Message for Annual Celebration

September 11, 2022

Scripture: 1Peter 3: 8-12

Hymn: The Summons

Title: It’s a New Day—Embrace It!

When I took this office January 1, 2022, not only was I wondering what I had **really** signed up for and how many missteps I would be given grace and maybe forgiveness for **BUT** did the old adage hold true, you can plead ignorance for only so long!

My term began New Year’s Day 2022 and maybe January 2nd or 3rd, a message came in an email that a change in our organization’s name was in the offing! A change in our name! I couldn’t guess what that meant! I was sworn to secrecy by my National liaison and could not even tell my best friend! That was hard!!

Of course, many rumors were floating around early on, and I had to essentially deny them so when March 3 arrived, I was excited and terribly relieved that I was not the only one who had to explain and buy into a major change! **All** of you had to do the same!

Believe me, I bought into the change, I can’t explain it, except that God’s grace and mercy are bountiful. I **did** have to rehearse the new name and I kept it on a note pad within eyesight so I could state it clearly—United Women in Faith—it did not roll off my tongue effortlessly.

Our conference plans were off and running. We were planning to go to Assembly in Orlando, Florida in May. That experience at Assembly in Orlando was refreshing and encouraging. The two recent issues of ***response*** magazines, July/August and September/October have valuable information and beautiful pictures taken at Assembly 2022. I highly recommend reading these articles and getting acquainted with some new leadership and innovative ideas in United Women in Faith. Let’s TURN IT UP!

We met together at Lake Junaluska for Spiritual Growth Retreat in June, followed by Annual Conference at Lake Junaluska!

Out of all those in person events after over 2 years of only virtual---- reality hit! We were still recovering from a vicious pandemic called COVID 19 plus varients. Even after careful steps were taken for United Women in Faith events to ensure that each participant was fully vaccinated, agreed to stay masked while inside and keep a safe distance from one another, there were cases of Covid reported from Assembly, from Spiritual Growth Retreat, and Annual Conference. We had to make the hard decision to not meet in person at Pfeiffer for Mission u but to go virtual again! We had to trust one another so as a group we would make the wise and prudent decisions.

In the scripture I have chosen to lift up, Peter points out the marks of Christian life.

We must show unity in that we truly love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Our love is not because of how good we are but because God loves all without reservation.

This phrase comes to mind, “Always love everyone. Is it hard? Sometimes. Is it necessary? ALWAYS!” Gossip will hurt and even destroy our sisters and brothers. Cross words and lack of respect can injure even the strongest of hearts. Humble ourselves and know that we will not be perfect.

A dear friend of mine gave me this scripture when I was struggling with doubts that I could live up to my commitments. Colossians 3: 23-24, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord, as a reward. It is the Lord Christ that you are serving.” What a sweet reminder that we do not have to go it alone!

What have I learned in this first 9 months as president of this wonderful outstanding conference? I found myself on many advisory boards that I had only known by name. The highlight of my tenure so far is finding out how much extremely important work is being done for women, children and youth in our national institutions.

Alliance Center for Education formerly known as Bethlehem Center/Charlotte has progressed with innovative program structure and great teachers. As a retired preschool and elementary teacher, I marvel at the positive impact on the area served while meeting the challenges of adequate funding and coming out of a pandemic! I was recently asked to share with a new board member about United Women in Faith and I am ready, willing and able to do that.

Our own Pfeiffer University has had tremendous challenges and changes even before the pandemic. The leadership has changed, bringing fresh new ideas to make this very special place in a tiny town named Misenhimer come alive with God’s love and possibilities.

I have been involved with Brooks- Howell Home for many years. This national institution has come through a storm of uncertainty and pain with a positive focus on making this special place just 1 mile from downtown Asheville vibrant and welcoming. We want to support and cheer on our population who live in this blessed community.

What can each one of us do to bring joy and meaning to this new day and truly embrace it?

Reset: Are we willing to change what we have done before? Do you hear “Well, we’ve always done it this way! Obviously, we need to change our hearts and minds because doing it this way is not working.

Remember the women and men who were faced with challenges and met those challenges—remember particular ones in your life. I began my United Methodist Church journey as an Evangelical United Brethren. My mother took me to guild meetings when I was a few weeks old. She always challenged me to stand up for what I felt was the right thing to do and perhaps not the most popular because that is how she lived her life.

Dot Weaver, a dedicated United Methodist Women’s member saw something in me and encouraged me to become involved in the Asheville District, now known as the Blue Ridge District.

Who helped you reset? Who do you want to help reset?

We have reached a time in our organization when we **must** be more inclusive, more open to people who share our faith and not necessarily our United Methodist Church name. We do not want to be a noisy clanging bell but a sweetly ringing chime.

Relationships: When we stop and talk to someone, do we give them our full attention? Are our answers to their questions thoughtful and kind? The relationships we have encourage our fellow United Women in Faith members. Those relationships are crucial at the local, district, conference and yes, the National level.

I am humbled at the other conference president’s comments about Western North Carolina Conference. During the pandemic when we had to communicate virtually, we were models for other conferences. Even before the shut down, I was asked to share training documents with another conference. And our giving is noted all over the country. Those relationships are vital to the health of this great organization as members of United Women in Faith.

I have helped find a sister United Women in Faith circle in Kentucky for a circle in Asheville. These Kentucky women will receive a generous donation to be spent any way that is needed for flood victims in those devastating and deadly floods. When I talked to a member of this sister circle in Kentucky—she said they had suffered tremendous damage to their church but kept reaching out to the community as the donations poured in and the repairs took place. Their sanctuary was filled with supplies and a congregation filled with love for all.

We have expanded our outreach to other women who share our passion for mission. We leave no one behind in planning, educating, encouraging—we seek the younger generation women for their fresh ideas and energy, the middle generation women who have had education and experience and the seasoned generation who bring wisdom. Healthy relationships are vital to any organization.

Embrace! Are you ready to embrace our new day? Are you ready to do things differently than we have always done before? Are you willing to take a chance on being more open, more inclusive, more like Jesus—no matter the cost?

The hymn that we will sing “The Summons” brings this all to an understanding of what we are asking of God and ourselves.

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same? Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known, will you let my life be grown in me and me in you?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name? Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same? Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare? Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name? Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same? Will you kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the “you” you hide if I but call your name? Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same? Will you use the faith you’ve found to reshape the world around, through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name. Let me turn and follow you and never be the same. In your company I’ll go where your love and footsteps show. Thus I’ll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

Amy, please lead us in singing this hymn. And in our hearts are we willing to follow Jesus no matter where he leads us?

May it be so!