

Friends,

Most of you are in full force now that October has arrived. What a beautiful, yet incredibly busy time of year this is. I've enjoyed seeing many of you as I preach in local churches and meet with various small groups in the annual conference. During the hardest times I remind myself of these gatherings and what wonderful people make up the Alabama-West Florida Conference.

Our hearts ache for the people of Las Vegas. We were alarmed to learn of the worst shooting in modern US history Monday morning. We will continue to hear stories of heroism in the midst of evil. Many of you know that my favorite word is hope. Not only do we pray for peace and hope, we have the opportunity to live out those words as Christians in a broken world. In the darkness, may we be the light of the world. Join me in prayer for the families of those who died, the injured, the medical professionals, law enforcement and the city of Las Vegas.

The 2017 hurricane season has been historic and is not yet over. My prayer focus continues to be with the folks in Texas, Florida, South Georgia and Puerto Rico. Whether a family experienced minor damage, complete devastation or loss of life, millions of lives were changed in just a few short weeks. The United Methodist Committee on Relief, or UMCOR, will be in these areas for years. This organization represents the absolute best in our connection and reminds me of why it is so vital for us to be in ministry together. In fact, the Alabama-West Florida Conference has raised over \$445,000 dollars and we are still counting! Friends, I am completely humbled by the generosity of our local churches. Your money will directly help those who need it most. I also have seen wonderful photos from our churches assembling UMCOR kits. That is a slightly harder number to track but we know that over 1,500 flood buckets and over 2,000 hygiene kits have been collected with numerous other supplies. Some of these supplies are en route now to Puerto Rico and Dominica. Thank you to Mike Norris and Rob Haynes for the work they are doing to keep these supplies moving.

In addition to these gifts, we heard stories of churches providing comfort stations to Florida evacuees as they returned home. Rev. Chris Ackerman at Grand Ridge and Shady Grove United Methodist Churches told of the two congregations coming together to serve almost 1,500 meals! Chris expressed to me that it was a learning process and a teaching lesson of finding the best way to meet people exactly where they are vs. waiting on them to come to to them. They realized that the most efficient way to reach these exhausted travelers was to bring the meals to the area rest station. Words cannot express how thankful I am for this conference. You represent us so very well.

Rev. Brandon Dasinger hosted a United Methodist Social Principles seminar a

few weeks ago at Frazer UMC and had almost 200 attendees and 400 hundred online viewers! It proves to me that our members are wanting to learn more and understand what we believe as United Methodists. I am proud of him for navigating what can be difficult discussions about hot topics and taking an opportunity to teach critical information. That video is now available on the Resource page of our conference Website.

Your generosity has not gone unnoticed. Thank you to those churches who have already paid 100% of their apportionments. The Demopolis District leads the way with 34 churches through August who have paid 100%. Your faithful giving enables so many ministries around the AWF Conference to take place along with reaching the ends of the world. I encourage all of our remaining churches to be faithful in your giving so that we may finish 2017 strong.

Finally, I'd like to congratulate Rev. Patrick Quinn for the official launch of Century Church this past Sunday on October 1. This congregation was launched by Frazer UMC and after two years, felt they were prepared to be their own United Methodist Church. Their first Sunday was remarkable. They welcomed 380 people in worship and chartered with 190 professing members and 134 children! What an incredible start for this new congregation. I applaud the hard work of so many to launch this church in one of the area's fastest growing zip codes, and to Frazer for having the vision to start a new church. Patrick and his staff are well prepared to reach new disciples who live just steps away.

I could go on and on about the incredible ministry happening in this conference. It proves that if we will stay focused on making disciples and changing our corner of the world, the best is certainly yet to come.