



# THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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March 13, 2017

Dear Members and Friends of the West Virginia Conference,

It is with great joy that I greet you in the name of our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I continue to be thankful and honored to be the Resident Bishop of the West Virginia Conference.

In this new quadrennium our Conference theme is "Cultivating a Culture of Leadership that is Hopeful, Innovative, Invitational, and Generative." Over the next four annual conferences, we will highlight one aspect of the leadership culture we seek to develop. For the 2017 session of our Conference, our focus will target what it means to be "Hopeful." Therefore, in the name of Christ who leads us to hope and fills us with hope, it is my joy and privilege to issue the call to join me for our Annual Conference gathering on the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College on June 8 – 11, 2017.

As we prepare for the 2017 conference meeting, I am thrilled to share that our churches, districts, and conference have caught the hopeful vision of 2,400+. Our conference vision of 2,400+ professions of faith keeps before us God's mandate to "**go and make disciples of all nations**"(Mt. 28:19) and the commission that "**you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth**"(Acts 1:8). This has always been the mission of the church and the purpose of the people called United Methodists. The vision of 2,400+ new persons in Christ has inspired many of our faith communities to prioritize building relationships with our neighbors and helping them to delight in Jesus.

This year, we will extend and expand the vision of 2,400+ new persons in Christ. We will still have a goal of 2,400+ professions of faith, but are hopeful in expanding that vision to include 2,400+ new persons engaged in intentional discipleship learning and growth opportunities. As United Methodists, we have always believed that the goal is not just to reach people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but to help them grow in Christ-like holiness.

As we prepare for the 2017 annual conference, it is my hope and prayer that the members and churches of the West Virginia Conference see the mission field that is all around us. When we step out of the sanctuary, we have entered the place where God is sending us to bring hope and to make a difference. The hope-filled vision of more than 2,400 new professions of faith and over 2,400 new people stepping forward to grow in their faith and discipleship is just the beginning of our bearing the fruit of faith and love. The vision is a sign that we are indeed hopeful and committed to loving God and loving our neighbors!

As we prepare to gather for the 2017 Annual Conference may we experience anew God's call for us to be a Christ-led, spiritual breath of fresh air that changes the world! Led by Christ and allowing Christ to work through us, we can be filled with the hope and dream of God that this world will be transformed and will come to know the hope, love, joy, and peace that brings new life.

Grace and Peace,

Sandra L. Steiner Ball

Resident Bishop, West Virginia Conference