



## Together in Christ

A letter from Bishop Johnson

January 1, 2023

### Give Me That Book

I greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. With the beginning of this new calendar year, I have become the interim bishop of the New England Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

I count it a high honor and privilege to minister among you as a servant of the church. It is my prayer that we, as the Body of Christ, can continue to live in such a way that people will experience the grace of Jesus through our words and deeds in the months to come.

I give thanks to God for my colleague, Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, who has served this annual conference with distinction and excellence for the past 10 years. His wisdom and love for God and for all people has set the Conference on a track for future growth and mission. He and his wife, Prema, have gone out of their way to assist me and my spouse, Mary, during this time of transition. I will be forever grateful for their friendship and care. I also thank the Episcopacy Committee and Conference staff for their faithful ministry on my behalf during this quick turn-around of bishops.

As I begin my ministry here, I would like to encourage all of us to study the Word of God as a priority. The founder of the Methodist movement John Wesley wrote in his *Preface to Standard Sermons*, "O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me."

Indeed, the study of Scripture is the fundamental ordinance of God that is "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and training in righteousness, that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." (II Timothy 3;16-17 NRSV Updated Edition).

Siblings in Christ, may we commit ourselves anew to the study of Scripture in private, at our churches, and wherever we teach it out in the world. I encourage you to consider reading the entire Bible in 2023 so that you can take in the full sweep of the whole of Scripture. Commit to Bible study every day as it is manna for the soul.



Often in the rush of our busy lives, we become spiritually malnourished, and our effectiveness suffers. Scripture speaks to our hearts in real-time as it is a living Word.

I want to testify to you that my calling to offer my name for interim episcopal service was a direct result of hearing a sermon preached on a passage from Luke 14 last September. The Holy Spirit speaks through the Word now as it has through the ages. We need to look no further for guidance in facing life's complexities.

I also encourage you to read and study the Bible this year using a different translation than you are accustomed. Recently the *New Revised Standard Version* has been updated. According to Zondervan Publishing, "It gives English Bible readers access to the most meticulously researched, rigorously reviewed and faithfully accurate translation on the market."

I have found many Scripture passages in this new edition to be more understandable. This includes a clarification about the Greek word used in I Corinthians 6:9 that had previously been translated as "homosexual."

But what about voices of cultural diversity among us? [\*The First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament\*](#) (InterVarsity Press) brings a unique linguistic understanding of the life and teachings of Jesus and the early church's ministry as seen through the eyes and hearts of Native American people. It is now in its second edition.

Another way to study Scripture is by watching it — on video in American Sign Language (ASLV Bible at [deafmissions.org](http://deafmissions.org)). In these videos, it is rendered in the visual language of the culturally Deaf community without voice. People who don't know sign language can follow along with a printed Bible and experience Scripture in a new, inspiring way.

How about singing the Scripture? [\*A Metrical Psalter: The Book of Psalms Set to Meter for Singing\*](#) by Julie and Timothy Tennent is another way of bringing God's Word to life.

Hearing the voices of diversity through the study of Scripture is fundamental to our spiritual growth and the justice ministry that we are called to bring forth from our faith communities.

May 2023 be a blessed year for you and your churches. Let us delve deeply into the streams of Living Water that come from the Word of God and be quick to obey and swift to give testimony to its power.

# Together in Christ

A letter from Bishop Devadhar

December 31, 2022



Beloved In Christ:

Prema joins me in greeting all of you in the precious and matchless name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As I write my last “Together In Christ” letter as Resident Bishop of the New England Annual Conference, also known as the Boston Episcopal Area, I thank our Creator God in and through the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, using the words of the Psalmist, who said, “Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.” (Psalm 115:1, NIV).

The following are words I shared with the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church, immediately after my election as bishop in 2004.

“Dear Bishops, sisters and brothers in Christ, I can only say praise be to God in the name of Jesus Christ. I stand here before you today because people along the journey lifted me up. My Bishops, my District Superintendents, colleague pastors, and laity in the conference, my brothers and sisters in the North Central New York Conference, Western New York Conference, colleagues in the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists, all of you have lifted me up. As I have said before, like Mother Teresa, I don't want to promise you that I will be successful, but I will be faithful, and I will try my level best to do that and please pray for me and for my wife and daughter.”

Friends, as I enter retirement in just a few hours, my words are the same today as they were then, quoting now Saint Teresa, "God does not call us to be successful, but God calls us to be faithful!" I hope and pray that you have found me to be a faithful follower of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, a leader of the New England Annual Conference, and a faithful bishop of The United Methodist Church for approximately the last eighteen and a half years.

So I stand today, affirming the words of the Psalmist, praising our Creator God in and through the precious and matchless name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for God's “love and faithfulness.”

Every day throughout my episcopal journey, I have experienced God's grace, love, and faithfulness in unimaginable ways; and though it is impossible to list all of them, let me highlight a few of them:

- The moving installation services, at Princeton University Chapel as I began my episcopacy in the Greater New Jersey Area and at Wesley United Methodist Church in Worcester when I arrived here in New England, are forever in my memory as are the touching farewell/retirement celebrations hosted by the Greater New Jersey and New England annual conferences.

- I felt and celebrated the genuine love of faith leaders from Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, Muslim, and other faiths, including community leaders, as I visited my hometown of Mulki, India, in January 2005 for the first time after my election to the episcopacy. They offered a warm welcome to me and those who traveled with me on the Northeastern Jurisdictional Mission of Peace. I was regaled with garlands, affirming my election to the episcopacy in The United Methodist Church. My election was indeed an honor to people of all faiths in my hometown.
- I will never forget my pilgrimages to Taizé from 2005 with Greater New Jersey Conference youth and young adults to this past summer's pilgrimage with New England. More than 500 young people and leaders have journeyed with me to this sacred place during my ministry, many of whom heard a call to ministry and started new ministries! Pilgrimages to Taizé have always been a heartwarming experience.
- Many clergy and laity joined our new ordinands, commissioners, and local pastors who had completed their course of study on pilgrimages to the Holy Land. One of the highlights of these pilgrimages was the opportunity to dialogue and break bread with Palestinians in their homes. I was energized by the ministries of Hope School – including the new ministries started there through the generous contributions from saints of the New England Annual Conference – and of Bethlehem Bible College.
- God was faithful when many of us traveled to Korea to understand the culture and passionate prayer life of the Korean churches through the hospitality ministry of Bupyeong Korean Methodist Church as well as the new partnership developed with the Samnam Annual Conference of the Korean Methodist Church. We recruited new leaders, clergy and lay, and extended the Table to people of all backgrounds to ensure there is a place for everyone – not just a select few – at God's Table.
- Here in New England, we were able to break the silos in leadership, particularly during COVID, thus adding more seats at the leadership table. We created a strong personnel committee, which made significant changes to personnel policies that support equity and fairness. Additionally, these changes, and others made by the Committee on Finance and Administration, Board of Trustees, and Board of Pensions enabled our Annual Conference to reduce the budget significantly even with the addition of more staff. The Conference finances are in a healthier place, thanks be to God. All of these things happened only because of God's grace and the amazing leaders of our conference boards, agencies, commissions, committees, Preachers' Aid Society, United Methodist Foundation of New England, camping and retreat ministries, and countless volunteers, clergy and laity alike, at various levels.
- I give thanks to God for all the Episcopal Office, District and Conference staff, resource team members, and consultants who helped and supported me throughout my episcopal journey.
- Our prayer ministry grew on March 22, 2020, with COVID gearing up. Prayers were written by clergy and laity throughout the Conference and beyond, including faculty, staff, and students of three United Methodist seminaries in the Northeast. These prayers touched the lives of countless people at a most difficult time. I am happy this ministry will continue under the leadership of Bishop Peggy A. Johnson.

- I always recognize and celebrate the episcopal leaders who served before me both in the New Jersey and Boston episcopal areas for their faithfulness, gifts, and graces. It has been a blessing to support and build upon the ministries initiated by my colleague bishops.
- I am grateful to Bishop Violet Fisher who guided me to understand more fully what a missional appointment truly means. Her example was a gift to me. As a result, guided by the Holy Spirit, together the New England Conference Cabinet and all those who have served on it during my episcopal tenure made appointments prayerfully and missionally, seeking grace and justice in appointing our colleagues who may have been underrepresented in the past due to race or gender, and holding the care, confidentiality, and ministry of all the clergy and laity in the Conference in sacred trust. My appreciation and thanks to Cabinet members, past and present, cannot be expressed in words.
- I am thankful for the Greater New Jersey Cabinet, who, upon the conclusion of my time in that conference, paid tribute to me with a humorous and grace-filled “[missional letter](#)” – a generous way to send me off.
- Most recently, I was blessed to receive a “[singing missional letter](#)” by the New England Cabinet in a hilarious rendition of “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” accompanied by Bishop Johnson on the piano. [Watch a video of the New England Cabinet choir singing their letter](#) to me at the final day of our Cabinet retreat earlier this month.

For all the above, and the many others that are not listed, will you kindly join me in thanking God using the words of Dag Hammarskjöld, “For all that has been, thanks. For all that is to come, yes.”

Beloved in Christ, as I conclude my episcopal ministry with you, Prema and I say, “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!” for all your help, love, support, and care through the years.

The Greater New Jersey Conference graced me with a departing gift to enable me to continue my passion for Taizé ministry. That gift, now with added interest, has been used to establish The Bishop Devadhar Fund for Taizé at the United Methodist Foundation of New England with the support of our Committee on Finance and Administration.

Prema and I are also grateful to all those who donated and/or purchased jewelry for the Annual Conference jewelry sale that also supports youth and young adult missions and ministries.

The New England Conference blessed me with a retirement gift that will continue to support the Clergy Respite Fund. I am grateful that this much-needed fund for our clergy is growing. To each and every one who has donated to these funds, thank you! thank you! thank you! [Click here if you would like to contribute.](#)

Also, we have been overwhelmed with notes, cards, gifts, emails and texts for which we are so grateful and thankful. As my Cabinet has often heard, “I love New England!”

To my amazing family – Prema, Trina, Gage, and our grandchildren Nyla, Laili, and Miana Hemmelgarn – thank you for supporting me and standing by me all these years, through my ups and downs, my celebrations and sorrows, and my successes and failures. I love you all deeply and look forward to more family time.

It is with great delight and pleasure that I hand over the baton to my successor, Bishop Johnson, to continue the extension of God's reign here in New England and beyond. As she leads you in moving our Conference forward to blossom for the glory of God, I know that you will be enriched by her leadership and many gifts and that she and her family will be blessed by you.

I know the prophetic work the Vision Forward Team, inspired by the excellent foundation laid by the Strategic Planning Team and Open Spirit Task Force and supported enthusiastically by all of you, will continue to bear great fruit in extending the Reign of God in New England and beyond.

May we recommit and rededicate ourselves for the ministry and mission of God as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, using the Wesley Covenant prayer:

I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things  
to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

Angels of God, who have supported us throughout my episcopal journey, we offer a big *namaste*, meaning, "I greet the divinity in you." Sending a big holy hug to each and every one of you. Kindly continue to hold us in your prayers as we will you.

Prema and my entire family join me in wishing you a happy and blessed New Year!

In Christ's love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Suda", written over a horizontal line.

Bishop Suda

## Special Prayers for these Wesley Family, Friends, and Others...

David O'Driscoll, with a foot ulcer and leg infection. Paige, Allison Hansen's sister.  
Alice & Joseph Boateng, Anne Burrows, Barbara Fletcher, Cheryl Johnson (Phil Johnson's wife),  
Charles & Samira Kiefer, Bill Kilmer, Kris (daughter of Lorraine Kronberg), Dorothy Norcross,  
David Samanen, Alicia Simoneau, Donald Tremblay; Barbara, Frank and the Vietze Family;  
Bill Wong, Laura Zoldak, Margie (Linda Keister's sister), Malika Gujarati (family of Jim & Judy Hoffman),  
Emily (Donroy Ferdinand's cousin), Marilyn (friend of Margaret Watson),  
Ralph (friend of Dorothy Adams).  
Those who struggle with depression, anxiety, and alcoholism.

## Tower & Rose Window Lightings & Altar Flowers

**The Rose Window lighting** for January is given in loving memory of Mrs. William B. Smith by the United Methodist Women.

**The Tower lighting** for January is given in loving memory of my mother and father, Mary & Norman Fletcher and my brother, David Fletcher, by Barbara Fletcher.

**Altar flowers** If you'd like to place flowers on the altar on a particular Sunday, please fill your name in on the day, then take an order form and submit it to Debi in the office with a check.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**The Church will be closed** on Monday, January 16<sup>th</sup> in honor of Martin Luther King Day.

**Herald:** The next Herald will be sent out on February 1<sup>st</sup>. Please send your article(s) to me no later than Friday, January 27<sup>th</sup>. Thank you.

### Community Suppers have a New Coordinator

Maria Gorsuch-Kennedy has agreed to be in charge of community suppers starting in January. She has led several suppers, assisted always by her family and usually by her scout troop also.

Thank you, Maria! If your group or family would like to sign up for a month to lead a community supper, speak to Maria (or I could give her a message). Suppers are held on the last Saturday of each month.

The January 28<sup>th</sup> supper will be prepared and served by the United Women of Faith (formerly UMW).

*Betsy Pennino*

### Wesley Centennial Calendar

We will continue to display and sell the 2023 Wesley Centennial Calendar after church services on the first three Sundays in January. They will be available in Brewer Hall and will also be available for the Annual UWF Meeting on January 15. If you live locally and cannot attend the church services, we can take calendars to your home. If you would like to have a calendar delivered, please contact Margaret Watson at [margjkw@outlook.com](mailto:margjkw@outlook.com) or 508-414-2430.

The calendars are \$20. each. Checks should be made out to: Wesley UMW

Best wishes for the New Year!

*Margaret Watson*

### **UWF Annual Meeting/Lunch Sunday, January 15**

All women of Wesley are invited to the United Women in Faith annual meeting in Brewer Hall on Sunday, January 15<sup>th</sup> after church. Thanks to Linda D'Acri, we will have a delicious soup lunch before our meeting. We will be reviewing the past year, honoring those who passed and discussing ideas for a new year.

To prepare the annual report, would all officers and circle leaders please submit their reports by email to Allison Hansen at [ACHis4788@aol.com](mailto:ACHis4788@aol.com) by **January 2**.

Thank you!

*Allison Hansen and Barbara Ingrassia, co-presidents*

### **Prevent Homelessness with Gift Cards**

It's a simple idea with community-wide impact -- buy gift cards for your groceries or other shopping and help Worcester-area families stay in their homes!

Working with the Central Mass. Housing Alliance, Wesley offers gift cards for sale each Sunday. A portion (anywhere from 2 to 10 percent) of the face value goes into a fund that helps families who are facing eviction. One rent check or utility bill payment from this fund can keep a family together in their home, rather than the upheaval of living in a shelter or on the street.

Available in a variety of denominations, grocery gift cards are on sale from Shaw's, Stop & Shop and Big Y. Cards are also for sale from CVS, Target, Dunkin' Donuts, Starbucks, Panera, TJ Maxx/Marshalls/Home Goods and Amazon.

Look for the display near the stage in Brewer Hall after church! Volunteers are always welcome -- pick a Sunday that suits your schedule.

Advance orders may be made via email to Allison Hansen at [ACHis4788@aol.com](mailto:ACHis4788@aol.com). January orders are due by the end of day January 17 for distribution Sunday, January 22.

### **Volunteering for Wesley's IHN Week-- Sunday, January 29 to Saturday, February 4**

Please let Betsy Pennino know if you are able to provide coverage for the evening shift (5:30 to 8:30 pm) or the overnight (8:30 pm to 6:30 am) during Wesley's week at IHN. (Her contact info is in the online directory.) If you would like an explanation of how to do either shift, please tell Betsy.

On the Monday of Wesley's October week at IHN, all of their staff and families were tested for Covid. Members of 3 families tested positive and the director notified me immediately. I quickly emailed our members who were volunteering and asked if they wanted to cancel. Currently volunteers may choose to stay in the IHN office or interact with the families. Volunteers no longer provide dinners but are encouraged to bring food to prepare their own.

The Mission Committee will give IHN Hope for Housing cards to pay for food and housing staples during Wesley's January 29 to February 4 week. Your donating Big Y cards would save money to give to another mission.



## Help Us Celebrate Dave Samanen's Birthday!

As some of you may know, Dad's 80th birthday is coming up on January 10th! He's been at Hancock Hall nursing home in Connecticut dealing with Lewy Body Dementia in 2017, and thus a party is basically out of the question, so instead I'd like to bring the party to him!

I'll be making a video birthday greeting, and you can all join in!!!

All you have to do is video yourself or someone you love saying happy birthday to Dad, and whatever else you want to say or do! You can email it ([samanen@inreach.com](mailto:samanen@inreach.com)), text it to me (818-383-1507).

For those who haven't seen or spoken to him recently, he's mostly still there mentally, he will almost certainly recognize you, and Jeff will turn the volume up loud for when he shows it to him. I'll edit all the videos together and throw the finished product up on YouTube, then Jeff can show it to Dad on his birthday.

The deadline for video's was Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, but you can send them in by Monday, January 9<sup>th</sup>.

Thanks in advance for taking the time, I know this will mean EVERYTHING to him!

*Steve Samanen*

## ***Birthday Cards...***

If you'd rather send a birthday card to Dave, you can send it to Dave Samanen, Hancock Hall Nursing Home, 31 Staples Street, Danbury, CT 06810.

*Carol Samanen*

## God Moments

If you could share a story of seeing God's work in your life, please tell me or email it to me. The story can be anonymous or signed, and all are invited to participate. Betsy ([betspenn35@hotmail.com](mailto:betspenn35@hotmail.com))



## A God Moment by Debi Reynolds

As I was getting ready for my latest vacation, an international cruise, I was asked for my license at the bank on Saturday. I was in complete horror when I noticed my license was not in my wallet. She let me process my request, by asking lots of questions, and then off I went in search of my license. I retraced my steps to every single place I had been that morning. On my way home to look I called my mother and was about to cry telling her I can't find my license. I asked her, 'who do you pray to when you need to find something?' She told me and I said my prayers. When I got home, I searched everywhere! High and low, looked in the same places 3 times, maybe more!

At this time, I decided to go to church because that's the only other place I had been. Again, I searched everywhere! Every folder I made the last few days, between papers I touched or filed, in the kitchen... absolutely everywhere! I was so sick to my stomach that I couldn't find my license. I needed it to travel! I was heading out to leave and as I walked by the counter in the sewing room, I found a debit card. I spoke with Allison and Barbara for a minute in the kitchen while they were preparing the Community Dinner, then went and dropped the card off in Matt's office. As I was about to leave again, I walked through the kitchen yet again and Judy Hoffman had just come in and said, "fancy seeing you here."

As my stomach turned in knots, my reply was “I can’t find my license.” She said to me, “I have a copy of it.” I shook my head and thought to myself, ‘What good will a copy do?’, and replied to her ‘What?’, and she said again, ‘I have a copy of it, for the Cori check.’ And just then the lights came on! I remembered taking it out to make a copy of it for SPRC for my Cori check. I ran to the office and there it was sitting on my printer in my office! I happily heading out, through the kitchen, thanking Judy ever so much for coming in! and I said to her, “This is a God Moment!”

I was not going to come to work to look for it because I honestly believed I had it with me on Thursday and Friday! But, as I was in complete despair at home, my gut told me to go to work to look! Had I not come to work, and had I not found that debit card and stopped to talk to Allison and Barbara, I would have left earlier and missed Judy coming in. And I probably would not have remembered taking it out to make a copy of it.

I firmly believe in the power of prayer and that God directs us to where we need to be.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In the worship life of our congregation we have just completed our celebration of the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle, one of the two main seasons of the liturgical year. Historically in the early church Epiphany was, along with Easter and Pentecost, one of the major festivals of the church. Although the celebration of Christmas has become much more prominent in the Western church than the observance of Epiphany, the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw Protestant denominations recovering some of the meaning and traditions of Epiphany.


Epiphany, meaning manifestation, in its broadest sense is a celebration of the incarnation and the many ways that God reveals Godself to the world through Jesus Christ. The celebration of Epiphany in the Western Church has traditionally emphasized the story of the arrival of the Wise Men bearing gifts for the Christ child. In contrast in the Eastern Church Epiphany originally celebrated two things—all aspects of the birth of Christ (including the visit of the Magi) and the baptism of Jesus. When the Western Church, which celebrated the birth of Jesus on December 25<sup>th</sup>, began to observe a feast of the Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup> (now most commonly commemorated on the Sunday prior to January 6<sup>th</sup>), it did not adopt the Eastern commemoration of the baptism. Instead, it separated a part of the Christmas story—the visit of the Magi—to celebrate on that date.

More recently the Western Church has become increasingly aware of the larger themes of Epiphany, and the lectionary readings over the three year cycle include the themes of Christ as light, his advent into the world, his baptism in the Jordan (now usually commemorated on the Sunday following January 6<sup>th</sup>), and the first miracle of turning water into wine. In the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle we experience hope, peace, joy, and love, and move from darkness to ever increasing light. Christ is the Light of the World, a gift given for all the people of the world. As we now move forward from our celebration of Christmas and Epiphany, we are called to carry Christ’s light to the world.


*Submitted by,  
Deborah O’Driscoll*

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Pastor	Rev. Byungmoo Lee	Wesley Tech Team	Mark Muncey
Organist & Choir Director	William Ness	Church Council	Brent Drajesk
Chancel Choir Director	David Potts	Board of Trustees	Gary Robinson
Ghanaian Choirmaster	Desmond Cheetham	Carty Cupboard Food Pantry	Nancy Spencer
Director of Children's Ministries	Cordelia Ferdinand	Communion Stewards	Linda D'Acri
Music Assistant	Deborah O'Driscoll	Finance & Stewardship Co-Chairs	William Wong
Church Business Administrator	Matt Crane	Financial Secretary	Peter Hansen
Church Secretary	Debi Reynolds	Ghanaian Association	Earl Flagg
Building Superintendent	Tim Murphy	Hospitality Chair	Paul Hayfron
Assistant Building Superintendent	Phil Johnson	Medical Ministry	Linda D'Acri
& Sunday Security		Mission Coordinator	Ron Ramsay
Custodians	April Dylewicz	Staff-Parish Relations Co-Chairs	Betsy Pennino
	Tom Friend	Youth Bible Study	Chris Flagg
	Gerard Piscitelli	United Methodist Women Co-Chairs	Judy Hoffman
Head Usher	David Dagle		Joseph Fletcher
			Barbara Ingrassia
			Allison Hansen