



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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Special Annual Conference – Letter from Bishop Lewis

January 21, 2022

Dear Virginia Annual Conference:

As followers of Christ our shared calling is to compassion and care for those who have experienced hurt and harm. One of our most sacred and important duties is the protection of children placed in our care. We must help those who are survivors of child sexual abuse and continually strengthen and refine our Safe Sanctuaries and related policies so that we have world-class programs to protect children, youth, and at-risk adults.

The cornerstone of The United Methodist Church's settlement agreement with the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is to provide healing and support to survivors of child sexual abuse. It is important to survivors, and part of the proposed settlement agreement, that United Methodists do the following:

1. Train leaders to meet with and hear the experience and hopes of any survivor who participated in Scouting activities connected with a United Methodist congregation.
2. Review all Safe Sanctuaries/Ministry Safe policies and update as necessary.
3. Develop a series of articles about how to ensure safe youth programming.
4. Participate in a survivors' justice and healing working group formed by survivors who filed claims.

At the special annual conference, the history and steps leading up to the BSA settlement agreement will be explained as well as why it is important for churches in the Virginia Annual Conference to work on the above matters.

In addition to the important non-monetary settlement terms listed above to help survivors and to protect the most vulnerable in the future, the settlement also requires a payment of \$30 million to the Survivor Trust Fund by the UMC conferences in the United States. As announced on January 10, 2022, the Virginia Annual Conference was given a commitment of \$988,456 as part of the \$30 million national United Methodist Church settlement with the BSA. The total value of the BSA settlement is \$2.7 billion.

I am pleased to report that following the unanimous recommendation of the Council on Finance and Administration (CFA), the Conference Board of Trustees on January 20, 2022 overwhelmingly voted to approve the payment and to make the full \$988,456 payment by the end of 2022. I commend CFA and the trustees for their leadership and for doing what is right for both survivors and the church.

CFA also recommends to the Annual Conference that half of the financial commitment be apportioned over a two-year period from 2023-24 and the other half be drawn down from Annual Conference reserves. CFA will use cash from the sale of investments to fund the commitment after the plan is approved by the Bankruptcy Court so that the survivors will have the funds as soon as possible. The average church will see a total charge of \$450 in apportionments over two years, or \$225/year, for funding the Survivors Trust Fund.

Exact figures for each local church's increased apportionment will be posted to the conference website (www.vaumc.org) shortly. I encourage you to also take this amount in account when planning stewardship campaigns.

As a connectional church, all of us within the Virginia Conference have benefited from the outstanding work that more than 200 people, clergy and laity, have done to negotiate this settlement. It helps survivors and enables the church's vital ministries to continue. I am particularly grateful to Bishop John Schol of the New Jersey Conference who led these efforts.

CFA believes, and I strongly concur, that it is important for this connectional approach to now include the modest increase in apportionments to replenish the reserve account. We have a reserve account for unforeseen issues like this and we need to ensure that we continue to maintain the reserve as good stewards.

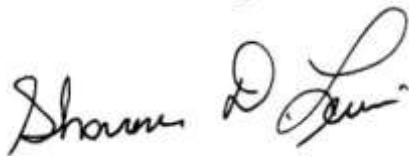
As such a vote will be taken at the special annual conference on January 29 to ask for approval of the special apportionment to replenish the conference reserves for half of the amount of the Virginia Annual Conference commitment to the Survivors Trust Fund. Zoom invitations to this special annual conference will be sent to the lay and clergy members of annual conference soon.

In closing, let me reiterate that it is essential that we undertake the other actions that are important to survivors as discussed above. As Bishop Schol said, "The United Methodist Church does not tolerate sexual abuse of any kind and has consistently worked to keep young people safe."

We must never become complacent regarding child safety. Strengthening our safe sanctuaries policies in 2022 and taking related steps must be part of our Christian walk. Through our connectional approach, we will ensure that we avoid complacency, have world-class programs, and do everything in our power to help child sexual abuse survivors to heal.

Thank you for your prayerful and thoughtful reflection on these matters.

Peace and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sharma D. Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis