



## THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### Dakotas-Minnesota Area

Resident Bishop  
Bruce R. Ough  
bishop@dkmnareaumc.org

Administrative Assistant  
Sheilah J. Kyburz  
sheilah.kyburz@dkmnareaumc.org

March 15, 2019

### **Living and Leading Together**

To the clergy of the Minnesota Annual Conference:

Grace and peace to you in name of the risen Christ! I echo the words of the apostle Paul that we began with on Monday at our clergy gathering: "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:3-6).

It was a hard day on Monday. It has been a hard time for us, the people called United Methodist, for some time now. I know your heart. It is my heart, too. We have committed our lives to the calling from God to lead this church and to offer a gospel of grace and love that is the core of our Wesleyan theology. Our hearts deeply desire to live out this calling with grace and integrity. My heart is broken to see this church that has been our home so divided in this season when all you and I want to do is offer the love of Jesus to all people.

My dream, which I shared on Monday, stands: *I dream of a church that is colorful, diverse, and full of love. I dream of a church that is passionately evangelical and transformative in its mission. I dream of a church that is deeply Wesleyan and wonderfully welcoming. I dream of a church that freely and boldly provides space for all who are gifted and called by God.* My dream is no less big and bold today than it was before the Special Session of General Conference. I believe that dream is still possible, but not in the shape and form that I had worked for going into the Special Session. God can breathe new life into dry bones.

As your bishop, I want you to know that I heard the cries of lament, frustration, anxiety, and anger. I heard the pleas for a church of justice, inclusion, and commitment to our Wesleyan values. I witnessed the pain in the room. I experienced how difficult it is for us, who have deep history and relationship with one another, to create space for everyone. It is extremely hard work being a church that witnesses to the world we can navigate our differences with a heart of peace. This is not tangential to our mission of making and equipping disciples of Jesus; it is at the core of our mission to bring abundant life to all. It is the work we are called to do, and I believe the Minnesota Conference has the capacity to do it.

As your bishop, my commitment stands. I will lead the Minnesota Annual Conference to



## Dakotas-Minnesota Area

remain focused, first and foremost, on our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, with a vision of each church living out the gospel imperatives of growing in love of God and neighbor, reaching new people, and healing a broken world. I will continue to seek out, call, credential, and appoint passionate, apostolic, gifted, evangelical leaders who are committed to join us on our Journey Toward Vitality. I will continue to do everything in my power to create and grant space for every pastor to lead and minister out of the fullness of who they are in the context to which they are appointed. I will continue to hold all of us to the highest standards of integrity, faithfulness, and fruitfulness. I will continue my work to remove barriers to licensure and ordination for qualified LGBTQIA candidates.

As your bishop, this is what I ask of you:

1. Keep leading in the excellent, mature, resilient, hopeful way you have been. You have remained faithful to the needs and opportunities of your respective mission fields. Our people need to know who we are as United Methodists in Minnesota. To that end, your congregation can obtain a \$1,000 grant towards a media push to repair and rebuild our reputation as a United Methodist Church in your community (learn more at <https://tinyurl.com/loveboldlygrants>). Nearly everyone agrees this was a major fallout of the Special General Conference.
2. In the midst of the urgent desire to “do something” in response to the actions of the Special General Conference, please be discerning and wise. There are several conversations and movements rising up across our global connection to create something new. There are efforts underway to re-order The United Methodist Church to create more regional autonomy. The Traditional Plan remains under review by the Judicial Council. The recent revelation of voting irregularities at the Special General Conference introduce yet another level of uncertainty and legitimacy around what was decided. As we stand in this moment, we don’t know exactly how the future will unfold. All that is certain is God’s great faithfulness. I am convinced the best way forward, first of all, is for the Minnesota Conference to be clear what kind of annual conference we want to be. To that end, I am putting in place a process to create a statement to that effect for consideration by the 2019 annual conference session. Further, I am convinced we need to hold together as an annual conference so that whatever emerges as our preferred future, we go forward strong, together, and with as many resources and as much clarity as possible. What I remind myself daily and call you to as well: Stay in conversation with the whole body of Christ; choose to respond in ways that do not harm the very thing that we are trying to create or the relationships we value; and maintain a convicted humility that grounds our passion for change.
3. If you are making personal decisions about your ability to lead and live within The United Methodist Church as it currently stands, please have a conversation with your



## Dakotas-Minnesota Area

District Superintendent or me. We want to walk with you. If your congregation is struggling with its ability to lead and live or participate in any fashion within The United Methodist Church as it currently stands, please have a conversation with your District Superintendent or me. We want to walk with you. I know how difficult it is to stay steady and maintain disciplined urgency in these anxious and uncertain times. We are facing big life decisions, and big life decisions need to have thoughtful, creative space and conversation.

4. Above all, do not lose sight of or heart for our first love—the mission of Jesus. In the midst of upheaval, Jesus' mission remains the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

I know you have a dream for the church too. Some of the strong and fragile dreams you shared at the conclusion of our day on Monday include: *that we will be a bold and loving witness to the world; that will we be a church where people see God's redemptive grace in action; that we are passionate, theologically grounded, generously loving laity and clergy; and that we are a church that follows Jesus and finds its hope in a God that makes all things new!*

I have seen these very dreams brought to reality in my travels across Minnesota. They are possible! Together, we can be the church God calls us to be. Together, we can be a resurrection people. Together, with God's help and leading, we can "make a way in the wilderness." Let us go forward, trusting in God, relying on the Holy Spirit, and committed to living and leading well as a covenant community of clergy.

Yours in Christ's extravagant love,

Bishop Bruce R. Ough  
Resident Bishop, Dakotas-Minnesota Area  
The United Methodist Church