

Dear Friends,

The United Methodist General Conference, meeting in special session this week in St. Louis, has voted to accept the "Traditional Plan" which excludes LGBTQ people from ordination or appointment as clergy and prohibits our pastors from marrying same-sex couples or holding their weddings in our churches. It also imposes additional penalties for including LGBTQ people in ways which violate our Book of Discipline. The Traditional Plan passed by a 53% majority, showing the deep divide in our church around issues of sexuality. Personally, I grieve for our friends and family in the LGBTQ community who doubtless experience this action as one more act of condemnation and exclusion against them. At the same time, I have friends and family on both sides of this issue and regret the fact that our worldwide church cannot find a way to be together in ministry even though we may have disagreements. The bottom line is that this decision of the General Conference is a further step away from the inclusive love of Jesus Christ and takes us down the road toward a rigid fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible that has never been part of our tradition.

And so, we have work to do. There are many questions still unanswered. Can the Traditional Plan take effect when parts of it violate the constitution of the United Methodist Church? Will churches leave and the denomination be reconfigured in some way? Is it possible to make a separate policy for churches in the US, where 2/3 of the delegates oppose this plan, which was supported largely by the parts of our worldwide denomination that are in other countries? We don't know what the future will hold, and it brings me great sadness to think that our United Methodist family is so splintered.

But I want you to know that *your* church has not changed. We will be watching and working on what happens next. I commit to continue to work toward full inclusion of all people in God's church, as I believe that is what I am called to do.

This Sunday, we will be gathering at the Lord's table for Holy Communion, the sacrament of God's expansive welcome, which holds out to us the promise of forgiveness, healing, and redemption. I encourage you to make a special effort to be with us in worship this Sunday, even if you have been away from the church for a while. This is a time to be together.

In addition to Sunday worship at 9:00 and 10:45, we will also gather between services (around 10:05 a.m.) for some conversation and reflection on the way ahead. Please be with us.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Bill