



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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“Do No Harm”

Dear Virginia Conference,

I remember when I was growing up in Statesboro, Ga., there was a colloquial saying commonly used by kids being bullied. We would say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” A defense against name-calling and bullying, this rhyme also sought to give those being bullied a sense of resiliency and calm.

I think you would agree with me that “words” do hurt if they are used in an inappropriate way. Words do hurt if they are used to label, stigmatize or denigrate a person or culture.

When we use the term “Chinese Virus” to describe the COVID-19 pandemic, it not only creates a culture of xenophobia, but it can also create physical, emotional and economic harm to persons of Asian descent. We are blessed in the Virginia Conference to be in community that embraces our ethnic diversity.

The Apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 12:26, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

Let us be mindful of our conversations, “words,” and expressions during these uncertain times not only toward our brothers and sisters of Asian descent, but of all cultures and ethnicities. The words we speak can build up, encourage or tear down and devastate the people in our lives.

We, as a people of the Christian faith, believe in the God of justice and mercy who always stands firmly on the side of the marginalized and oppressed. During these times of uncertainty let us, as the wonderfully, marvelously and fearfully made people of God, hold fast to our baptism and make evident to the world the freedom that we have to resist evil and oppression in whatever forms it may present itself.

Peace and Blessings,

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis