



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

March 1, 2019

Dear Friends,

You have no doubt noticed that our denomination has been "in the news" this week. Many of you have shared your concern and your prayers with me. As your pastor, and one who cherishes the United Methodist Church (UMC), I am grateful for both.

On Tuesday, 864 United Methodist delegates representing many countries of the world voted both to reaffirm and to strengthen our denomination's traditional stance on homosexuality. The United Methodist Church will continue to disallow same gender marriages and the ordination of practicing gay clergy. Our denomination will also more strictly enforce this ban.

This vote came as a surprise to some because the majority of United Methodist bishops endorsed a different approach (called "The One Church Plan") that would allow for greater self-determination. The outcome of the vote is indicative of differences of opinions around this issue and the global nature of our denomination. While a small majority of US delegates voted in favor of the One Church Plan, the vast majority of our sisters and brothers from Africa and the Philippines were committed to Traditionalist Plan. Ultimately, this plan passed by a close margin.

What does this mean for us? First, I want to affirm that FUMC is the same church we were a week ago! We will continue to embrace our vision of *changing lives, making disciples*. We will continue to be a community where all persons – both gay and straight – will joyfully come together for worship, mission and discipleship. We will also continue to be a congregation (like most) where we have different opinions on human sexuality and marriage. Most of all, we continue to be a community of people who do not just love each other in spite of our differences of opinions. We love each *because* of our differences! John Wesley once said, "Though we cannot think alike may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt," he concluded, we may." And so, we will!

This fall, almost two hundred of our members have already participated in small group discussions on theology and human sexuality. We will continue these conversations. On Monday, March 4th, I will meet with our Church Board to discuss how we will continue the conversation. During the next few weeks, I will be in close contact with our Blue Ridge District and our Western North Carolina Conference. As I discern any implications of the recent General Conference decision for FUMC, I will share them with you.

In the meantime, we will not only pray for our denomination, we will continue to do what we do best: sharing the love of Christ!

Warmly,

Mark