

Friends,

On September 1, 2019, I will begin my fourth year with you as the resident bishop of the Alabama-West Florida Conference. When I reflect on the last three years, I am overwhelmed at the love, support and care you have shown Nancy and me. As our appointed clergy know, change can be unsettling but the opportunities are usually beyond anything you can imagine. This certainly summarizes my time with you, thus far. When I came to the Alabama-West Florida area, this conference was already in a wonderfully healthy place. So it has been my joy to walk with you to continue excellence in ministry. This upcoming fourth year will have its challenges, no doubt, but I am most excited about the ways we can change our corner of the world.

Most of you have seen through our communication pieces that the conference is hosting a required training that will better prepare us to resist racism. At this training, clergy experts on this subject from outside of our conference will equip our clergy with the tools and knowledge needed to resist all forms of racism in their church and community. These trainings will be held in Marianna, Florida, Mobile and Montgomery. Personally, I have been changed from engaging in conversations with people who don't look or think like me. I give thanks to God for allowing my heart to be open to growth and maturity. Thank you for making this a priority in your schedule. Details and registration may be found on our Website.

Another event I hope you will consider is a new sermon-planning workshop focusing on Advent. Rev. Sam Parkes and Rev. Jeremy Steele are co leading this day and are very skilled in this area. They are equipped at providing tools for effective and transformative preaching. One of our conference staff priorities is to teach, train, and coach to support excellent preaching so that people encounter Jesus and live out the Great Commission. This event certainly aligns with this goal. In order to get the most from the day and be able to interact with one another, space is limited. Visit our Website for more information.

Last week our conference released information related to the first anniversary of Hurricane Michael. We would like every church in the Alabama-West Florida Conference to help us remember this catastrophic event in some way. We have a host of materials we will release in a few weeks you may use in your worship services on October 6. We will also be doing several things to remember the event on October 10; including a Hurricane Michael Remembrance Day of Giving. All money donated will be given to UMCOR in honor of the partnership and significant grants we have received from them. I encourage you to carefully review the information sent to you to see how your local church can participate in this remembrance.

Charge conference season is upon us.....I know.....I can see the eye rolling from here!!! Charge conference is a necessary time for us to review and evaluate the total mission and ministry of the church, receive reports, and adopt objectives and goals recommended by the church council that are in keeping with the objectives of The United Methodist Church. However, during this tedious work, some of the most beautiful stories of transformation have emerged from these meetings. I encourage you to share these stories with your district superintendent so that we can consider sharing them with the conference.

I want to take a brief moment to share my appreciation for our Coordinator of Hispanic and Latino Ministries, Martha Rovira. Martha has faithfully served for twelve years in this conference and has shared with our leadership team that she will retire on November 1. She has a heart for those in our

conference who are often overlooked and has been an outstanding resource for our clergy, the cabinet and me. I wish her the very best in retirement and am thankful for her ministry. Join me in expressing our appreciation to Martha for her service.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to our churches for continuing their strong support through missional giving. Overall, we are slightly behind with our apportionments from this time last year, but the difference is mostly due to the hurricane last fall. I encourage you to finish strong in the remaining four and a half months. You have been extremely faithful through uncertainty. Your commitment allows us to continue vital ministries that change our corner of the world.

Thank you for the many ways you engage in ministry around this conference. There is no way I can possibly convey what an honor it is to be the Bishop of the Alabama-West Florida Conference. Let's have a great year four together and I can assure you that the best is yet to come!