

Friday, July 20, 2018



Dear Bonaire Church Leaders,

We both, Tammi and Scott, have met in recent months to assess the status on the UMC's ongoing process for settling the impasse around human sexuality. We write with the purpose of informing our leaders, directing people toward the next places to listen, learn, and speak, and encouraging everyone to continue praying as we move forward together.

The General Conference of the UMC is the only group allowed to speak for the whole Church. Made up of lay and clergy delegates from around the world, it gathers every four years to establish church rules and approve statements on various social issues. It was at the **April 1972** General Conference that the language around human sexuality was first introduced, discussed and voted on. That General Conference, and every one since, has upheld that marriage is exclusively between a man and a woman, that same-sex weddings and ceremonies are prohibited, and that while all persons are of sacred worth, there are limits to who can be considered for ordained ministry in the UMC. However, there have been numerous instances, through the years, of violations by clergypersons, annual conferences, and local churches of the established rules of the church that have escalated tensions and caused hurt.

Many were hopeful that the **May 2016** General Conference would remove some of the ambiguity in how rules are followed and cases of non-compliance are handled. After debate, the 864 delegates asked the Council of Bishops to develop a plan for a special General Conference dedicated solely to the various ways this topic impacts our ministry together. It was also agreed that church leaders would observe a time of compliance with the current church rules on the matters of ordination and marriage ceremonies, until the work of the process could be realized. However, the Western Jurisdiction elected and consecrated an openly-gay Bishop in **July 2016**, only further deepening concerns about what it means to be united in understanding the Scriptures and the *Book of Discipline*.

Since **November 2016**, a Commission of thirty-two persons has been meeting to develop plans to move the church forward. You can read more about their work at [www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward](http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward). Their final report was received by the Council of Bishops in **May 2018**. About a week later, the Judicial Council of the UMC ruled that the final report to the special General Conference would instead come from the Commission. That report is expected to be released around **July 30, 2018**. It will include details and legislation being proposed for three plans, often referred to as the Traditionalist, the One Church, and the Multi-Branch.

Following that, Bishop Lawson Bryan will be meeting with the Laity from the North Central District on September 9th at Riverside UMC in Macon from 6:00-7:30 PM to offer an update.

The special General Conference will be held **February 23-26, 2019**. Afterwards, Bishop Bryan is inviting every South Georgia United Methodist to gather in Tifton, Georgia on **Saturday, March 9, 2019**, to hear directly from our delegation.

It was Paul who said, "I'm sure about this: the one who started a good work in you will stay with you to complete the job by the day of Christ Jesus." This was true for the church in Philippi, and it is true for the church in Bonaire. We both, Tammi and Scott, want to honor God, uphold the truths of the Bible, encourage others to trust God, and show kindness to everyone. We will invite our Administrative Council, at our next meeting on **Tuesday, August 28**, to consider plans for our congregation to go through a time of prayer, fasting and discernment.

We are humbled to serve in leadership alongside you. We welcome your questions and feedback. Ask either of us for more information. We will answer or seek someone who knows the answer.

Grace and peace,



Tammi Wildes  
Administrative Council, Chairperson



Scott Hagan  
Pastor