



February 8, 2019

Dear South Dakota Representatives,

On behalf of the Dakotas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, please accept this letter as our official endorsement of HB1230: An Act to add Clergy to the list of Mandatory Reporters.

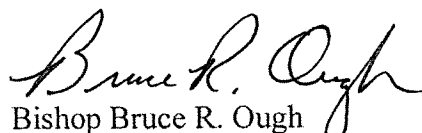
As ministers of the gospel we know that our highest calling is to create disciples of Jesus. And, we know that Jesus was clear in his mandate and his example of being a voice for children (in a time in history when children were considered inconsequential). We endorse HB1230 because we believe that this legislation not only aids in offering protections for our most vulnerable members of society but also frees our clergy to be better disciple-makers who model the teachings of Jesus and speak up on behalf of children.


The Dakotas Conference of the United Methodist Church is comprised of 245 UMC churches across both North and South Dakota. North Dakota already has a mandatory reporting law and our experience with upholding these laws has proven that it has made our policies and processes for ND clergy more, and not less, effective towards ensuring protections for our youth. It has helped them stay accountable to the teachings of Jesus to protect children. It has helped develop relationships with counseling and state agencies who are better equipped to handle the traumatic impacts that abuse and neglect leave behind. It has also helped us identify resources to help both the abused and the abusers we shepherd.

We believe that being pro-family, and pro-life, begins with being pro-child. The cost of not speaking out when we suspect harm is too great a burden—financially, mentally, physically, and spiritually—for those we hope to disciple now and in the future. We believe that this law will be a good way to demonstrate collaboration between our church and our state. It signifies that both entities are willing to work together to care for the least of these. We believe that this legislation will go further in raising awareness, offering support, and keeping members of the clergy accountable to upholding the tenets of their doctrine across denominations and faith traditions.

On behalf of the Dakotas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church we encourage all legislators to support House Bill 1230.

Sincerely,


Bishop Bruce R. Ough
Bishop, Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area


Rev. Valerie Reinhiller
Chair, Conference Board of Ordained Ministry