

Here are words of Hope and Assurance from Bishop David Bard, December 6, 2022...



## PREPARE OUR HEARTS FOR JESUS

*In this Advent edition of Joyful Journey, Bishop David Bard encourages us to open our hearts, our lives, and our communities so Jesus can show up in us and through us to touch the world.*

Friends, we are again entering the Christian season of Advent, the time of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas. The word “advent” means “arrival,” “appearance,” or “coming.” Traditional Advent hymns are about anticipation, such as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” or “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus.” As Christians, our preparations are to be about more than making gift lists, decorating, or sending out cards. At the heart of Advent is preparing our hearts and lives to receive Jesus in new ways. At Advent, we are also invited to lean into the part of our heart and soul that yearns for the second coming of Jesus the Christ, a coming in which all things will be made right and well. We long for a newer world of justice, peace, reconciliation, beauty, joy, and love.

Before returning to the deeper themes of Advent and Christmas, allow me to use this space to speak about a couple of matters of comings and goings.

In the current situation of The United Methodist Church, one can hardly mention the notion of “comings and goings” without acknowledging the separation going on within our denomination through disaffiliation. To date, approximately 15% of United Methodist churches in Michigan have inquired about the cost of disaffiliation. A number of congregations are discussing their identity and ministry and future. Unfortunately, inaccurate information or even disinformation continues to find its way around. I want to share with you one bit of information that I think you will find helpful.

**The Michigan Conference will hold a special session of the annual conference on November 30, 2023, using a virtual format, for the purpose of approving church disaffiliations and church closures.** This session is being called in accordance with Paragraph 603.5 of *The Book of Discipline*. While the official wording for the calling of this special session will be released later, it is important to know that such a session is being planned and is on the conference calendar. Congregations discerning about their mission, ministry, identity, and future need not rush their process so that if they choose to disaffiliate, they have to complete the process before our June annual conference session.

In other comings and goings, I am very pleased to share with you that at the November session of the North Central Jurisdictional Conference, I was assigned to continue my service as the bishop for the Michigan Area. Beginning January 1, my service as the bishop for the Minnesota Conference will end. My assignment to Michigan is effective until September 1, 2024. I understand that some were confused at our June 2022 annual conference session when I spoke about the uncertainty of my future. At the time, I did not know where the jurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy might assign me, and I wanted to make sure that you knew of my deep love and appreciation for you and our shared ministry together for Jesus Christ. I did not want my opportunity to say thank you to slip by. It is a joy and delight to share in ministry with you, and to know that we will continue in ministry together in the coming months.

The Advent and Christmas seasons are about how God showed up in the world in the coming of Jesus. They remind us that the work of Christ continues in a world that is broken, beaten, filled with violence, and torn by hatred, a world in which we yearn for hope and healing, justice and joy, reconciliation and redemption, beauty and love. We long for the work of Christ to be made complete, even as we know it awaits a definitive second coming.

In the meantime, we open our hearts, our lives, and our communities to the continual coming of Jesus. The Christmas carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” says, “How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given; so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.” In that carol, we sing and pray for Jesus to “be born in us today” and are assured that “where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.” We open our hearts, our lives, and our communities so Jesus can show up in us and through us to touch the world with hope and healing, justice and joy, reconciliation and redemption, beauty and love.

In all our comings and goings this holiday season, may we open ourselves so that Christ comes into us and touches the world through us. Blessed Advent. Merry Christmas. – **BISHOP DAVID BARD**, Michigan Area