



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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February 24, 2016

Dear Members and Friends of the West Virginia Conference,

“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; and the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” Isaiah 55:12

Deploy! That is the theme of the 2016 Annual Conference. When I arrived in 2012, we talked about new beginnings. At that time, we committed ourselves to take a serious look together to discern how we could discover, develop, and deploy passionate spiritual clergy and lay leadership for the purpose of leading us into being a spiritual breath of fresh air bringing transformation to God’s people, the church, and the world.

For this annual conference, “deploy” means much more than being sent out or assigned to do something. Picture “deploy” as bursting forth, like a milk weed pod bursts open to send seeds out. To “deploy” is to recognize and to take action – bursting forth – responding to our call to make Christ known in such a way that others will be “birthed” into discipleship. It is with this theme and mission in mind, that I issue the call to join me for our Annual Conference gathering on the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College on June 9 - 12.

As I visit churches and districts, I continue to discover a thirst among people to be co-creators with God, to burst forth to make Christ known, and to walk with people into discipleship. There are great gifts here! There are opportunities here! With this deployment, this bursting forth of energy, focus, and commitment, we are on our way to reaching 2400+ people with the good news of Jesus Christ in ways that bring 2400+ to professions of faith. What glory sightings there are and will be with this effort. A fresh new wind of God’s Spirit is in fact blowing here.

As we continue our work to effectively discover, develop, and deploy disciples who make disciples, I pray that you will come to Conference expectantly ready and prepared to hear and experience the Christ who is present and our God who still speaks in this world today. Be prepared to do some things differently. The conference agenda will provide two opportunities for small group holy conversation. These groups will be called Circles of Grace. The Circles of Grace will be opportunities to talk and listen to people who may hold views or opinions different than our own. Our 2016 General Conference may make some decisions that will need opportunities for conversation (rather than debate). We will break out into Circles of Grace with facilitators (there will be training for them) to discuss our lives together. The particular points for dialogue will be determined with our delegation as we move through the General Conference process and decisions.

In order to prepare to hear and experience Christ at the annual conference this year, I would like to call you to join me in both prayer and fasting. A calendar for Forty Days of prayer and Fasting is included in the workbook. Prayer is the vehicle God gives us as the very foundational gift to deploy disciples and transform the world.

As you prepare, please pray for me, that I preside prayerfully, faithfully, and wisely. Pray for each other, meditate on God’s word, read all the pre-conference materials, and be open to a fresh movement of God’s Spirit among us!

Grace and Peace,
Sandra L. Steiner Ball
Resident Bishop, West Virginia Conference