, I would like us to be assured of God’s presence with us throughout the journey ahead. God is with us. Christ is for us. And the Holy Spirit is within us and among us.

Please know that the Cabinet and I are committed to uphold the covenant of the Discipline of our church. Please also know that, as far as human sexuality is concerned, nothing has changed in the current Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. The action of one annual conference is not binding on other annual conference, nor are the actions of the Jurisdictional Conference binding. General Conference is the only place that can change the church laws.

I would like to ask our people of faith to practice being a non-anxious presence as much and as best as you can. I understand that our church is like a boat in the midst of a fierce storm. But Jesus is in the boat. Even the winds and the waves obey Jesus. The assurance of his presence with us does bring the calmness we need to discern and decide God's way forward.

Bishop Ough, president of the Council of Bishops, released a statement last Friday. Please allow me to bring part of the statement to your attention as it is something that resonates with me: "... However, we clearly understand the Church appropriately expects the Council to provide spiritual leadership and for bishops to uphold our consecration vows. In May, prior to General Conference, the Council again affirmed to keep the promises made at our consecrations, including, among others:

- Shepherding all persons committed to our care;
- Leading the church in mission, witness and service;
- Ordering the church including administering processes for handling complaints;
- Seeking unity in Christ..." (this would include the work the Council proposed to and adopted by the General Conference in "An Offering for a Way Forward.")

I would like to plead with the church to give the best chance to the mandate of the General Conference. A Commission is soon to be organized by the Council of Bishops to bring the proposal for a way forward before the 2020 General Conference. Our church deserves the best possible way forward. Knowing the magnitude of the task and that its impact will be of historic proportion, please give time to wait on the Commission even if others in the Church are not doing so. We are all to be in prayer for the Council and the Commission so that the outcomes from the process will be in harmony with God's preferred future for our church.

We empathize with the pains of the broken heart of God as well as our broken hearts from the conflict and division of our church over human sexuality. We affirm that faithful Christians have different understandings and have their opinions, convictions, and beliefs about it from their biblical and theological foundation. We can come to the common table for a Christ like conversation, not to persuade and convert others to our side, but to listen to the hearts of each other as we seek God's will for us and to serve as an instrument of healing, hope, and peace for our community and the church. Our Susquehanna Conference can become a model of holy conferencing and Christian conversation for others. In the coming months, I will pull together a diverse group of clergy and laity to lead us in a call to prayer and conversation for the future of our beloved church, and laity will be offered opportunities for holy conversation around the questions of human sexuality.

When our church is going through one of the most challenging, difficult and painful times, our attention and focus can dwell on “what’s wrong with our church” and thus our energy, time and resources are diverted from the mission of the church. I would like our people to continue to affirm and celebrate “what’s right with our church”:

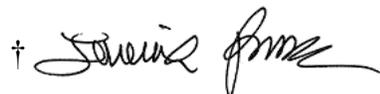
- People of our Susquehanna Conference are faithfully and passionately engaging in amazing missions and ministries that touch, transform, serve, and save countless number of lives in their communities and in the world each day, each week, each month, and each year.
- Mission Central alone touches and serves two million lives a year.
- Thousands of new disciples are made each year.
- As a denomination, nearly 70 million dollars were raised for the Imagine No Malaria campaign. As a vital partner of the global force that combats the killer disease, the death rate from malaria is now cut in half saving millions of lives.

The list goes on and on and on.

Alive in Christ together, we serve our awesome God, love God’s people and are making a difference in our communities and in the world in the name of Jesus. It is my ardent hope and prayer that God’s people of the Susquehanna Conference stay focused on the mission of our church in unity for such a time as this.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:5-7)

With You in Christ’s Ministry,

† 

Jeremiah J. Park