

February 27, 2019

Dear Friends, Our Beloved Princeton UMC Community,

Out of the past and out of God's love, God created each and every one of us in God's own image. In Isaiah 43:1 we read, *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are mine."* The love of God for us is a grace-filled and everlasting love. This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As you are aware, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church has met these past four days in St. Louis, Missouri. The sole business for this conference has been to receive and legislate the work of the Commission on the Way Forward that was formed in 2016 to help us, as a deeply divided and global church, make decisions about the ordination of members of the LGBTQIA community and the performance and hosting of weddings for same gender couples by United Methodist clergy and churches.

When Bishop Schol came to talk with us at PUMC on Sunday, January 6, he laid out the three primary plans that would come before this special called session of General Conference. Of the three plans, the Traditionalist Plan was approved yesterday by a 54-vote majority of the 822 delegates voting on this matter. This plan retains the current language in our United Methodist Book of Discipline, and seeks to impose harsher penalties upon those who violate the restrictions set forth therein, primarily the ordination of "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" and clergy who choose to perform weddings for same-gendered couples. There are several aspects of this plan which are currently under review by the Judicial Council (akin to the United States Supreme Court) who will next meet in April, including the constitutionality of these penalties.

For a great many in our denomination, including many in our congregation, this is deeply distressing and troubling news, as it simply does not reflect our understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For others, particularly in parts of our world where homosexuality is taboo, illegal, and even a forbidden topic, this decision reflects a different, yet just as deeply held, understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is one of the great challenges of our world today at large and particularly in a global denomination such as ours.

In addition, it's important to note at least three things about the very process by which such decisions are made in The United Methodist Church. First, our General Conference process is deeply flawed. It is not an embodiment of the love, grace, and fellowship exemplified by Jesus Christ. It is contentious, embroiled in conflict, and is set up to produce winners and losers with any decision it is working on, leading to deeper disunity. Second, historically speaking, the decision reached by General Conference yesterday is not ultimately surprising, as petitions around matters of sexuality (and others like them) have been brought before GC for decades, without significant change. Third, while General Conference is the only body that can speak officially for The United Methodist Church as a global denomination, it does not speak for every United Methodist or every local United Methodist congregation.

While the work of this General Conference session is done for 2019, we write to remind us all that **OUR** work in PUMC is **not** done. And we write to assure you that as we continue together in the journey of discipleship, we will continue to be faithful to Christ and to the mission Christ has given us. We will continue to be, “...*a diverse community, joyfully responding to God’s love and growing as disciples of Christ by nurturing, teaching, reaching and serving all people.*”

And to our LGBTQIA sisters and brothers, and family members of LGBTQIA persons, we want to say especially to you: You are loved and accepted - by God and by us. You have a place in this church and the Kingdom / Kin-dom of God. You, your families, your gifts, your leadership, are welcome here. You are enough, as we rehearse each week in worship. And we are deeply sorrowful that you have become an “issue” and the subject of such painful debate in the life of our denomination.

While the ramifications of General Conference’s work are not entirely clear at this point, regardless of what comes, we will continue to be in discernment and conversation about *our* response and call as we love and welcome all people, including our LGBTQIA sisters and brothers, recognizing in each one the gifts and value of every person entrusted to our care.

Our *Relationships and Faith* program is a significant part of this discernment and conversation. If you are not already engaged in R&F, we hope you will join us for our next gathering on Sunday, March 17, at 5:00 p.m., in our PUMC Fellowship Hall for a panel discussion, followed by small groups and dinner, all focused on recognizing and addressing injustice toward the LGBTQIA community.

Further, if you missed the conversation we had with Bishop Schol on January 6 after worship, Jenny has a recording of this event. If you would like to hear what was said, please contact her. And if you need to talk or process any of this, from any perspective, all three of us are available to you. Please call the office or email us to make an appointment.

We look forward to continuing this journey with **you** and ask that you continue to pray for our beloved denomination as it makes crucial decisions.

With hearts full of love and grace and peace,

Pastors Jenny, Ginny, and Skitch