

A Pastoral Letter from the Southeastern Jurisdictional College of Bishops to
the United Methodists in the Southeastern Jurisdiction

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We celebrate the way God is working through you and the churches you represent to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Your witness is making a difference in the lives of individuals and communities around the world.

We write this pastoral letter with hope in Jesus Christ. Yet our hearts are heavy as we recognize that as a result of our denominational conflicts we stand at a fragile place. Our Christian witness is defined, not by an absence of conflict, but by how we act in our disagreements.

Many in our church are working to change our *Book of Discipline's* current position on human sexuality, believing that it is exclusive, unjust and based on a misinterpretation of Scripture. These actions are being done through processes our polity has in place for making such changes.

Many others in our denomination are working to maintain our *Book of Discipline's* current position on human sexuality, believing that it is grace-filled, orthodox and biblically-based. These actions are also being done within the context of our church's polity.

Still others in our denomination, including some Boards of Ordained Ministry and Annual Conferences, are acting in nonconformity to our church's legislation about marriage and ordination standards. These actions are not within in the bounds of our church's polity.

We, the Southeastern Jurisdictional College of Bishops, grieve over the deep divisions in our beloved United Methodist Church. We recognize the pain felt both by those advocating for and those opposing change. We also view the acts of nonconformity as a violation of our covenant and as divisive and disruptive.

As a College of Bishops, we are fully committed to keeping the promises we made at our ordinations and consecrations, including:

- shepherding all persons committed to our care;
- leading our areas in mission, witness and service;
- ordering the church, including administering processes for handling complaints about violations of our *Book of Discipline* that occur within our episcopal areas;
- and seeking unity in Christ, including the work the General Conference requested the Council of Bishops do in relation to the Commission on Human Sexuality;

We invite you to join us in prayer as we strive to faithfully and compassionately fulfill our covenant with God, the church and one another. We also encourage you to stay the course in your covenant relationship with God, The United Methodist Church and each other.

In Christ,

The Southeastern Jurisdictional College of Bishops