



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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RESIDENT BISHOP

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OF THE VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

March 18, 2020

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

— Psalm 11:3

Ours is a faith that is built to shine in hard times. As the Bishop and Cabinet of the Virginia Conference, we recognize that these are hard times and share with you what we believe.

We believe that God does some of God's best work when the going gets tough. At the center of our faith is a Messiah, crucified yet raised from the dead to show how God's love and power work. So, when our world is facing pandemic...when our congregations are refraining from in-person worship...when people are retreating into isolation for the common good...when we are overwhelmed by fear and foreboding...what is Christ's Church to do?

We believe that now is the time for us to be the Church, for the sake of the world. Now is the time to bear witness to the God who is able to make all things new, who redeems even the most desperate of situations, and whose grace is always sufficient. Now is the time to let our light shine in the midst of the world's despair, to bring healing in the midst of brokenness.

Because we believe this, we want to ask you to join us in acts of living faith. We encourage every congregation, every pastor, every church member to:

— *Draw near to God* for the strength that God alone supplies, through daily prayer and Scripture reading, taking time to let God's love fill us, reassure us, replenish us.

— *Reach out into the world* as agents of good news. Practicing social distancing does not mean we are relationally distant, even if our touch comes via the phone or supplies and notes dropped at the door. People need to know that they are not alone, that there is someone who will walk with them, listen, understand, care, help, and pray with them.

— *Be creative in worship* by exploring digital media, home-based devotions, and other means.

Finally, this is a great opportunity for us to ask people to give. Our ministries have not shut down; they are simply taking new forms to meet the needs of this crisis. In such a time, we are reminded why we are the church and why we give. Of course, we are sensitive to those whose incomes are imperiled by the crisis, and can communicate with them that we value all that they give through their prayers and acts of love for God and others. We can also encourage all of our financial supporters to keep giving to the church even though we are not meeting in person, either through [online platforms](#) or through old-fashioned mail. Beyond this, we can challenge ourselves and others to deepen our

generosity for this season, giving more so that the church will be strong to meet these challenges and opportunities.

In hard times there are usually three responses: there are those who run toward the trouble, those who hunker down to wait it out, and those who run away. As your Virginia Conference Cabinet, we believe it is time to run toward the crisis because that is where we believe Jesus is. It will take all the gifts that God has given us, spiritual, physical, and financial. And it will take all of us.

There are very real structural and financial challenges in front of us but, as the Church of Jesus Christ in hard times, we discern even more very real spiritual opportunities. We give thanks for your generosity, for your willingness to try new and uncomfortable things, and for your perseverance in enabling the church to move with God into a new chapter in ministry in these unprecedented times.

In Christ,

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis and the Cabinet of the Virginia Conference