

February 27, 2019

Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

I returned yesterday from the Special Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in St. Louis. As you may know, the “One Church Plan,” which would have allowed for individual congregations to decide for themselves how they will approach the issue of human sexuality, was defeated. Instead, the Conference passed the “Traditionalist Plan,” which retains the current language regarding human sexuality in *The Book of Discipline* and adds extreme punitive measures for clergy who violate this language. It is important to note that currently, it may be difficult to implement this plan fully due to portions of it that were ruled to be unconstitutional by our Judicial Council. Having said that, however, the plan was approved and likely will be put into effect in some fashion in the near future.

As a Reconciling Ministries congregation, we will need to process what this means for us as a United Methodist church committed to inclusive ministries that welcome all people regardless of their sexual orientation – however, please know that this changes nothing for us currently at the local church level. We will continue to be a Reconciling Ministries congregation that will reach out with the love of God in Christ to all persons, regardless of what the future may hold for the denomination. We are disciples of Jesus Christ first and foremost – and only then, do we connect ourselves with the essentials of being United Methodists.

On a personal note, this was a particularly painful experience for me to witness the church at, what I believe, to be its very worst. It would seem that the famous observation of one of the leaders of the early church, Tertullian, has been reversed. In referring to Christians in the 3rd century, he said that pagans were baffled by the witness of the followers of Jesus: “See how they love one another,” they would say. Now, in our modern day, those outside the church are equally baffled by the witness of *some* of the followers of Jesus: “See how they hurt one another,” they must be saying.

In closing, let me say on behalf of Pastor HeyYoung and the staff of First Church that we haven’t changed. We love you regardless of who you are or how you have been beautifully fashioned as a child of God. Please hold on to the sacred truth that the church is not a denomination – it is the people of God gathered in love and support of one another under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That will never change so long as I’m your pastor.

In the end, love wins.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Tom