

*“Therefore, as God’s choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. The peace of Christ must control your hearts – a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.
- Colossians 3: 12 – 17 (Common English Bible)*

Dear members and friends of the West Virginia Conference,

I share this life passage of Scripture with you once again to remind us of how we are called to treat one another. At last week’s General Conference, I believe Jesus wept. Oh, not about the decision that was made, but for how we treated one another during discussion and debate. There was very little of God’s Grace in how followers of Christ treated one another when they were at the microphone. There were moments of grace, but very few. Often people spoke in unholy and callous tones. It seems that we forgot that each of us is God’s choice, holy and loved. We forgot that we are called in whatever we do, word or deed, to do it all in the name of Jesus. I believe Jesus wept! I wept! When we stepped into the legislative session as a church we forgot to put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. We forgot to be tolerant with each other. We struggled with forgiveness. The peace of Christ did not control our hearts as revealed in what came out of our mouths and how it came out of our mouths. We can do better in treating and respecting each other as people, God’s people, God’s choice – holy, beloved, and valuable. We must do better!

As you probably know now, the General Conference passed the Traditional Plan. I have put together a summary of the General Conference actions that I hope you will read and share. That summary can be found on our website: wvumc.org. I will be traveling through the districts in March to unpack the impact of General Conference action. Please see the district meeting schedule posted on the Conference website.

In the West Virginia Conference and our Global United Methodist Church, I know everyone is not of one mind on the complicated issues of human sexuality. What I have learned is that faithful Christians can read the same Bible on a number of matters and interpret sacred passages differently. The denomination remains divided on the subject of human sexuality and **on the inclusion and participation of the LGBTQ Community in the life of the Church**. General Conference action did not fix this challenge, and disagreement does not go away with the vote of General Conference.

To our LGBTQ members, their family and friends. I want to say, I am sorry for the pain and harm you have experienced in being the subject of this General Conference session. Each of you is God’s child, God’s chosen one, loved by God. You are of sacred worth and

you have given time, talent, gifts, service and witness in service to Christ and the Church. I am sorry for the pain you feel in the General Conference decision.

To our more conservative or traditional members, their family and friends. Your prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness are also a great gift to God and to the Church. Your lives have been changed by the good news of Jesus Christ, and you seek for others to know and be transformed by the life and love of Christ.

We are all part of Christ's Church. Some of you are satisfied with the decision of the General Conference; some of you are hurt and discouraged and in pain. Please be sensitive to your fellow church members who may be upset or hurting, no matter what their convictions. Please treat each other as God's chosen ones, valuable and loved.

After the General Conference, our mission remains the same: to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We remain a denomination that is open to people of all ages, nations and races. We remain a denomination that affirms that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. We remain a people who seek to find better ways to embrace our diversity and journey together in fulfilling the mission of Christ.

God, pour out your Holy Spirit and call to our remembrance the grace declared to us in our baptism, for you have called us by name, and claimed us as your own. You have washed away our sins and seek to clothe us with righteousness throughout our lives, that dying and rising with Christ we may share in his final victory.

May it be so and may we allow the peace of Christ to control our hearts as we all seek to live together as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Peace,

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