



UNITED METHODISTS

OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Colossians 3:15

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Special General Conference of The United Methodist Church gathered in St. Louis, MO February 24-26, 2019 and passed the Traditional Plan for the United Methodist way forward. This plan affirms the present policies in The Book of Discipline which does not allow same gender weddings and the ordination of gays and lesbians. This plan was preferred over the One Church Plan which would have left these issues up to individual conferences, congregations and clergy.

Personally, I experienced the church more contentious and divided at this General Conference, than any of the previous seven General Conference I have attended.

This General Conference:

- Passed the Traditional Plan. If 28 people of the more than 800 voting delegates had voted differently, the Traditional Plan would have been defeated.
- Defeated the One Church Plan. If 26 people had voted differently, it would have passed.
- Supported the Traditional Plan even though the Judicial Council ruled on two different occasions that core aspects of the plan, about 60% of it, was unconstitutional.
- Called for an investigation into an accusation that some delegates were being given money and other goods to influence their vote.
- Had a tie vote, 409 to 409 on a piece of legislation and approved another by two votes.

- Was divided culturally with an estimated 65% of US delegates approving the One Church Plan and 85% of the delegates outside the US approving the Traditional Plan.

GNJ is clearly a model for our church for how to honor difference and in the midst of difference to respect one another. GNJ is a One Church Plan conference that recognizes that we are in ministry with LGBTQ people in different ways. I came away from this General Conference appreciating even more the rich diversity and different expressions of GNJ. Thank you for your continued example of Christ-like love and grace in the midst of difference. You make me proud to be your bishop.

The legislation that was passed, was again sent to the Judicial Council, the “supreme court” of The United Methodist Church where it is anticipated that much of the Traditional Plan will be ruled unconstitutional for a third time. We most likely will not receive final rulings from the Judicial Council for several months. United Methodists will continue under our present policies concerning homosexuality.

I want to take this opportunity to speak to our gay and lesbian sisters and brothers and to the family members of gays and lesbians. You are welcomed and accepted by me and most of the people of GNJ. While our denomination wrestles, we welcome you with the arms of grace found through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You are of sacred worth to God and me and I pledge to create space for you to worship, serve and engage through The United Methodist Church of GNJ.

I call upon all of our clergy and congregations to dedicate themselves to a season of prayer and to be the welcoming congregation that I have experienced you to be.

We are a One Church Conference where churches hold different beliefs and understandings and engage in different ministries with gays and lesbians. I will lead so that each of our congregations and clergy will have different expressions and ministries and yet serve one God, one Lord Jesus Christ and one mission – to transform the world as we make disciples and grow vital congregations.

I will be a bishop of the whole church and all of our people.

On March 16, 2019 we will meet in an annual conference special session to learn more about the actions of General Conference, how we will move together in mission and what we can do to work together and move forward.

These are challenging days for the church. We are blessed to have creative, resourceful and whole

leaders who will guide us through this time.

Thank you for your service and participation in The United Methodist Church. We need you.

Keep the faith!

John

John Schol, Bishop
The United Methodist Church
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