



Matthew 22:36-40

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2026 Episcopal Address

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Bishop Héctor A. Burgos-Núñez

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05/29/2026, Syracuse NY

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You can watch the video presentation, [here](#).

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7

CELEBRATIONS

8

First, Upper New York, thank you—for all the ways you make the love of Jesus Christ visible in your communities. Together, we really are helping change the world—one person, one neighborhood, one community at a time.

11

12

I thank God for our pastoral leaders—elders, deacons, licensed local pastors, certified lay ministers, and our supply lay minister. The love you have for God and for God’s people is such a gift to this shared mission. And in this season of change, your faithfulness, resilience, and adaptability continue to strengthen the Body of Christ.

16

17

We’re also celebrating two important milestones in the life of our church: 70 years of women’s ordination and 30 years of the Order of Deacons in The United Methodist Church. Across our Conference, women and deacons are helping shape communities of faith through leadership, justice, compassion, and service. And we give thanks for their faithful ministry and for the lasting difference they make in our shared mission.

22

23

I also give thanks for our laity—the engine that keeps our shared mission moving forward.

24

Your presence, your prayers, your leadership, your generosity, your witness—they inspire me

25 every single day. In a season with new missional demands, you are rising up with courage and
26 creativity. You are guiding congregations, sustaining ministries, and opening new doors for the
27 gospel.

28

29 Another thing I'm celebrating this season is the growing collaboration between the
30 Susquehanna and Upper New York Cabinets. I know that it may feel new to many, and maybe
31 even a little unfamiliar. But it has brought more clarity, more alignment, and a deeper shared
32 commitment to Christ's mission in both conferences. Over the past year, our cabinets have been
33 meeting together—not to merge, and not to blur our identities, but to respond faithfully to the
34 realities in front of us. And as we align our strategy, support one another, and steward resources
35 wisely, this partnership is making leadership stronger across the episcopal area. This is
36 Connectionalism at its best.

37

38 I want to celebrate the extraordinary generosity of United Methodists across Upper New York.
39 Because of your sacrificial giving—and the careful stewardship of our finance team—UNY
40 participated at 100% in United Methodist Shared Giving in 2025. Your generosity is helping
41 support new faith communities, campus ministries, disaster response, clergy development, and
42 mission partnerships here at home and around the world. It's a reminder that when we bring our
43 resources together and align our hearts, we can do so much more together than any of us could
44 do alone.

45

46 I want to offer a word of thanks to everyone who took part in the Faithful Resistance rally in
47 Washington, D.C., and to those who showed up at the local events organized by our Social
48 Holiness team. Your witness for justice matters. It reflects the very heart of our Wesleyan
49 tradition—a faith we live out, a faith we embody, a faith that engages the world with courage
50 and hope.

51

52 We're also making room for new people to meet Christ. Our Missional Excellence Team
53 is supporting fifteen New Faith Communities, and this year we chartered the very first
54 Nepali United Methodist congregation in the United States. This multigenerational community—
55 many of them refugees from Nepal and Bhutan—worships in more than five languages,
56 with a beautiful bilingual ministry among children, youth, and young adults. Their life together is
57 a powerful sign of the Spirit at work among us.

58

59 There is more to celebrate. Over the past four years, nearly two hundred of our congregations
60 have grown in worship attendance, baptisms, and professions of faith. Nearly two hundred. That
61 is extraordinary. In a time when the wider narrative talks about decline, your ministries are telling
62 a very different story—a story of renewal, and the unmistakable movement of the Holy Spirit.

63

64 There's even more good news. In 2025, Upper New York financially supported 7 missionaries

65 And again, we are number one in the Northeastern Jurisdiction for giving to The Advance
66 Missions! In 2025, you gave more than \$750,000!

67
68 The Conference was also recently awarded a \$46,000 Disaster Preparedness Grant from UMCOR.
69 This is a powerful affirmation of the resilient, hope-filled communities you're building and our
70 commitment to showing up when people need us most. And this fall, working with our Creation
71 Justice Team, we'll be hiring a part-time Creation Care and Justice Coordinator—someone who
72 will help inspire and equip our congregations to care for God's creation as part of our public
73 witness. It's an important step in living out our call to love God, love our neighbors, and care for
74 the world God has entrusted to us.

75
76 We recently held a conference-wide Confirmation Rally with more than 75 in attendance. It's
77 been a long time since we've done something like that, and it was life-giving. And in 2027, we're
78 planning a conference-wide event for all our youth. And later this summer, A group of our youth
79 will travel to Ireland for our denomination's Global Young People's Convocation.

80
81 I could go on with celebrations, but three themes keep rising across our Conference: resilience,
82 innovation, and generosity. These aren't one-off moments. They show a church growing more
83 creative in its witness, more courageous in its leadership, and deeply committed to its mission.

84

85 **EPISCOPAL REFLECTIONS**

86 Last night, the Visioning Task Force shared some sobering realities about where we are as a
87 Conference: We heard many statements that started with fewer and smaller: Fewer churches,
88 fewer clergy and laity, fewer financial resources; more small and very small congregations;
89 more multi-charge appointments; and more buildings that are simply too large, too old, or too
90 costly to sustain.

91
92 They also named the adaptive shifts and initiatives we'll need to engage over the next five years
93 and beyond. I'm not going to repeat their presentation. But I do want you to hear from me that I
94 am all in—ready to lead this Conference in the missional direction you affirmed last night. And I
95 look forward to seeing the powerful things God will do as, together, we engage this missional
96 path.

97
98 Now, friends, as your episcopal leader, I want to name two important truths in light of what we
99 heard last night.

100

101 First: being smaller does not necessarily mean being weaker. Fewer people do not mean "not
102 enough". Different does not mean "less than." Healthy, impactful ministry is possible in every
103 size church—even if your congregation is smaller than it used to be. And the same is true for us
104 as a Conference.

105

106 This season of visioning has simply confirmed what many of us have known for a long time:
107 in our region, the United Methodist movement has always been for the most part a small-church
108 movement. It's how communities formed here over the years. It's part of who we are today. And
109 God works powerfully through churches of every size That are intentional about loving God,
110 Loving their neighbors and inviting people To embrace Christ in their lives And join in this
111 transformative journey.

112

113 And here's the second thing I want to say—hope is not denial. Real hope, Christian hope, starts
114 with telling the truth about where we are. It's not about wishful thinking or pretending
115 everything is fine. Naming these realities doesn't weaken our faith, and it's not about shaming or
116 judging anyone. It actually brings clarity. It helps us face our challenges—and our
117 opportunities—honestly and faithfully. Because God's love still has the power to redeem,
118 to transform, and to breathe new life into any situation. And friends, that power has no limits—
119 not when God's people rise to the moment, not when we follow the Spirit's lead, and not when
120 we trust that resurrection isn't just a story we tell, but a power we live.

121

122 Yes, we are smaller. Yes, we are fewer. And yes, we're configured differently than we were fifteen
123 years ago. I want to be transparent with you— these trends are not going to turn around
124 overnight. They will be with us for a while before we see any real upward shift. And the truth is,
125 there are no easy answers and no quick fixes to what many of our congregations are
126 experiencing.

127

128 But that does not diminish what God is doing through us (you). Our hope for the future is not
129 fragile, because we are resurrection people—and the Holy Spirit is leading us forward into
130 deeper love for Christ and wider love for our neighbors.

131

132 If becoming smaller is what it takes to wake us up with a healthy sense of urgency—
133 to help us remember who we are and what really matters—then so be it. We should not be
134 afraid of being part of a smaller movement for a season, if it's truly living the gospel and
135 embodying the love of Christ.

136

137 Now, if we're really going to live into real hope, We must be honest. We need the courage to
138 name the deeper, persistent causes of our decline—the things that will not change
139 until we face them head-on.

140

141 Today, I want to reflect briefly on four of them: loss of spiritual vitality, paralyzing nostalgia,
142 insularism, and a lack of missional humility.

143

144

145 **Loss of Spiritual Vitality**

146 As difficult as it may be to hear this, reality is that many of our churches have lost some of the
147 spiritual fire that once shaped their life together. Some have forgotten what matters most:
148 loving God with our whole lives loving our neighbors the way Jesus loves us; and inviting others
149 into this transforming journey of love.

150
151 Worship, in some places, has become routine instead of life-giving. Prayer has become occasional
152 instead of foundational. Christian formation has become optional instead of essential.
153 And service and justice work are sometimes seen as an inconvenience—or treated as quick
154 strategies to get more people in the pews. When spiritual vitality fades, the mission fades with it.
155 Congregations fade with it.

156
157 But hear me: spiritual vitality can be rekindled. The Holy Spirit has not retired.

158
159 “Christ has been raised to life! And he makes us certain that we will also be raised to life.” 1
160 Corinthians 15: 20

161
162 Where there are hunger, humility, and openness, God is always ready to breathe new life.

163
164 **Paralyzing Nostalgia**

165 Second, nostalgia is different from gratitude (they are not the same thing). Gratitude honors the
166 best of our past. Nostalgia tries to recreate the past—and gets stuck there.

167
168 “Anyone who starts plowing and keeps looking back isn't worth a thing to God's kingdom!” Luke
169 9:62

170
171 Paralyzing nostalgia keeps us looking backward instead of forward. It whispers that our best
172 days are behind us. that what feels familiar is the only faithful way to be the church, and it blinds
173 us to the new thing God is trying to do right now.

174
175 We honor our past best by refusing to live in it. In this season, God is calling us to Rise Up and
176 lean into Sankofa—A west African tradition that invites us to look back, to learn, to carry forward
177 what is life-giving, to let go of what is not longer helpful, and then to step boldly into the future
178 God is shaping.

179
180 We can't go back to the way things “used to be.” And honestly, in many cases, we shouldn't
181 want to. The world most of our congregations were born into just doesn't exist anymore.
182 Our communities have changed. The way people—especially younger generations—
183 gather, find meaning, and encounter the hope of Christ has changed, too. The gospel hasn't
184 changed. But the way it's lived out has.

185 We can't go back to a world that no longer exists. But we can carry forward the wisdom, the
186 courage, the faith—the very best of what we've been—into the future God is calling us to build.
187 That's not nostalgia. That's discipleship. That's bold love. That's real hope. And that's the path
188 toward the renewed, Spirit-led church we are becoming.

189

190 **Insularism**

191 Now, about insularism. Some congregations have turned inward—trying to protect what's left
192 instead of being curious about what can be. And let's be honest: many times, turning inward
193 feels safer. Staying quiet about the issues of the moment can shield us from criticism, from
194 conflict, and from the hard consequences that come with rising up for love, mercy, and justice.
195 But avoiding the world's pain is not faithful discipleship. Silence may keep us comfortable,
196 but it does not keep us faithful. When a congregation becomes focused only on the people
197 already inside, and chooses to ignore the pain in its neighborhood and community,
198 it slowly loses its purpose, its energy, and eventually its life.

199

200 Inwardness is the opposite of the gospel. Jesus always sends us outward. toward our neighbors,
201 Not the ones we want, the ones in front of us Toward the stranger, the hurting, the searching,
202 toward the very places where love takes risks and where mercy and justice need courage.

203

204 "...he treated his wounds...and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took
205 him to an inn, where he took care of him." Luke 10:34

206

207 A church that turns inward shrinks. A church that turns outward grows—in spirit, in joy, in
208 compassion, In service, and yes, often in number. Because the church comes alive when it steps
209 into the world God loves.

210

211 **Missional Humility**

212

213 And finally, a word about missional humility. Friends, missional humility begins with
214 surrendering to a simple but liberating truth: the mission belongs to God—not to us.
215 We are stewards, not owners— of the mission, the resources, the buildings, and even the
216 traditions we've inherited.

217

218 Missional humility calls us to learn again, to adapt with courage, to attempt what we have never
219 attempted, and to acknowledge—without fear—when familiar patterns no longer serve the
220 mission.

221

222 Some of our congregations have resisted needed change for twenty+ years because change
223 feels like loss and now they are literally collapsing. But hear me: faithfulness often requires
224 letting go. Letting go of preferences. Letting go of control. Letting go of "the way we've always

225 done it." Letting go of space we no longer need. Letting go of location—so we can move closer
226 to where people are today.

227

228 Why? So that something new—something Spirit-born—can rise. Something that blesses people
229 now, and will still bless people long after we're gone.

230

231

232

233 This season is going to ask something of us—all of us. It's going to ask us to get over
234 ourselves—our preferences, our silos, our turf. God is calling us into deep, courageous
235 collaboration at every level of the church. It will require us to trust the power of God
236 in Jesus Christ working through us together: Even if we don't see it.

237

238 And here's the good news: I already see it happening. People reclaiming the heart of the gospel
239 and discipleship Churches stepping out into their neighborhoods. Congregations partnering
240 with one another and with community groups. Others, letting go of space and location
241 To be closer to the people they're called to serve Pastors and laity serving side by side.
242 Laity standing in the gap in congregations without appointed pastors. Clergy and laity speaking
243 with courage for justice, mercy, and love. This is the heart of Methodism. This is the church the
244 Spirit is calling us to become. This is the movement that can transform communities and form
245 disciples of Jesus Christ in ways that matter for the world God loves.

246

247 Naming these realities is not despair. I believe—boldly—that it is hope. Because hope that
248 refuses to face the truth isn't hope, it's illusion. Real hope looks reality in the eye and still
249 proclaims: God's love can redeem, restore, and resurrect anything. There is no limit to that
250 power—not when God's people rise to the moment, not when we follow the Spirit, not when we
251 trust that God is not finished with us yet.

252

253 As your bishop, I am committed to lead you faithfully through these realities and these
254 opportunities. But this is not the work of a few. All of us have a part to play in co-creating real
255 hope with God.

256

257 We're going to stay focused on what really matters—loving God and loving our neighbors,
258 and forming disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve
259 joyfully, and lead courageously. And we will keep inviting others into this transforming journey
260 of love.

261

262 Now, let me be clear—this isn't just work for pastors. It takes all of us. The connection will walk
263 alongside you and do its best to resource you. But the truth is, the local church is still where
264 ministry really happens. And that means each of us has a role to play right where we are.

265 I can't reach every community on my own. None of us can. That's why it takes all of us—
266 showing up, leaning in, and joining God in the work already unfolding in our neighborhoods.

267
268 We will re-activate and strengthen our Connection, drawing on the gifts, skills, and passions
269 you already bring to our shared life. And I genuinely believe this: we already have everything we
270 need to carry the mission forward.

271
272 We're going to adapt and experiment with a real sense of missional urgency— We'll move
273 forward with those who are ready, and we won't let ourselves get stuck waiting on those who
274 aren't. And let me say that being ready doesn't mean having everything figured out.
275 It means being willing. Willing to step into the messy, stretching, Spirit-led work of joining God
276 in mission— right where we are, right now.

277
278 Friends, after everything I've named today—our celebrations, our challenges, our opportunities,
279 our calling—there is one more thing I need you to hear: I still believe, with all my heart,
280 that in the United Methodist Church there is room for all of us.

281
282 We love boldly when we listen across our differences, seek understanding, and choose to live
283 into our shared beliefs with both grace and conviction. What I see across this Conference and
284 Episcopal Area is a growing commitment to keep moving forward together—not because we are
285 the same, but because we belong to one another in Christ.

286
287 So—Rise Up. Love boldly. Serve joyfully. Lead courageously. God is with us. The same Christ
288 who called the early Methodists is calling us today. And the same God who has brought us this
289 far will carry us into the next faithful chapter of our shared mission.

290
291

292 **Discussion Questions for Congregational Leadership Teams**

293 Use these questions to guide prayerful, honest, and hopeful conversation as your leadership
294 team reflects on your congregation's mission, challenges, and opportunities.

- 295 1. What in our congregation's life gives us the most reason for gratitude right now, and
296 where do we see God actively at work among us?
- 297 2. If applicable, in what ways have we allowed being smaller, fewer, or different to shape
298 our self-understanding? Where might God be inviting us to see these realities not as
299 weakness, but as an opportunity for faithful ministry?
- 300 3. Which part of the message feels most true for our congregation at this moment: loss of
301 spiritual vitality, paralyzing nostalgia, insularism, or a lack of missional humility? Why?
- 302 4. How would we describe the current spiritual vitality of our congregation?

- 303 5. What practices, traditions, or assumptions are life-giving and worth carrying forward?
304 What might we need to release so we can respond more faithfully to the people and
305 community around us?
- 306 6. Where have we become too inwardly focused? What would it look like for us to turn
307 more intentionally toward our neighbors, especially those who are hurting, searching, or
308 overlooked?
- 309 7. What courageous collaboration might God be calling us to embrace—with other
310 congregations, community partners, the connectional church, or leaders within our
311 church?
- 312 8. What is one ministry area where we may need to experiment, adapt, or take a faithful risk
313 in this season?
- 314 9. How can our leadership team help our congregation move from anxiety or
315 discouragement toward truthful, resurrection-shaped hope?
- 316 10. What is one concrete next step we can take in the next 30 to 90 days to love boldly,
317 serve joyfully, and lead courageously in our context?
- 318
- 319
- 320 End of document.