



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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Prayer and Fasting for the Healing of the Nation

Dear Virginia Annual Conference,

As I type this letter, I write it with an urgency to call the entire conference to join me and the [Call to Action Work Group for Racial Justice and Reconciliation](#) for a three-day period of “Prayer and Fasting for the Healing of the Nation” from **October 31-November 2, 2020** from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

I encourage everyone to commit to fasting and praying during these three days that we might be more aware of Christ’s presence in our personal lives, the Commonwealth, and the nation. Prayer is essential to sustain our faith and fasting calls us to refocus our attention and listen for God.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

We can no longer pretend and turn a blind eye that our nation is in the midst of trouble. We are witnessing the tension between party lines coupled with our anger that governs our speech. We are fighting two pandemics—COVID-19 and systemic racism—that have taken the lives of individuals and forced us into a world of pain and suffering.

How are we as Christians called to act in this unprecedented time? How are we as Christians called to live out our civic duties? I believe God is calling us to a time for deeper soul searching, reflection, and repentance that leads us to daily prayer and fasting. Our *United Methodist Church Social Principles* state, “we hold governments responsible for the protection of the rights of people to free and fair elections.” I encourage all of you in the Commonwealth to exercise your right to vote as we seek God’s direction for our country.

In the designated twelve-hour period, I encourage you to pray, fast, and spend time with God. You may choose a total, water, partial or juice fast. Please fast only if your

health allows it at this time. If you can't restrict your food or liquid intake abstain from something else – like social media, watching television, fast foods, desserts, etc.

If you have reservations or want more information about fasting, **the attached document describes the significant components in understanding the spiritual discipline of fasting.**

I pray as an annual conference we will experience the power and presence of God in an extraordinary way as we commit ourselves from October 31 to November 2, 2020 to pray for the healing of the nation.

Peace and Blessings,
Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

Join Bishop Lewis and the [Call to Action Work Group for Racial Justice and Reconciliation](#) for

“Prayer and Fasting for the Healing of the Nation”

Fast: October 31- November 2, 2020

8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

What is Fasting?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is taught in the Bible, Jesus expected His followers to fast and He said that God rewards fasting. Fasting, according to the Bible, means to voluntarily reduce or eliminate your intake of food for a specific time and purpose (Warren, 2016).

We live in a toxic environment, and fasting is a mighty cleanser. On the spiritual side, fasting begins to break the stranglehold your hunger may have over your behavior (Colbert, 2004). The Bible talks about this as the flesh warring against the spirit. Fasting is part of crucifying the flesh, which leads to greater self-control and harmony with God’s Spirit. (Colbert, 2004).

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”
(Matthew 6:16-18, NIV)

Why Fast?

1. Fasting gives you more time for prayer. In the Bible fasting is always connected with prayer.

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they

had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:2-3, NIV)

2. Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something.

“Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out the Lord.” (Joel 1:14, NIV)

3. Fasting releases God’s supernatural power. (Warren, 2016)

“God says, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untied the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6, NIV)

Caution: Fast only if your health allows it at this time. I’m encouraging the entire family to fast. If you can’t restrict your food or liquid intake abstain from something else – like social media, watching television, video games, fast foods, desserts, candy, cookies etc.,

References: *Day of Fasting and Prayer* by Rick Warren, 2016

***Fasting Made Easy* by Dr. Don Colbert, 2004**

How Should I Fast?

There are many types of fasts and the option you choose depends upon your health, the desired length of the Virginia Annual Conference fast is three days and your preference: (Colbert, 2004)

1. Total Fasting – means to abstain from food and water
2. A Water Fast – means to abstain from all food and juices; except for water
3. A Partial Fast – means to eliminate certain foods or specific meals

4. A Juice Fast – means to drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times

How to Finish Your Fast in A Healthy Way?

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller at this point, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pasta, potatoes, rice or bread (except for “Melba Toast”). Also avoid, meats, dairy products and any fats or oils. Introduce them slowly in small amounts.

Even a three-day fast requires reasonable precaution. It is wise to start with a little soup, something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes and carrots and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine: start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime (Bright).

**References: *Your Personal Guide to Fasting and Prayer* by Dr. Bill Bright
Fasting Made Easy by Dr. Don Colbert**

As you fast from Oct. 31- Nov. 2, here are some prayerful prompts:

- Quiet your mind and be aware of Christ’s presence in your life. Focus on where you see Christ in our Commonwealth. Where do you see Christ working in and around people in our nation?
- Use one or all of the Scripture verses below (about prayer or fasting) as a way to begin prayer during these three days. Allow yourself to experience these verses in a new way.
- Focus on Ephesians 6:12 where the Apostle Paul reminds us, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”
- Spend time praying for the lives that have been lost to COVID-19 and systemic racism this year.

- Consider: How are we as Christians called to act in this unprecedented time? How are we as Christians called to live out our civic duties?
- God can do more than we dream or imagine. Pray for God’s plan to be unveiled as Americans carry out their civic duty during this time.
- Pray for God’s healing upon on our state, nation, and our world. Ask how you might play a part in that healing.

Scriptural references on prayer:

- “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” (1 John 5:14-15, NIV)
- “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6, NIV)
- “Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16, NIV)
- “Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress, have mercy on me and hear my prayer.” (Psalm 4:1, NIV)
- “Hear my prayer, LORD, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping. I dwell with you as a foreigner, a stranger, as all my ancestors were.” (Psalm 39:12, NIV)

Scriptural references on fasting:

- “Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink.” (Daniel 1:12, NIV)
- “Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” (Joel 2:12, NASB)
- “So we fasted and prayed about these concerns, And he listened.” (Ezra 8:23, MSG)
- “Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant –the Ten Commandments.” (Exodus 34:28, NIV)

- “So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.” (Daniel 9:3, NIV)
- “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.” (Nehemiah 1:4, NIV)
- “For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days and when the time was up he was hungry.” (Luke 4:2, MSG)
- The Time of Fasting and Prayer: “Have you any days of fasting and prayer? Storm the throne of grace persevere therein, and mercy will come down.” (John Wesley)