



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



2018 New Year's Greetings

To the People Called United Methodists:

Grace and peace to you as we embrace the New Year.

The joy of Christmas and the gift of Emmanuel - God with us - gives us the confidence to face the future with hope. This hope is born of our faith in the Living God. Thus, as we enter the New Year we affirm that God who started a good thing in us will see it to fruition.

As United Methodists, we are at a precipitous moment, uncertain about our denomination's future. Yet, we do know that we have been raised up as a people to share in God's mission by spreading scriptural holiness across the globe. And, we know that God knows what form this mission will take in the future.

As a Council of Bishops, we have been in unceasing prayer, asking God to open our hearts and minds to discern what God would have us do to lead our global movement. We thank you for your earnest prayers and invite you to continue to pray for the Commission on a Way Forward and the Council as our work continues and we prepare for the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference.

Likewise, every part of the world where our United Methodist Connection is present is in the throes of dramatic upheaval, conflict, poverty, migrations or natural disasters. As we enter 2018, let us resolve to be tireless in our efforts to bring health, healing, recovery and transformation to a broken world.

Let us be unflagging in our commission to reach new people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us be fully available to grow in our love of God and neighbor. Let us renew our commitment to always and everywhere practice our Rule of Life - do no harm, do good, attend to the ordinances of God.

The New Year is a time for renewing the covenant. John Wesley clearly understood that covenant cannot be manufactured or maintained by structural, administrative or compulsory means. He knew that covenant-making and covenant-keeping were spiritual matters—a function of offering one's life to God and to God's purposes above all else.

The first celebration of the Covenant Service in the Methodist movement was held on Monday, August 11, 1755. In short order, covenant renewal services were being held on New Year's Day in class meetings and societies of the Methodist revival movement. Many United Methodist churches utilize this service in their own Watch Night or New Year's Day worship. Many United Methodists can recite all or portions of Wesley's invitation to his Covenant Service as deftly as they can recite the Lord's Prayer, the Apostle's Creed or Psalm 23.

The words are powerful and provocative. I believe they may hold the key to our seeking a way forward. They invite a measure of humility, integrity, denial and

surrender that is often discomfoting and disorienting to our pre-conceived, siloed positions.

They clearly remind us that we belong to Christ, and that to give ourselves to Christ in all things is the heart and soul of all covenantal relationships within our great United Methodist Church.

So, as we enter into 2018 and trust that God will provide a future with hope, I invite all United Methodist's to renew our covenant with God and one another, as we join Methodist people throughout the ages in praying the Covenant Prayer, which in part reads:

Lord, make me what you will
put myself fully into your hands;
put me to doing, put me to suffering,
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and with willing heart
give it all to your pleasure and disposal. Amen.

May God add God's blessing to our journey together as a covenant people and grant us a blessed New Year.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce R. Ough".

Bishop Bruce R. Ough, President
Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church