



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 Admin. Asst.  
cmackey@susumc.org

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

**Rev. Dr. Thomas Salsgiver**  
Clergy Assistant  
tsalsgiver@susumc.org

**Sarah Filizzi**  
Admin. Assistant  
sfilizzi@susumc.org

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*“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*  
(1Corinthians 12:26-27)

My Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness, and Hope of the World!

The General Conference is the highest legislative body in The United Methodist Church and the only body that can legislate church law and speak officially for the church. The special session of General Conference 2019 held in St. Louis has ended. I am writing to share with you my heart and my understanding of where our church is at this time.

Here is what we know of the decisions of General Conference 2019.

- The Traditional Plan passed by 54 votes. The vote was 438 (53%) in favor, 384 (47%) against.
- The Traditional Plan keeps the current language around homosexuality and increases accountability by streamlining the processes to enforce penalties for violations of *The Book of Discipline* related to marriage and ordination of homosexual persons. Some parts of the Traditional Plan were ruled unconstitutional and the entire plan was referred to the Judicial Council for review to determine what parts are constitutional and what parts are not.
- A minority report was passed that would provide for an exit for churches that choose not to stay in The United Methodist Church. That was also sent to the Judicial Council.
- The Judicial Council, the highest court of the church, will meet April 23-26, 2019 to consider all these referrals. Thus, it will take some time to clarify which parts will become part of our church law and which parts will not.

What happens between now and the decisions of the Judicial Council?

- The current 2016 Book of Discipline is in effect.
- Once the Judicial Council rules, only those parts determined as constitutional will become effective January, 1, 2020.

This General Conference displayed that The United Methodist Church is a deeply wounded and broken Church. In the midst of manifestation of hurt and division, I give thanks for the witness of the Susquehanna Conference delegation that you elected. All of them felt the enormity of making decisions on behalf of our church. Filled with compassion

and care for each other, they were dedicated to the work you sent them to do. They served with diligence, integrity and faith, led by the Spirit of Christ.

This is indeed a tumultuous time. While acknowledging that all are of sacred worth deserving of and in need of the ministry of the church, The United Methodist Church is in the midst of immense pain. No matter where you stand on the question of inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the life and ministry of our church, pain is so deep and real as both sides claim that their position was made out of love for Jesus and the church. Pain will prolong. Knowing that this question will not be resolved by legislation, it will continue and increase.

Knowing also that the intensity of pain is not equivalent among all, I want to say to our gay and lesbian sisters and brothers and their families and friends that your love for Jesus and the church is no less than anybody else. My heart goes out to you and aches for the hurts and harms you have to live through. You are of sacred worth to God. You are God's beloved. I will do my best to offer space of welcome and hospitality for you to worship, fellowship, and serve as partners in the ministry and witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. My prayers will continue to be with you for the grace of assurance, strength, perseverance, healing and wholeness.

The Council of Bishops and the Northeastern Jurisdiction College of Bishops had a time together respectively the day after the close of General Conference. As you can imagine, the mood was heavier than any other time in my tenure as a bishop. As we shared our pains and hurts over the brokenness of our church at the college meeting, a bishop reminded us of Isaiah 43. When God's people were in the midst of drowning waters and fiery trials in exile, God's words of assurance came to them that they were God's people known by name, that God was their Savior, and that God loved them. And God called them to give attention to a promise that God was doing a new thing by reminding them that God was making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. God is able.

As your Bishop, what I know and what I believe is

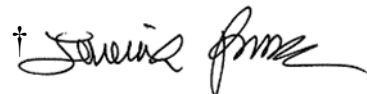
- Those who have been hurt – God can heal.
- When the way feels the darkest – God will light the path and lead us to God's preferred future.
- While we cannot see beyond our hurt and division – God holds the future in God's hands as God loves and holds all God's children in God's loving arms.

At the Council meeting, Bishop Ken Carter, President of the Council shared with us that, at least once a year, pastor should preach a, "I have a dream" message. Our "Susquehanna Conference will embody the beloved community as disciple making congregations." God's people, please keep this vision of our conference alive as best as you can. Clergy and laity alike, please create as many opportunities to share with one

another your dream of the church in a most inviting, winsome, honorable, humble, peaceful and loving way that would reflect the Beloved Community of Christ for such a time as this.

My sisters and brothers, Ash Wednesday and Lent is but a few short days away. As you know this season began as a time of fasting and preparation for baptism for converts. It has evolved into a significant time of prayer and penance for all Christians. This Lenten Season, all in the church have much to repent. Now more than ever we need to be together as a faith community to reflect on division and the hurts in the body of Christ by things we have done and things undone. As we fall on knees with convicted humility, God will hear us and bring new life to our spirits and to our beloved Church. Until the time of Easter and Pentecost which follows, may we find our healing and hope in the possibility of God's future as we love each other more deeply and fully to embody the Beloved Community of Christ.

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, Healer of our brokenness, and Hope of the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremiah Park", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Jeremiah Park