

The Below Meditation and Prayer were shared in Worship at St. Paul's July 23, 2017 with the kickoff of the Baltimore-Washington week of praying alongside the Commission on a Way Forward

Something I love about the United Methodist Church, and about St. Paul's UMC, is our profession of welcome and our intense focus on local and global ministry. The UMC proclaims its slogan as "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors." At St. Paul's and other local congregations, all are invited to share in communion at our table, recognizing that we are all brothers and sisters despite our many differences. Indeed, at St. Paul's we are often greeted by name at the door and at the altar rail, by clergy and by lay people. Recognizing what it means to be the body of Christ together, we - locally and denominationally - offer our gifts of time, energy, and resources to serve one another and lift one another up. We offer our strongest ministry when we do it together, drawing on the diverse gifts of the people God has placed in our congregation.

As someone who was confirmed and raised in the UMC, the coming years as the UMC discerns a path through an especially deep divide in how our brothers and sisters understand homosexuality and what it means within the church frighten me. Our denomination and congregation can offer comfort, hope, and witness to each other and to our communities. I want us to remain strong and become stronger so we can offer a church home for my daughter as she grows. I pray that the Holy Spirit may lead us - locally and denominationally - to find continued and new ways of being church together, strengthened rather than divided by our points of disagreement. I believe there can be a way forward that we have not yet imagined, and that through persistent prayer and quiet, humble listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit we may yet be able to find it.

Emily-Sama Miller

God of a way forward,
as we enter into a week of prayer,
we give thanks for those who have been meeting
over the last many months, and indeed the last centuries,
listening to each other's stories, and weighing with intention
the policies and traditions that bind us together
as what is today the United Methodist Church.

We know that even the earliest of disciples had differing
views on how to live faithfully as followers of Christ.
Like St. Paul, we find ourselves immersed in issues that have the potential to splinter community.

When we are tempted to despair,
that the church looks differently that we might expect,
sit us side by side with the struggles of this world
until we see your face in the faces of the afflicted.
on street corners, and in hospitals
until we see your face in the faces of the afflicted.
Forgive the times, O Lord, when we have chosen to look away
in the name of Discipline.

Pour out your healing on those we have named today,
and those we know to be hurting
as they look to the church as a source of strength and comfort.

Like St. Paul, may we err on the side of love
that sometimes looks like the church we know,
but more often than not calls us into a dream
we can't even yet imagine.

Do what you must, O Lord, to make Christ
known through our common actions.

Do what you must,

O Lord, to rend our hearts for your mission.

Do what you must, oh Lord, to forge the
next step of your new creation.

**Call us to do what it is that *we* must,
with our hands, our feet, our lips, our lives,
to embody the forward motion
of a people called Methodists.**

**For we believe that you are not through with us—
who we are, or what we are capable of becoming
as your church.**

Amen.

Rev. Claire Matheny