

Bridge Churches

Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9, NRSV)

The Virginia Annual Conference knows that for those whose churches are disaffiliating, this can be an unsettling time if they wish to remain United Methodist. They may be angry, confused, or uncertain about what to do next.

As Joshua led the Israelites out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land, they too, were uncertain and afraid, yet God promised to remain with them. Churches in the conference are seeking to come alongside those left behind by disaffiliation, to serve as a bridge to support them as they discern what God has in store for them.

Mechanicsville United Methodist Church is a Bridge Church. These Bridge Churches are United Methodist faith communities which are confident they will remain United Methodist. Bridge Churches will provide pastoral support, nurture, and opportunities for connection during this time of grief and transition, always in response to each individual's needs, timing, and sense of God's call. These congregations bring no expectation of church membership; rather they offer support based on the needs of each person and community. Such support may include:

1. Individual pastoral care by laity and clergy from the Bridge Church;
2. Physical space for groups to gather as they consider what faithful next step God is calling them to take;
3. Ministry opportunities in which to engage – or not. There will be no pressure. These opportunities may include
 - Worship opportunities, either online or in person. These services will intentionally engage and welcome new people into their midst. They will also include the sacraments of communion and baptism.
 - The invitation to grow in discipleship, small group gatherings, Bible studies, and prayer opportunities.
 - Mission opportunities to serve through hands-on ministries. These might include anything that involves making a difference and sharing the love of God with others.
 - Assistance in finding and connecting with other individuals and groups displaced by disaffiliating churches, both for grief support and for discipleship and discernment about faithful next steps.
 - Help connecting with Conference and District resources to help them discern their next steps as they consider a new church home.