

# Three Commitments:

A Missional Plan for Congregations and Clergy in the Post-Covid Florida Conference

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*By Bishop Ken Carter & Alice Williams, Lay Leader  
Florida Conference*

**T**his week our nation paused to acknowledge the deaths of over 500,000 known persons to COVID-19, and our state acknowledged the deaths of over 30,000 persons. At the same time we are beginning to see large number of persons vaccinated, especially those most vulnerable to the disease. As winter passes into spring, and as the virus continues to subside, we begin to think about the post-COVID church and what it will mean for us to live into the new normal as Christ's disciples called to bring hope and healing to the world.

We offer the following for your reflection and we ask for your participation in re-launching worship in our churches at the appropriate time. As we consider re-connecting with one another in our churches, as well as re-engaging with our mission to those beyond us, we recognize that we must continue to be faithful in our witness of care for ourselves as well as those around us. For everything there is a time and a season (Ecclesiastes 3), and we support a planned and careful approach to the full reopening. We are also mindful of the broad impact that the pandemic has had on our churches and our congregations. This is likely to mean changes in how and when we worship in the post-pandemic world. Each church will have to ascertain how best to move forward and our Conference is here to assist as our churches engage in their reopening process.

As the appointive cabinet discerns the appointment of clergy to the post-Covid realities of our local churches, ministries, and missions, we invite you to join our Annual Conference in supporting three important commitments we feel are necessary to further our witness in the world. In this moment we are asking God to enable and equip the leaders in each local church, both lay and clergy, to accomplish the mission that God will entrust to us in the months ahead.

The three important commitments for our Annual Conference in this season are:

**1. Establishing Vital and Sustainable Local Churches** that proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, build community, welcome all, exercise good stewardship and feed the hungry. The pandemic has severely impacted some churches which may mean making difficult decisions regarding how best to be stewards of the existing resources and the best course of action in order to further Kingdom building work.

**Scriptural Grounding:** [Luke 4](#); [Isaiah 61](#)

**Wesleyan Tradition:** [John Wesley's sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation"](#)

**Resources:**

- [Alex Shanks, “Why Reopening a Church is Different” \(Lewis Center\)](#)
- [Fill The Table](#)
- [A 31-Day Journey with Jesus: A Community of Love and Forgiveness](#)
- [The Proposed Black Church Academy](#)
- [Florida Fresh Expressions Pioneer Leader Academy](#)

2. Engaging all of us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, to grow the muscles of justice and mercy in order to tackle the unfinished work of **dismantling racism**. This includes both personal and corporate work to strengthen connectional practices that support an anti-racist church on the way to holiness.

**Scriptural Grounding:** [Amos 5](#); [Micah 6](#)

**Wesleyan Tradition:** [John Wesley’s Pamphlet, “Thoughts Upon Slavery”](#)

**Resources:**

- [Bishop Gregory Palmer’s Presentation on Antiracism to the Fall, 2020 Conference Table](#)
- [The Florida Conference Antiracism Survey](#)
- [The Statement of the Florida Conference Appointive Cabinet in Response to January 6](#)
- [Bishop Ken Carter’s Facebook Live Reflection regarding January 6](#)
- [Ismael Ruiz-Millan, “The Journey to Cultural Humility”, Divinity, Fall 2019, page 24](#)

3. Increased support for the **well-being and resilience of our clergy**, who have been at the center of denominational and national political divisions, and who have been in a prolonged season of adaptation due to the pandemic. Many have had to monitor not only their own health and the health of their congregations. They have learned new technical skills and engaged in new forms of worship and pastoral care, while having to socially distance from the communities they have led and grown to love as shepherds. Our clergy have willingly and gracefully reinvented their roles in ways few would have ever imagined, and this has taken a physical and emotional toll on them just as it has on so many of us.

**Scriptural Grounding:** [John 10](#); [Psalm 23](#)

**Wesleyan Tradition:** [Dr. James Hildreth, Meharry Medical College and Dr. Randy Maddox, Duke Divinity School, Coronavirus at the Crossroads of Faith and Science”, GBHEM YouTube Channel](#)

**Resources:**

- [Grants through the Clergy Care Initiative](#)
- [Bishop Ken Carter’s Presentation on “Surviving a Lenten Pandemic”: Eleven Lessons on March 1, 2021](#)
- [Shade and Fresh Water](#)
- [Bishop Janice Huie’s Presentation on Reservoirs of Resilience to the Winter, 2021 Conference Table](#)
- [Dr. Frederick Southwick’s Presentation](#)

We encourage reflection and discussion of these three commitments in local churches, staff-parish relationships committees, Sunday school classes and small groups, covenant groups, and district committees between March 1, 2021 and [Annual Conference, 2021](#). The United Methodist Church anticipates a special session of the [General Conference in May, 2021 and an in-person General Conference in August, 2022](#). We offer prayers for our delegation, and in this interim time we focus on “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” ([The Book of Discipline](#) ¶120; [Matthew 22, 28](#)). Our hope is that each congregation will consider innovative and creative approaches to help support each of these initiatives.



**The Florida Conference**  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH