

Because lay ministry has been instrumental in the spread of the gospel from the earliest times and especially in the establishment of The United Methodist Church, and because God, through baptism and confirmation, continues to call each believer into ministry, the Board of Laity lifts up the crucial importance of lay ministry and urges lay people to take this call seriously, committing themselves to grow in faith and ministry. We thank the pastors who commit themselves to leading lay people to discover and develop their ministries and who partner with them in this great adventure of faith and discipleship.

These *Characteristics of Effective Lay Leadership* provide a vision of what the laity of the church are called to be and do as they live out the church's mission of bringing people into fellowship with God. Like the *Characteristics of Effective Clergy Leadership* in the Virginia Conference, this list is not exhaustive but expresses the current priorities of the conference. Each lay leader and pastor is responsible for presenting and interpreting this vision to their Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development and to their congregation.

**All God's People in
All Places,
And in
All Times,
Are Called to Love
And to Serve.**



Ministry of the Laity

Virginia
Conference
Board of Laity

**Characteristics of
Effective
Lay Leadership
in the
Churches
of the
Virginia
Conference**



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Characteristics of Effective Lay Leadership in the Churches of the Virginia Conference

This document is intended:

- 1) to assist the local church Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development in selection, training and evaluation of church leaders.
- 2) to help current leaders evaluate their own leadership as they plan for continued growth.
- 3) to help potential leaders as they consider their response to an invitation to leadership.
- 4) to be lifted up before the congregation as a goal for all disciples to work toward.

This document recognizes that all Christians are on a journey of faith and discipleship, and that no one meets all these standards. As such, we accept them as goals and call ourselves to continue to work toward the vision.

Leaders model what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ:

PRIMARY COMMITMENTS

- Leaders recognize that commitment to Jesus Christ is the foundation for all leadership in the church, and that commitment to God's will is the beginning of all vision.

- They recognize making disciples of Jesus Christ as the primary goal of the Church and of individual Christians.
- They see those who are closest to them - their family and friends - as the frontline arena for their ministry/service, and commit to give them the best of themselves rather than the leftovers.

CHARACTER

- Leaders seek to respond to conflict as Jesus did — directly, openly, and responsibly, treating others with respect and always seeking justice, healthy accountability, and reconciliation. They recognize the importance of character and seek to become people whose lives are marked by integrity and compassion, and who treat others with respect regardless of their race, gender, social status, theological viewpoint, or any other human difference.
- They intentionally pursue spiritual growth and renewal of body, mind and spirit; setting aside time to deepen their relationship with God and to grow in faith and discipleship.

LEADERSHIP STYLE

- Leaders are determined to be servant-leaders, seeking the good of the kingdom rather than their own power and status, and making decisions based on the good of the whole Church rather than their own preferences.
- They listen to God, to the community, to their congregation, and to others of differing viewpoints, as well as to their own hearts as they discern visions and set goals for their church's future and ministry.

- They are future-oriented, willing to take risks as they encourage others to celebrate the past while moving toward the future.
- They partner with their pastors — praying for, supporting and encouraging them, and dealing honestly and openly with difficult issues.
- They seek to identify, nurture, encourage and support leadership in others.

DISCIPLESHIP

- Leaders seek to grow in all areas of discipleship.
- They commit to regular, frequent participation in worship and study, and to grow in giving, service, prayer, and witness.
- They recognize fitting as the traditional standard for giving and commit to grow toward or beyond tithing.
- They support the ministries and programs of the local church, district, conference, and general church, in order to more effectively accomplish the mission of the Church.
- They seek to understand and interpret the Methodist distinctives: history, tradition, beliefs, worship, structure, and vision.
- They are committed to discovering, developing and practicing their spiritual gifts, and to encourage others to do the same.
- They are committed to hands-on service in and beyond the local church, meeting the practical and spiritual needs of others in the church, the community and the world.



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December 11, 2018

Dear Virginia Conference—

The topic of human sexuality has long been a source of disagreement within The United Methodist Church. Right now the topic is the focus of many conversations as we prepare for the Special Session of General Conference 2019 in February.

With tensions so high, congregations may be concerned about what is happening and what this means for their church. **Church leaders may feel fear or uncertainty.** I send this letter in the hopes of setting us on the same course in the Virginia Conference.

It is my hope and prayer that we can stay a connected church.

As the Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:20, it is God who can do more than we can ask or imagine. I hope that the Virginia Conference will trust in our Lord together.

The reason I hold out for hope for this denomination's unity is because I know what we can do together. I have seen it.

Our conference has been historically and consistently one of the strongest supporters of the missional connection. Our small and large membership churches, through shared ministry in apportionments, help support Global Ministries and 350+ missionaries in 60 countries.

We have been a part of the church's growth in countries such as Cambodia, Brazil and Mozambique. Through our unique conference Initiatives of Hope missional partnership team, we have:

- Supported church and parsonage construction and lay and clergy leadership development in Cambodia and Mozambique.
- Started educational advancement through school and dormitory construction and scholarships for students in Cambodia.
- Provided tutoring and after school programs for at-risk children in Brazil through the Shade and Fresh Water ministry of The Methodist Church of Brazil.
- Opened dialogue and support for Virginia Native peoples as they seek autonomy and sovereignty as well as offering opportunities in cooperation with the conference Native American Ministries team to provide a family camp.

Through our aid to UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), we have supported disaster response when disasters such as wildfires and hurricanes are more prevalent. The need has never been greater. In 2017, the Virginia Conference supported UMCOR in excess of \$1.7 million.

Our churches, big or small, are and can be a source of hope. We are never more like the hands and feet of Christ than when we are working together in ministry.

I hope you will use the resources listed below to help start conversations in your context and share information. These conversations will be hard ones, but we learn more from our neighbors by understanding different perspectives.

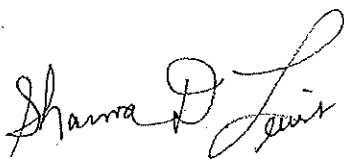
As we prepare for this Special Session of General Conference, I call upon you, members of the Virginia Conference, to be a non-anxious presence. Lean away from fear and lean on God. Lean away from uncertainty and lean into the mission of your local churches.

God is here. And God is doing something immeasurably more than we know how to ask or imagine.

Resources:

- Commission on a Way Forward information: www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward
- Final Commission on a Way Forward report: www.umc.org/who-we-are/way-forward-report-released-in-all-four-official-languages-of-general-conference
- Virginia Conference Sept. 2018 livestream event: <https://livestream.com/VAUMC/COWFQA>
- Bishop Lewis' "Guiding Principles" for Virginia Conference: www.vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/WayForward/BishopLewisSlides9_27_18.pdf
- Judicial Council Oct. 2018 decision: www.umc.org/who-we-are/council-of-bishops-issues-statement-regarding-the-judicial-council-decision
- General Conference 2019 information: www.vaumc.org/GC2019

Peace and Blessings,



Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

Called General Conference Session February 23-26, 2019 St. Louis MO

To follow the General Conference Session:

<http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session>

For information about the Commission on a Way Forward (CoWF) and its work:

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-about-us>

To view or print the report of the CoWF:

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/way-forward-report-released-in-all-four-official-languages-of-general-confe>

August/September/October 2018 edition of *Circuit Rider*, an online quarterly periodical:

https://www.ministrymatters.com/circuit_rider/139/decision-2019-one-with-christ-one-with-each-other-one-in-ministry-to-all-the-world-augsepoct-2018

See the list of delegates from the Virginia Conference and any other VAUMC news regarding the Called General Conference: <https://www.vaumc.org/GC2019>

Virginia Conference resources for local church conversations: <https://vaumc.org/WayForward>



PRAYING OUR WAY FORWARD

 We are One in Christ
UMCprays.org • A UMC Prayer Community

Every United Methodist is being invited to:

- Engage in a weekly Wesleyan 24-hour fast from Thursday after dinner to Friday mid-afternoon. That fast does not have to be from food but could be from social media, emails or another daily activity.
- Pause and pray for our church's mission and way forward daily for 4 minutes from 2:23 through 2:26 AM or PM or at another time. This is because the Special Session of General Conference will be held February 23 through February 26.
- Pray using a weekly calendar that is posted on the UMCPrays.org website. The calendar will list a unique cluster of names each week which will balance United States bishops and delegates with Central Conference bishops and delegates. It will also include other individuals whose work is important to the General Conference session.

The Commission on a Way Forward (CoWF) has put forth three options to be considered by the 2019 Called General Conference. Each option represents the heartfelt convictions of deeply devoted Christ-followers.

In all this, REMEMBER:

- Teach, model and lead open, honest conversations filled with dignity and respect.
- Help individuals and groups understand that people who love Jesus can amicably disagree over how to interpret and apply Biblical teaching.
- Our language and actions are of extreme importance as we live out our General Rule of Discipleship: do no harm; do good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible to everyone; and attend to the ordinances of God.

The One Church Plan, the plan most strongly affirmed by the United Methodist Council of Bishops, would allow different United Methodists in different places to make different decisions regarding ministry with or by LGBTQ+ persons rather than maintaining a single standard that operates everywhere throughout the worldwide church. In this plan, individual pastors would be entrusted with the decision about whether or not to officiate at same-sex weddings; individual congregations would be entrusted with the decision about whether or not same-sex weddings could be held on church property; and individual annual conferences would be entrusted with the decision about whether or not to ordain people who are self-avowed LGBTQ+. This plan would remove restrictive language from the **Book of Discipline**. The One Church Plan seeks to create adequate space for a divergence of perspectives and to honor United Methodists who believe that the current impasse over human sexuality does not necessitate a denominational split.

The Connectional Conference Plan replaces the five U.S. geographical jurisdictions with three connectional conferences which are defined, not by geographical boundaries, but by theology and perspective, each having clearly defined values (traditional, unity, and progressive). Jurisdictions, annual conferences, and local churches would have the opportunity to affiliate with the Connectional Conference with which they are in theological alignment. The Connectional Conferences would each have a College of Bishops and a contextualized **Book of Discipline**. Annual conferences and local churches would have options within given timeframes to reconsider affiliation with chosen Connectional Conferences.

The Traditionalist Plan affirms the current language in the **Book of Discipline** related to homosexuality and seeks to strengthen enforcement for violations of church law. It clarifies accountability standards in an effort to encourage both a more widespread adherence to Disciplinary proscriptions and a quicker resolution of complaints. The Traditionalist Plan seeks to preserve the denomination's established teaching and to honor those United Methodists who believe that changing the denomination's current position would be an unacceptable departure from a necessary orthodoxy. Those annual conferences, pastors and congregations which feel they cannot live within the boundaries of denominational practices can form or join self-governing bodies.

Other Plans Introduced as Petitions:

- The Simple Plan – endorsed by the Reconciling Ministries Network
<https://rmnetwork.org/reconciling-ministries-network-the-simple-plan/>
- A Plan of Dissolution – put forth by the Wesleyan Covenant Association
<https://wesleyancovenant.org/petitions/>