

From: communications@epaumc.org,

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Bishop Schol's message about General Conference and Disaffiliation

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The United Methodist Church

Bishop John Schol

Serving
Eastern Pennsylvania
& Greater New Jersey

March 10, 2022

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한국어 버전은 여기를 클릭하세요.

Bishop Schol's message about General Conference and Disaffiliation

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

-Jesus, Matthew 11:28

Peace I leave with you; not as the world gives. Let not your heart be troubled.

-Jesus, John 14:27

Dear United Methodist Laity and Clergy in Eastern Pennsylvania,

In this season, we are encountering what Methodism has faced several times since its inception in 1784, churches disaffiliating from the denomination. In the past it has been because of slavery, women in ministry, integration of the church, and today it is because of different beliefs about ministry with and by LGBTQ persons. Let me be clear, LGBTQ persons are not the reason for our differences, our differences are because of our own beliefs, traditions, understandings, and attitudes.

Recently General Conference, the legislative body of The United Methodist Church, was postponed a third time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. General Conference will not meet until 2024. The delegates to General Conference who serve on the General Commission and made this decision stated that as many as 30% of the delegates would not be able to attend because they could not receive visas. Attempting to conduct a virtual General Conference was not realistic across 12 time zones, multiple languages, all on Zoom with different internet stability.

These are anxious times, but in Eastern Pennsylvania, we are united in a belief to move forward as the body of Christ. In EPA, there are a few congregations and/or pastors who have communicated an interest in leaving The United Methodist Church. We will work with all United Methodists to help all persons arrive at the place they need to be in order to lead and thrive throughout the mission field.

A group of EPA leaders are working and will move deliberately to ensure there is clarity about the process and materials so that congregations who wish to disaffiliate can transition smoothly. Due to the approval processes required, and the need to do this well, it may take up to a year for a congregation and the leadership of EPA to work through the process and approvals.

Over the next several weeks, I will share with you about the following.

- The heart of the matter.
- Who EPA will be.
- EPA's focus.
- EPA's beliefs, theology and commitments.
- Pathways for EPA and your congregation's future.
- The processes and steps EPA will use to transition well.
- The costs of disaffiliation.
- Go slow to go fast.
- Things for congregations to consider.
- Next steps.

God has a future for us, not for our destruction, but for hope and a bold mission (Jeremiah 29:11). Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, reaching new, more diverse, and younger generations; grow healthy vital congregations that are centers of hope and are missional servants of the community; and to transform the world through the grace, salvation and justice of God. I see this bold future every day in the hearts and lives of the people in EPA. You and we together are difference makers!

The leadership of EPA and I hope all congregations and clergy will continue to be a part of our mission and church. Each of you are important to God and the mission of EPA.

The Heart of the Matter

I am not at my best when I am weary. I have noticed this in others as well. I find amid difference and conflict or when someone is pushing or threatening me, I sometimes become defensive and reactive. I have noticed this in others as well.

Jesus said, *if you are weary, come to me*, and Jesus said *I leave with you a heart of peace*. Today and every day, we have a choice, a heart of peace or a heart of war. To be fully outward and honor God, we will need the heart of Christ, the ultimate heart of peace. I invite all of us in all our conversations and deliberations to begin in the right way, that the person I am talking with is a child of God and matters just like I matter, that is the heart of Christ. We are not in a contest for churches and people, but honoring God, a heart of Christ. This is not a time to try to change other's hearts, but a time to seek the peace, hope and mission of Christ in your own heart.

Who EPA Will Be

At our 2019 Annual Conference Session, EPA affirmed that it would be a *One Church*, a conference racially, ethnically, linguistically, geographically, theologically and in beliefs. In essence we affirmed that we are bound together through our common calling to love God and to love our neighbor, and that we have a common mission.

Being *One Church*, we in essence recognized that there will be differences in the way congregations live out the calling and mission. We believe that all congregations are called to show hospitality to whoever comes to our churches and that we would have congregations in which LGBTQ persons would lead side by side with heterosexual leaders and that there would be congregations that would not have leaders or appointments of LGBTQ persons. We understood that there would not be one way of doing and being in ministry, but that we would all love God and our neighbor. EPA has affirmed this, and this is how we continue to form, lead and serve.

EPA's Focus

Serving God by advancing the mission is our focus. If anything deters us from serving God and fulfilling the mission, we are no longer the church of Jesus Christ. We can do things that are necessary in addition to the mission, but we can never let any task rise above serving God and fulfilling the mission. The urgency or the anxiety of some cannot put serving God and fulfilling the mission on hold. Throughout these challenging times, EPA's focus will be:

- Call, equip, send and support transformational leaders.

- Make disciples by sharing God's salvation through the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- Resource healthy vital missional congregations.
- Transform lives, communities and even the world through the grace of God.
- Work to end the sin of racism and sexism.
- Welcome immigrants.
- Start new congregations and faith communities.
- Provide food and other basic necessities of the people in our communities.
- Provide relief and recovery for those who experience disasters.
- Have a global mission through schools, hospitals and clinics and starting new churches.
- Serve the poor in our communities and work for justice for all.
- Seek peace.

This is who we are and what we do as United Methodists.

The leadership of EPA and I hope all congregations and clergy will continue to be a part of our mission and church. Each of you are important to God and the mission of EPA.

Keep the faith!

John

You are invited to share this email with fellow church members, United Methodist family and friends. Churches are to share the email through their website, Facebook page and newsletter.

Bishop John Schol

The United Methodists of

Eastern Pennsylvania & Greater New Jersey

BishopJohnSchol@epaumc.org | 610-666-1442

BishopJohnSchol@gnjumc.org | 732-359-1010

Equipping transformational leaders for

New Disciples | Vital Congregations | Transformed World

