



The Northeastern Jurisdiction College of Bishops

May 2015

Sisters and Brothers of the Northeastern Jurisdiction,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ. We celebrate the resurrection of Christ and the good news we are hearing about ministry occurring in the conferences across the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

We, the Bishops of the Northeastern Jurisdiction, write to you after a recent meeting in which we recognized that due to a reduction in jurisdictional church membership over the last four years we are scheduled to reduce from nine to eight bishops leading Episcopal Areas in the Northeastern part of the United States.

Within the United States, The United Methodist Church is divided into five jurisdictions: Western, South Central, Southeastern, North Central and Northeastern. In the Northeastern Jurisdiction, there are 10 annual conferences served by nine bishops. The number of bishops assigned and serving within a jurisdiction is based on a membership formula. In a preliminary assessment of 2014 membership statistics, the Northeastern Jurisdiction has 1,209,815 members, falling below the 1,215,001 mark required to maintain nine bishops or nine episcopal areas. Bishops lead episcopal areas and episcopal areas may include two conferences within the same episcopal area. Presently the Philadelphia Episcopal Area has two conferences, Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula Delaware.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction has three options to address the scheduled reduction of a bishop as indicated by the membership statistics. Jurisdictional leadership is currently considering the following:

1. Request that the 2016 General Conference (the legislative body of The United Methodist Church) continue nine episcopal areas in the Northeastern Jurisdiction because the jurisdiction has a unique mission field that serves large urban areas and a diverse population. This request would be made through the Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy to the appropriate General Conference body. The Committee on Episcopacy is comprised of two representatives from each conference.
2. Present legislation to the 2016 General Conference that would continue nine episcopal areas in the Northeastern Jurisdiction that would evaluate the need for bishops based on information other than or in addition to the jurisdictional membership statistics. This legislation could also be submitted by the Northeastern Jurisdiction Episcopacy Committee.

3. Reduce from nine to eight episcopal areas by aligning conferences together. In the past, this has been done by having two conferences in one episcopal area or by merging conferences. The College of Bishops, which is comprised of the bishops of the Northeastern Jurisdiction, is the body that would be responsible to make a recommendation for new alignments that would reduce the number of episcopal areas from nine to eight to the 2016 Jurisdictional Conference.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction Episcopacy Committee and the College of Bishops are in prayerful consideration of each of the three possible solutions to address the potential reduction of an episcopal area. No decisions have been made. If we are required by General Conference to reduce by one episcopal area, many different scenarios will be considered. The College of Bishops has already committed that the mission of the church will guide its work as we together seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction may not be the only jurisdiction that is facing a possible reduction in the number episcopal areas. We intend to enter into collaborative conversations with other jurisdictions who find themselves in similar positions so that we might better discern together the journey ahead.

In Philippians 4:6 we read: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

We recognize we are facing challenges as the Church. We also believe that God will guide and support us through our greatest challenges. We call upon you to be in prayer for the General Conference, the leaders of the church, our conferences and our congregations. Pray for God's wisdom as we move forward.

We also thank you for your faithfulness in your ministry. We continue to hear of the powerful ministry God is doing through our congregations.

Blessings,

Sandra Steiner Ball, Resident Bishop, West Virginia Area

Thomas Bickerton, Resident Bishop, Pittsburgh Area

Sudarshana Devadhar, Resident Bishop, Boston Area

Peggy Johnson, Resident Bishop, Philadelphia Area

Marcus Matthews, Resident Bishop, Washington Area

Jane Allen Middleton, Retired, assigned as Resident Bishop, New York Area

Jeremiah Park, Resident Bishop, Harrisburg Area

John Schol, Resident Bishop, New Jersey Area

Mark J. Webb, Resident Bishop, Upper New York Area

Retired Bishops: George Bashore; Violet Fisher; William Boyd Grove; Susan Hassinger; Neil Irons; S. Clifton Ives; Alfred Johnson; Ernest Lyght; Felton E. May; Susan M. Morrison; F. Herbert Skeete; Forrest Stith; Peter D. Weaver; C. Dale White; Joseph H. Yeakel