



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Baltimore-Washington Conference

ANNAPOLIS DISTRICT

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I am deeply saddened by this week's vandalism at Faith UMC in Rockville. I know that the message spray-painted on the front doors of the sanctuary has caused concern, fear and trauma not only for the congregation, but also for those in the community.

I am further frustrated that this incident is one in a series of recent attacks against Faith UMC. This kind of incident is certainly a challenge for law enforcement, but I am grateful for the efforts they are putting into identifying the persons responsible. I trust they will keep our neighborhoods free from ongoing acts of vandalism and hate. The safety of our communities requires all of us to be vigilant and to work together. The generosity and good will of the neighbors who live around Faith UMC is a testament to the power of community. They are to be commended. We look forward to working closely with our elected leaders and first responders to bring an end to this vandalism and to cultivate communities of safety where all persons are protected.

While the incidents at Faith UMC over the past year have appeared to target the church due to their proactive welcome of the LGBTQIA community, these hate-motivated actions indeed target the very fabric of the community in ways that impact all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is important that church and local leaders provide all necessary support to assure that the Rockville community is a safe and hospitable community for those who are marginalized and indeed all persons.

The United Methodist Church affirms, "that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God." Our denomination's General Conference has removed *all* restrictions on the UMC's ministry to and with LGBTQIA persons. This is a small step in a long struggle to be the church we believe God calls us to be—one in which the sacred worth of all people is embodied in all of the ways we share life together. Our neighborhoods and communities ought to provide the same.

Our Christian scriptures repeatedly remind us that our God is a God of love, and that we are called to embody that love in all that we do. I am grateful for Rev. Norvell and the Faith UMC congregation's persistent commitment to love and welcome all of God's people, and I join with them in prayer for the safety of their church and community, and for the resolution and end of these repeated incidents. May God's peace, love and grace cover the congregation and community as they work together to embody God's love even in the midst of the attempts by some to sow seeds of hate and division.

Grace and Peace.

Rev. Sarah A. Schlieckert
District Superintendent
Annapolis & Greater Washington Districts

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TO MAKE AND ENGAGE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD.