



Yadkinville United Methodist Church

P.O. Box 25
Yadkinville, NC 27055

February 27, 2019

Dear Yadkinville UMC Family,

If you have not followed the Called session of the General Conference held February 23-26th closely, I understand. My hope for any church is that it would be devoted to ministry in its own community. As I was watching General Conference coverage via livestream over the past week, I received texts and emails about worship, the youth retreat, community benevolence, and mission from members of this congregation. For your faithfulness I give thanks. We do though, belong to a global denomination and this letter deals with decisions made by our global legislative body, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, and its impact upon our mission and ministry.¹

You may have noticed that the news and social media have been flashing dire headlines about the future of the United Methodist Church over the past week. One headline from ABC news read “United Methodist Church on edge of breakup over LGBT stand” and the Washington Post’s said “Will the nation’s third-largest church split up over LGBT debate? Leaders try to reach an answer.” While I wish that these headlines were far from the truth, they are not. The UMC is teetering on the edge. In recent years and even more recent days the UMC has proven itself to be no more immune to political infighting, partisan posturing, and backbiting than the U.S. political establishment. We have failed to be an obedient church in many ways.

This Called session of the General Conference had a choice between four main plans to clarify the UMC’s position on human sexuality as it relates to ordination of clergy and marriage of same-sex couples. Only two of these plans had real momentum going into conference. The plan recommended by the Bishops, The One Church Plan, would have allowed for contextualization at the Church, Conference, and Pastoral level when addressing LGBTQI Ordination and Same-Sex Weddings. The One Church plan would not have required anyone to act against their conscience, while allowing an opening for progressives to follow their convictions in ministry. The General Conference voted against this plan in favor of The Traditional Plan. The Traditional plan maintains the denomination’s current prohibitions of same sex marriage and LGBTQI Clergy, while making the punishments for clergy and conferences who break these rules much harsher. The conference also approved a disaffiliation

¹ If you would like more background information on this called session of the General Conference please visit our Annual Conference Website at www.wnccumc.org

plan which will (if ruled constitutional), provide a path for individual congregations to leave the denomination while ignoring the trust clause that has historically been central to UMC polity and other financial obligations.

I believe that our denomination has done deep and grievous harm to our LGBTQI sisters and brothers. My prayer is that reconciliation and healing are not beyond us, and my faith and hope tell me that they are not beyond God. Frequently, when LGBTQI people were acknowledged during the Conference, they were talked “about” as if they were not present or a part of the conversation. So many faithful people had to stand by while their denominational home questioned their very rights to exist and receive God’s love. Our Discipline says that “all persons are individuals of sacred worth created in the image of God,” however we did not live out that statement at General Conference. On behalf of myself and the denomination that formed me into the pastor and person I am today, I earnestly repent.

I fully acknowledge and affirm that we each have particular modes of interpreting scripture, and that our theological stances span a large spectrum. It is our differences and diversity that bring richness to our congregational lives. I have met people at every point on the theological spectrum who read and take seriously the words of the Bible and try to actively live out their faith, and to look at those with whom we disagree and denigrate their faith as lesser is a grievous sin. Even if we as Christians disagree, we still all worship and serve the same God.

Jesus tells us to love one another, as he loved us. Christ instructs us that we are to feed his sheep. The Lord commands us to reach out to the oppressed and the lost. St. Paul says that in Christ there are no distinctions. While we can celebrate theological difference, we cannot allow for any person to encounter the church and walk away uncertain of God’s absolute and abiding love for them. No theology stemming from the Christ of the Cross should lead us to hate our neighbor.

One of the most moving parts of General Conference was a floor speech given by a lay delegate named JJ Warren (Upper NY).² He speaks of evangelism at what he calls the “least religious college in the US,” where he is a student, and says that they have had amazing success because “ [the people he encounters] had not heard this message before. They didn’t know that God could love them because their churches said that God didn’t.” If the church is willing to waste the passion, love, testimony and faith of this man then we have indeed fallen grievously into sin. If the church is willing to allow LGBTQI folks to walk into the forgotten creases of society thinking that God cannot love them, then we have strayed from the gospel.

² You can watch his floor speech here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC9OwM2piKQ>

My heart breaks for the church, as we double down on the false idea that God's love is limited and some persons are worthless. I also recognize that the brokenness that I feel pales in comparison to those whom the church has rejected. I commit to you and Christ that I give myself to the spreading of God's amazing grace, staggering love, and tremendous salvation. I will be a friend to all. I will be a pastor to all who need the Word of God. For our community here at Yadkinville United Methodist church I recommit to engaging in ministry in this place with you, to sharing the table of Christ, and "Living, Learning, and Loving" with my whole heart.

To our LGBTQI siblings, I beg your forgiveness for the harm caused to you by the church that should have been a place of love and nurture. You are beloved children of God of incalculable sacred worth.

It will be some time before we know the full effect of the General Conference legislation. The United Methodist Judicial Council may rule the Traditional Plan and Disaffiliation plan unconstitutional putting us back where we were before the Called session of the General Conference met. In the days to come, may we all be in prayer. May we ask God for forgiveness for excluding people from the grace of God. May we seek to listen to our LGBTQI neighbors. May we learn to stand together against indifference and idolatry. May we all embrace the earth shattering and healing love of Christ. May our hearts not be hardened against those holding viewpoints different from our own, instead let us be united in the Body of Christ.

There is hope in Christ who heals the sick, eats with sinners, turns over tables, opens tombs, and welcomes all. In this time of uncertainty and hurt, may we find hope in Jesus who calls us into grace. As John Wesley said "if your heart is as my heart, take my hand," or as our Moravian siblings affirm "In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity." Let us come together for the mission and ministry of our risen Savior. My door is open to any who need to talk.

Grace & Peace in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonathan Gaylord". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Rev. Jonathan Gaylord
Yadkinville United Methodist Church