

Dear Smoky Mountain District Clergy,

This is an email to let you know that you and your churches are in my thoughts and especially my prayers tonight. Praying God will calm and direct your spirit, your words and your presence, on this Epiphany Sunday, the first Sunday of the New Year. With the release of the proposed agreement to the General Conference on Friday and the world events of the past two days: The U. S. directed Assassination of an Iranian Military Leader, the deployment of more military service men and women to the Middle East, the ongoing acts of violence domestically and worldwide to mention just a few, if I were still serving as a pastor in a local church, there is no doubt that I would be wondering tonight the direction of my sermon, prayers and worship leadership for tomorrow.

I am praying that you will be reminded of Jesus' words: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Also, Paul's words written to a divided and disputing church in Corinth:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all did. And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Christ who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-16)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to God through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

I have attached documents related to the proposed agreement to the General Conference, [Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation](#), released on Friday. I thought it would be helpful for you to have all of these documents in one email for your prayerful consideration and in anticipation of questions you may be asked. The Media has quickly shared various perspectives and understandings on this document – not all factually correct. I suggest you read Bishop Leeland's Response first. It was helpful to me to read the FAQ information before reading the actual statement.

D'Andre, our District Communications Coordinator, will be posting all of the links to these documents (with the exception of the Book of Discipline Addendum) on the Smoky Mountain District website <https://www.smokymountaindistrict.org/> and Facebook. This hopefully will make easy access to this information for your members.

Below is Bishop Ken Carter's Facebook post from January 2nd. I found his words helpful, as we look together toward General Conference and beyond. Leighton Ford's prayer is my first memorization goal for 2020.

[Ken Carter](#)

January 2 at 9:45 PM

Tomorrow will see the public release of some of the mediating work done by a group of United Methodists from across the world who represent many (not all) of the important streams of our church. It is in service to the delegates who will gather four short months from now in Minneapolis for the 2020 General Conference. It is not perfect--no mediation is--but it gives a great deal to each of these different streams, more than I could have imagined at the beginning, and I attribute this to the work of the Holy Spirit.

I write prior to the release, simply because this evening it is on my mind and heart, and because much of its effect will be how we receive it and how we turn toward each other. It is not about winners or losers, but about how God's promise of grace and reconciliation relates to our structures, convictions and hopes. It is significant, and at the same time it is one step in a journey.

At the beginning of a new year, I return to the words of my friend and mentor Leighton Ford:

"Lord, give me I pray:
A remembering heart for the things that have happened
An attentive heart to what I have learned
A forgiving heart for what has hurt
A grateful heart for what has blessed
A brave heart for what may be required
An open heart to all that may come
A trusting heart to go forth with You
A loving heart for You and all your creation
A longing heart for the reconciliation of all things.
A willing heart to say "Yes" to what You will.
Amen."

Anticipating God's faithfulness, the Holy Spirit's prodding, and Christ's compelling love to guide us, may we prayerfully seek the path of reconciliation and grace for all,

Linda

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