

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to update you on our church's actions since the conclusion of the General Conference. Last Sunday, a letter from Bishop Ken Carter, the president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, was shared at both services. The text of that letter can be found at this link: http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/news-media/press-center/documents/COB_President_Letter_to_UMC_March12019.pdf

A listening session was held between services, with around 80 people in attendance. The consensus of those who spoke was that the church should take action to assure the wider community that our church is still a place of welcome and inclusion for all people. The Board of Directors met in special session on Tuesday evening to respond. They approved an ad for three local newspapers which shares the simple message: God loves all people. So do we. Posters with this same message have been placed at the entrances to the church.

Some of the legislation passed by the General Conference has been sent to the denomination's Judicial Council for a ruling on whether or not it is allowed under the constitution of the United Methodist Church. The Judicial Council will meet and hand down its rulings on these questions during its spring session (April 23-26). Pastor John McBride and I will be attending a daylong meeting with Bishop Ough on Monday, March 11, to review the implications of the General Conference decisions and to discuss best practices in leading our congregations into the future with hope.

If you want more information – including links to a recording of last Sunday's meeting and a video message from Bishop Ough – please go to the Way Forward page on our church's website: <http://wblumc.org/resources/a-way-forward/>

I'm aware that not everyone is on the same page in their reaction to the decisions of the General Conference. If you would like to talk to me about your own reaction, I will make time for you. Please get in touch with me. I'm also aware that many in the LGBTQ community – and their families, friends, and allies – have been hurt by these decisions. I encourage us to be in prayer for any who have experienced the church as a place of pain or exclusion. And remember that you are the face of the United Methodist Church to your family, neighbors, friends, and co-workers.

Finally, I know some people are feeling as if they want to walk away from the United Methodist Church. I want to encourage you to stay with us. Something new is being born in this time of upheaval. The process of birth can be long and messy. But I'm convinced that there are great days ahead for a church that celebrates the gifts of all of its people.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Bill Eaves