

Pastor's e-Letter, March 8, 2019

Hello, Sunrise!

What's going on with the United Methodist Church? And how does what's going on affect Sunrise United Methodist Church? Who are we as people of faith as a result of these current statements and decisions? These are just a few of the questions I hope to address in this email.

FIRST, SOME OF MY OWN THOUGHTS: I need to share up front that I am shocked and in grief by the actions of the denomination called United Methodist to strengthen the stance to isolate LGBTQ (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer) individuals and the families as "incompatible with Christian teaching." With many others, I am embarrassed and appalled by these most recent legislative actions! Personally, I felt the words of Rev. Eston Williams of Aley UMC: "At the end of the day, I'd rather be excluded for who I include than included for who I exclude."

OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS, OPEN DOORS has been the motto for the United Methodist Church for many years. I believe it reflects what I have cherished about the Church that has been at the core of faith in my family for at the least five generations of clergy. The decision made in St. Louis reflects a desire to CLOSE hearts, minds, and doors to LGBTQ people. It is also intended to CLOSE the doors, minds, and hearts of others who wish to promote God's love for LGBTQ people. NO, not "people" BUT: family, loved ones, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, neighbors, strangers, faith seekers. As a man of faith and a pastor, I want to represent a church that reflects the LORD's unconditional love for ALL people. All means ALL. All includes those of us who disagree. Sunrise Church has long been a congregation that has embraced our differences. I believe that we can ALL come to the table of the Lord for Communion. I wish I could apologize to LGBTQ community members and loved ones for the brutal decision and speech that has been part of this whole process. The Body of Christ, the community of faith, the Church was created to be an advocate for Jesus Christ in the world for the ALL people. We are called to make disciples for the transformation of the world. I believe that the gospel is not represented in the footnote that appeared in paragraph 304.3 of The 1972 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church: "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."

MORE DETAILS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED:

A Special Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church was held February 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis, MO, USA. The General Conference consisted of 864 voting delegates representing the United States, Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Philippines. The purpose of this special gathering was to address the report of the Commission on the Way Forward and to try and resolve the denomination's impasse over issues related to human

sexuality. The legislative process came to a conclusion with a vote of 53% in favor to 47% opposed to the Traditional Plan.

This Traditional Plan includes:

1. Focusing the definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual.”
2. Bishops prohibited from consecrating bishops who are self-avowed, practicing homosexuals.
3. Boards of Ordained Ministry must certify that they will uphold The Book of Discipline.
4. Minimum penalties established for clergy who perform same-sex marriage (first offense: mandatory one year suspension without pay; second offense: surrender ordination credentials).
5. Several other points that mandate adherence to prohibitions that reference those who are “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Many of these issues are complex and difficult. Because of this complexity, there is a need for review by the Church Judicial Council. There are several items that could be in violation of the Constitution of the UMC. For more information follow this link (what happened and what didn’t at General Conference 2019):
<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/what-happened-and-what-didnt-at-general-conference-2019>.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Judicial Council, the legal arm of the UMC, will meet in Evanston, Illinois, April 23-25, 2019. This group of nine elected persons will review and rule on matters of law pertaining to the action of the General Conference. In May of 2020, the next scheduled General Conference will gather in Minneapolis, MN. That Conference will further focus the direction for the future. It is important to know that no action is being asked of any of us at this time. The decisions of the General Conference do not mandate any individual, Sunrise Church, or any organization in the United Methodist Church to take action. That day may come, but there are still months/years of work and process yet to be done. It is also important to know that Sunrise Church will function as we have! Our mission statement is KNOWING CHRIST AND MAKING HIM KNOWN, SERVING CHRIST BY SERVING OTHERS. That mission and our purpose of being faith-filled followers of Christ will not change. ALL are welcome! ALL are Children of God!

WHAT CAN WE DO?

1. Contact anyone you know who could be hurting as a result of this decision. Speak with them as soon as possible and assure them that God loves them. And if they are in need of that assurance, pray with them and listen. We are ALL God’s Children!

2. Pray: "Lord, offer your comfort and assurance to all who have been harmed in these days. Remind each one of us that you love us. And remind us deep in our souls that your love is unconditional. Remind us that your grace comes to us before we can acknowledge how much you love us. Remind us to be kind to ALL. And today, grant us the vision of Sunrise Church, a safe sanctuary in a world of hurt. Open our Hearts, Open our Minds, Open our Doors today. In Jesus" name, we pray. Amen."

God bless,

Rev. Olon