



**March 8, 2022**

**A Pastoral Letter: Moving Forward**

Dear Friends in Christ,

On Sunday, March 6, I, along with the Staff Parish Relations Team (SPR), announced that beginning July 1, I am appointed to serve at Impact, a United Methodist Church in East Point, GA. This news has been a shock to many, and it will be hard to say goodbye to all of you when the time comes. I would like to briefly explain why this has happened and how you as a church can move forward.

In the United Methodist Church, all clergy enter a covenant with one another. Part of that covenant is to go where the bishop and cabinet send us. Occasionally, this happens across conference lines. The cabinet consists of the district superintendents of our conference. From January through May and even into June, the cabinet spends time in prayer and discernment as they seek to match churches in need of a pastor with someone whose gifts will fit that particular church's needs.

On June 30, the Pastor of Impact is retiring; therefore, the cabinets and the bishops in both the Alabama West Florida Conference and the North Georgia Conference decided I would be an excellent fit to serve on the Pastoral Team at Impact. Therefore, through prayer and discernment, the cabinet and the Bishop of the Alabama West Florida Conference will find a new pastor for our church.

Over the next several months, during this process, our district superintendent will be in conversation with the SPRC team to hear what attributes they feel our church needs in a new pastor. The district superintendent and SPRC team will meet and identify the new pastor, make the appointment, and make an official announcement at a later date and time.

Many have asked if my move can be reversed or reconsidered, but the decision is final. Impact and Cokesbury announced my new appointment simultaneously on March 6. Many of you have asked if I am alright with this move. Although it will be tough to say goodbye, there is still much that can be done here in Pensacola through the hands and feet of the good people of Cokesbury; I have accepted this appointment and believe it will be a good one.

As a United Methodist pastor, I believe the Holy Spirit works through the appointment process, the work of the cabinet, and our Bishops. This move will bring me closer to my family in Atlanta and my daughter in Nashville. These past several years have been challenging in unspeakable ways, and we have

*Bringing Christ to people and people to Christ*

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5725 N. Ninth Avenue  
Pensacola, FL 32504  
Website: [www.CokesburyChurch.com](http://www.CokesburyChurch.com)

Phone: 850-476-5818  
Fax: 850-494-1100  
Facebook : @CokesburyPensacola

still done some remarkable things! I have seen many of you grow in your faith step out of your comfort zones to teach and lead ministries for the first time. We have shared in ministry through the power and love of Jesus Christ. This same faith in Jesus, this same love, this same hope will propel you onward into the future God has for Cokesbury and each of you.

I am here to help you transition into the leadership of a new pastor and to empower you to continue to do the work of Christ. As I stated in church, the best way to prepare for this transition is to pray:

- Pray for the future of this church as a community of faith.
- Pray for the Bishop and the cabinet as they choose a new pastor.
- Pray for God's blessing upon your new pastor and their family as they prepare to begin a new ministry with you.
- Pray for each other, the staff, and this community to receive this pastor with open arms, hearts, minds, and most importantly, with grace, respect, and love.

Finally, with the rebuilding of the sanctuary, new roof, parking lot resurfacing, Asbury renovation, children's laughter, babies crying, and more outreach to the community, fruitful ministry will continue to grow through Cokesbury. I am in prayer that your next pastor will lead you into a future of blessing and growth as you step out in faith and invite those in the community who do not know Christ - to know Christ. I also pray that you will help the next pastor to be a success and with them to make this happen. I have seen you act in faith many times, and so I pray you will continue to step up, show up, serve, generously give, lead, and worship God in person or online during this season of transition.

Saints - always remember YOUR call - to be followers of Jesus Christ, stay grounded in your purpose in Christ, and commit to the faithful mission and ministry of Cokesbury - *Bringing Christ to people and people to Christ.*

You are loved –



Pastor Sheila Bates, Lead Pastor  
Cokesbury, UMC - Pensacola

Let us pray:

*Dear Lord, we thank you for your faithfulness, your grace, and your love from the beginning of time until now. We especially thank you for the time that we have had to work together to Connect People to You, Grow in our Faith, and Serve You - our God, together - in the name of Jesus Christ. We ask that during this time of transition, you would help us to trust in you. We thank you for this chapter in our lives together; with hope, we anticipate the next chapter will unfold in July. Lord, guide and direct Bishop David Graves and the cabinet as they seek and discern a new person to lead and pastor our congregation. Since you already know, Lord, who this person will be, bless them as they prepare to join us in the ministry of the Gospel. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.*

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