

June 1, 2023

Dear Clergy of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church,

Grace and peace be with you. First and foremost, I want to thank you for your faithful ministry even in the midst of difficult and trying times. I grieve with you over the churches that have left, and are in the process of leaving, the Virginia Annual Conference. However, I want us to start putting our time and energy into the churches that are remaining UMC. I also encourage you to cultivate new faith expressions that introduce people to Jesus Christ and make them his disciples.

Second, as we look toward the future with hope there are some things that I want to make clear:

1. It is not acceptable for United Methodist clergy (active or retired) to lead their churches out of the denomination. This is a chargeable offense as outlined in The United Methodist Book of Discipline (2016) paragraph 2701.e.
2. If your loyalty lies within another denomination, with pastoral integrity you need to withdraw from The United Methodist and go serve that denomination (2016 BOD ¶360.1).
3. Retired pastors cannot serve churches in another denomination without the Bishop's and D.S.'s permission (see the attached document for more information and 2016 BOD ¶341.4).

As churches have decided to disaffiliate, many are still trying to utilize the resources of the denomination that they chose to leave. This is not acceptable and the Virginia Conference will not be appointing pastors to these churches.

As we approach Annual Conference, I look forward to celebrating with you all that God has done in your life, your ministry, and within your ministry settings. God is still moving even in the midst of division and despair and God continues to call us to mission and discipleship. May we move forward together as we continue to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling us to serve together for the glory of God.

In ministry together,
Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson