

Friends,

As we continue into the Easter season, I hope you are still finding ways to celebrate our risen savior. As Easter people, we hold onto to this promise each day of the year. As Christians and believers, let us be instruments of peace in a world with so much hate and acts of violence. Your witness could have a profound impact on your corner of the world.

Let me first express my deep appreciation for the many prayers the cabinet and I received during the appointment season. This is some of the most important work I do as your Bishop and we could not have done it without your prayerful support. It was a joy to see our pastors who are receiving a new appointment at the Transition Event last week in Crestview, FL. Many of them acknowledge the time and effort it took to appoint our clergy where they were needed. Please continue to keep these pastors who are moving in your prayers. Change for churches and families is not easy, but these new opportunities allow both to minister to new people in new ways. If you are sending and receiving a new pastor, I know you will do everything you can to make this transition successful.

I also want to thank our local churches and the people of Alabama-West Florida for their dedication to our mission. I have heard many conferences that are experiencing difficult financial times but I am humbled and thrilled to report that as of the end of March 2019, we have received 20% of our yearly apportionment giving, which represents a 1.3% increase from this time last year. There are numerous reasons why our churches and members could have withheld their giving but by showing your support to our mission, we are able to minister to those who would suffer without our presence. It is remarkable to grasp this increase after witnessing a category five hurricane in our conference and a special-called general conference. A large portion of the apportionment dollars stay in the annual conference. You have my word that we are making responsible decisions to ensure that the United Methodist presence will be significant in our communities. Again, thank you for this outstanding support.

One example of how our presence is vital is in the Panama City, Marianna and Port St. Joe communities. The news has moved on but the United Methodist Church is still there. Under the leadership of Rev. Chris Ackerman, the recovery team is on the ground each and every day assessing needs and helping neighbors. What we need most is for churches to identify teams within their congregations who can travel to the panhandle to assist with the recovery work. More information is on our Website or hurricanemichaelrecovery.org. We are deeply grateful to the United Methodist Committee on Relief for their generous \$4.6 million-dollar-grant that will also help continue the necessary work. They represent the best in our connection and we are thankful for this partnership.

Let me briefly mention that the Judicial Council met last week and made their rulings on the decisions from the 2019 session of General Conference. Both petitions in question were ruled constitutional. The exit plan places many of the decisions around this topic into the hands of conference trustees and the annual conference. The new legislation will take effect January 1, 2020. General Conference will meet again a year from now in May of 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I know you all have annual conference marked on your calendar. The event will be June 2-5 at Frazer Memorial UMC here in Montgomery. I am honored that my colleague, Bishop Tracy Smith Malone from the East Ohio Conference, will join us for the opening worship and ordination services. You will, without a doubt, be blessed by her presence. Much of our time will be spent voting for 2020 general conference delegates but rest assured there will be dedicated time for worship and ministry celebrations. This year's theme is based on John 1:1, "This We Proclaim." There is so much hope, love, thanks and faith

that we can proclaim as God's children. Let us take time to center ourselves around this theme before coming to conference.

Thank you for the many ways you represent the Alabama-West Florida Conference. I am grateful for your ministry and I still believe that the best is yet to come!