**Bishop David Bard,**

**We, the undersigned Deacons, Elders, and Local Pastors of the Michigan Conference, are called in this moment in the life of The United Methodist Church to offer you this open pastoral letter.**

You have shared publicly that you find it difficult living under the Traditional Plan. Thank you for that clarity. It has allowed us to arrive at the same conclusion. We believe your heart is with us. Know our hearts are with you. We stand with you as our Resident Bishop.

We join you in acknowledging that the special General Conference inflicted deep harm on our LBGTQIA colleagues, church members, friends and family. Many of us have spent hours offering pastoral care to those harmed. Struggling to convince our members to continue to tithe or at the very least to stay. Saying broken hearted farewells to those who cannot.

Heeding your call for us to keep a holy Lent, we lift up these Lenten laments and confessions:

We confess the ways our silence, privilege, and concern for the preservation of the institutional church has harmed LBGTQIA people, excluding them from the life of the Michigan Conference for too long.

We confess this is part of a long history of harm. We have and continue to struggle against racism and sexism in the life our church, and we continue to find need to broaden the conversation to include these systemic sins that still plague our connection.

We lament the current state of The United Methodist Church. We confess the institutional church was unable to move us forward. It is stuck.

We lament the narrowly passed, overtly punitive, and constitutionally suspect petitions in search of a legislative win. The General Conference, as an institution, is broken.

We lament the marginalization of the Council of Bishops as an institution. Its leadership and recommendations were disregarded at the Special General Conference.

Over the past two weeks, we have made space and taken time to listen to the members of our congregations and ministry settings. They have told us they no longer recognize their Church. They are wondering how they can, with any integrity, share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and invite people, especially young people, into the life of their congregation or ministry setting. Our members are calling for action. They are saying, “Enough!” “The harm is too much.”  “It is time to decide who we are and where we stand.”

These words convict us.

We, therefore, refuse to accept the United Methodist stance that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm the rich diversity of sexual orientations and gender expression as part of God’s good creation. No one group of people are inherently more sinful than another. All people are ensnared in sin and need God’s prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.

We can no longer abide by the restrictions the Book of Discipline has placed on inclusion of LBGTQIA people in the full life of the UMC.

We will take our authority as clergy to perform marriages per our consciences for our congregants and our communities, whosoever they are.

We call upon our District Committees on Ordained Ministry and the Michigan Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry to recommended qualified candidates for ministry, whosoever they are.

We affirm your authority as a Bishop, to consecrate, commission, and ordain all qualified and elected candidates for ministry — Bishops, Deacons, Elders, Local Pastors, Mission Personnel — whosoever they are.

Out of the ashes of the Special General Conference we sense the Holy Spirit moving. A new day is dawning – in our local communities, not in legislative maneuvering. We commit to following the Spirit’s lead. We invite you to join us.

We stand ready to chart a way forward for United Methodism – in Michigan and around the connection.  Now is the moment to unite in confessing the harm we have done and continue to do to our LBGTQIA siblings; covenanting to faithfully keep our baptismal vow to follow Jesus Christ in resisting “evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves;” and boldly sharing the good news of God’s abundant grace.

In Christ,