

*O for a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free,  
a heart that always feels thy blood so freely shed for me.  
A heart in every thought renewed and full of love divine,  
perfect and right and pure and good, a copy, Lord, of thine.*

-- from "O For a Heart to Praise My God," United Methodist Hymnal

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

-- Matthew 28: 18-20

As the College of Bishops of the Northeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church, we greet you in the matchless name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

All of creation stands in the immutable goodness of God joined together by God's unconditional love and sustained by God's grace. Yet we live in a world that ebbs and flows in its expressions of justice, equality and compassion. Whether in the northeast, the boarders of the United States or around the globe we see escalating tensions arising from fear, illness, division, grief, greed and unbridled abuses of power. We do not always have control to completely prevent the difficulties of life, but we do have the opportunity to choose a more excellent way: to walk with one another, to support one another through the hardships and devastation, and to seek to be salt and light in the name of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of all that swirls around us, we remember our foundation, which is God's love for us and our love for one another. In his farewell discourse, Jesus offered a seminal lesson for his disciples when he taught, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13: 34-35) The world and the organization of the church will continue to change, but our mission – our very reason for being – will not and must not change because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The call of God for us to be the Church, offering the love and good news of Jesus Christ to all the world remains the only hope for transformed lives, transformed churches, transformed systems, and a transformed world.

The unprecedented upheaval of our times requires committed servants of God, prepared to lean into the discomfort, bridge deep divisions, and reconcile broken relationships. Therefore, as your servant leaders, we will work together with convicted humility to empower and equip the people of God for the work of ministry, recommit ourselves to the discipline of fasting and prayer, and deep listening to God, one another and the people in our communities to lead the church through these most challenging times. As your bishops, we have established Mondays as our day to fast, pray and intentionally seek God's face for

our own renewal and to inspire our covenantal leadership as a college. We invite you to join us in this spiritual discipline.

Even as we wrestle with postponements in holy conferencing, unknown outcomes and delayed jurisdictional and denominational elections, we will keep the main thing the main thing, to love God and one another and to lead the church forward in its mission. There is no circumstance, period or season where the mission of God's church is not to be our central focus and lived reality. Our purpose is mission. In its statement regarding the Theology of Mission, The United Methodist Church Board of Global Ministries says it well:

*God's holy spirit calls the Church into being for mission. The Church is the sign of God's presence in the world and of God's intention for creation. In response to God's call and the leading of the Holy Spirit, women and men, young and old of all nations, stations, and races, and in all times and places, unite as the living Body of Christ to join God's presence in the world. This community of faith aspires to live out the potential of new life in Christ among all human beings now, while envisioning the fulfillment of God's reign and the completion of God's mission. The Church experiences and engages in God's mission as it pours itself out for others, ready to cross every boundary to call for true human dignity among all peoples, especially among those regarded as the least of God's children, all the while making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.*

By living into this vision as disciples pouring ourselves out for the sake of others, we are God's instruments of peace and love. By joining God in this mission, the community of faith is assured of a future filled with hope. That hope is not sentimental, situational or simply an eschatological phenomenon. That hope is a discipline developed and evidenced in our consistent willingness to practice repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Our future will also require that we learn from the past but not be imprisoned by it. It is imperative that we lead, serve and function differently. We are not served by attempting to place new wine into old wineskins. This is a time for bold vision and even bolder innovation. We will sometimes fail, and in the words of Brené Brown, when we do, may we fail extravagantly, rise with resilience, learning and changing in the midst of our failings so that we continue to bear fruit, fruit that will last.

As your servant leaders looking toward the future, full of possibility and promise, we boldly and unequivocally declare who we intend to be:

- We will be a leadership team rooted in faith, formed and guided by love and committed to transformative ministry in every community we are privileged to serve.
- We will lead collaboratively.
- We will empower and invest in committed lay and clergy leaders, assisting them with grace to step into God's call and future for their ministry.

- We will create and encourage opportunities for shared ministry initiatives.
- We will leverage resources, both human and financial, to support innovation and creativity in missions.
- We will tirelessly work to end systemic racism and other forms of discrimination and division.
- We will facilitate opportunities for healing and reconciliation.
- We will be ambassadors of hope.

Won't you join us? It is our deep prayer that you will. It matters – it matters for the mission and for our life together as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Your servants in Christ,

LaTrelle Easterling, Baltimore-Washington & Peninsula-Delaware  
Sandra Steiner Ball, West Virginia and Susquehanna  
Thomas J. Bickerton, New York  
Sudarshana Devadhar, New England  
Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, Western Pennsylvania and Susquehanna  
John R. Schol, Greater New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania  
Mark Webb, Upper New York