

A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP BLEDSOE AND THE APPOINTIVE CABINET

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

We are writing to the churches of the New Mexico and Northwest Texas Annual Conferences to support and encourage you as we work together to respond to the recent outbreak of the Coronavirus in our world. Our political leaders and healthcare professionals have all come together to provide guidelines for us to live by in order to minimize the spread of the virus over the weeks and months ahead. The threat is real, and the risks are high, if we do nothing.

The 2020 General Conference scheduled for May in Minneapolis, Minnesota has been postponed until a later date due to the threat and complications related to the Coronavirus. We will keep you informed as decisions are made and alternate plans develop for our Annual as well as the South Central Jurisdictional conferences.

We as a church do not want to abandon or neglect our core values and mission in the world to care for others and to share hope and encouragement during this crisis. We do not know how long the crisis will be with us before we have an effective vaccine to curb the spread. At this point, the experts are anticipating it will get worse before it gets better.

Because we are The United Methodist Church, we are asking each of our churches to help maintain our sacred connection while practicing safe physical distancing. We applaud the work that is already occurring in many of our congregations to minimize the risk, while carrying out their mission in the world.

Let's work together in creative ways to accomplish our mission by doing the following:

- (1) Prayer is our most powerful tool, and our **first** response to crisis. Be creative in finding ways to implement prayer as individuals and as congregations. Prayer calendars, specific times during the day to pray in unity as a congregation, video conferencing for group connection and prayer, and social media connections, can be powerful ways to join in prayer. Remember that persons we might encounter who are in fear will be most open to a word of hope, and a promise of prayer. Pray for all those affected by the current crisis, and be challenged to consider persons others might tend to overlook.
- (2) Practice good hygiene by washing our hands and cleaning areas most used or touched by individuals. For additional information, go to one of the following, www.cdc.gov or <https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20200306/power-of-hand-washing-to-prevent-coronavirus>
- (3) Practice safe distancing by meeting in smaller rather than larger groups and gatherings. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/14/health/coronavirus-asymptomatic-spread/index.html> Many large churches have gone to live streaming and online worship. Several smaller congregations are instilling the Wesleyan Class meeting concept to stay in touch with families and individuals through class leaders. Be creative!

Be the church and learn to share effective ideas with others. See <https://www.resourceumc.org>

- (4) Work at being the church: practice the best of Wesleyan “social holiness” by extending love and care to each other, staying connected with those who are isolated (especially the elderly) by checking in with and encouraging them during this time and offering assistance with food, groceries, and childcare where needed.
- (5) Do not hoard resources. Do not neglect to be generous with those in need - this is the way of Christ!
- (6) Financially support your church by continuing to give of God’s tithe and offerings, using online giving or by mailing in your gifts. Our CF&As in each conference are working on implementing financial relief (help in shared ministries, health benefits and pension) and help to support you in your ministry.
- (7) As many schools are closed or closing, find creative ways to make sure children are safe and cared for in the community. Pay attention and be ready to respond to the emerging needs these families might be experiencing.
- (8) Being in God’s Word is also an important tool. May we suggest 2 Timothy 1:7, Isaiah 40:28, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 6:34, and Philippians 4:4-13.

We will get through this if we do not grow weary or lose heart. We look at this as an opportunity for us to learn to be the church in creative and effective ways. May God bless and keep you as we work together to keep our focus on the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



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Rev. Felicia Hopkins
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P.S. The bishop, conference lay leader and lead clergy person to General Conference will be sharing a video that speaks to additional plans. In the meantime, take care of one another as God cares for us all.