

## January 2019

I am grateful to our bishop and our District Superintendent for the trust they demonstrated to me in appointing me to serve as your pastor the past three years. Even more, I express my deep appreciation to each of you for choosing to trust God and accept my leadership in the midst of difficult circumstances. (\*A special “Thank you” to Daniel Graff, who has led our Staff-Parish Relations team with patience, thoughtfulness and integrity these last three years.) Together, we have carefully and intentionally sought to bring healing where there was brokenness, and we have shaped a mutually-affirming ministry marked by generosity, hospitality and compassionate outreach.

Believing that God “can do more than we can ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20), and believing that we are just getting started in our shared work, the Staff-Parish Relations team and I have put forth our recommendation to the Bishop and the Cabinet of District Superintendents to allow this partnership to continue for a fourth year (July 2019 – June 2020). As always, in our Wesleyan itinerancy, the bishop has the final say.

It is my hope that our recommendation will be honored because our church (and the whole United Methodist denomination) has some potentially challenging days ahead. Next month, February 23-26, the called special session of General Conference will meet to give us greater clarity and focus on the topic of human sexuality. The topic has long been a source of disagreement within the United Methodist Church. It is my hope that we can remain connected. I do not want the letters to become mixed up – I don’t want to become the “Untied” Methodist Church. I hope we can remain “United”.

The mission and ministry that occurs through our connected efforts is phenomenal. The Virginia Conference has historically and consistently been one of the strongest supporters of ministries around the world, including over 350 missionaries in 60 different countries. Through United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) we brought the love, compassion and healing of Christ our Lord to countless people touched by natural and human-made disasters (Hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, etc.). In 2017, Christians throughout Virginia gave over \$1.7 million to UMCOR.

We are sources of hope, healing, justice, acceptance, hospitality, forgiveness and love. We are called to connect people with the living God through Jesus Christ. We fulfill this calling best when we diligently seek God’s heart and when we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. I hope to be appointed for another

year here at Skipwith so that we can grow deeper in love with God together and so that we can embrace the least, the lost, the lonely, and the left-out –as Jesus, our Lord, did and does and always will do.

I ask you to join me in preparing for the challenges that lay ahead as the special session of General Conference meets in St. Louis, Missouri next month. I ask you to join me in trusting that God is at work. I ask you to make use of the resources listed below to better understand what is before our denomination and every congregation within it. If you would like hard-copies of any of the resources listed, please call the church office and request it.

I am praying, “Lord, thy will be done. Nothing more, nothing less and nothing else.” I’m asking God to do “immeasurably more than we can know how to ask or imagine.” I know many of you are praying too.

### **Resources**

Watch the [archived livestream event](#) from Sept. 26, 2018 featuring Q & A with Bishop Sharma Lewis, the Rev. Tom Berlin and Ms. Martha Stokes

[Resources for the Called General Conference Session: Feb. 23-26, 2019](#) (pdf)

[Handout Summary](#) (pdf)

[Background: Summary of Plans](#) (pdf)

[Way Forward Timeline](#) (pdf)

Grace,

Pastor Todd