

Letter from our Bishop:

Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you in the wonderful name of Jesus the Christ!

Over this past weekend, various media were filled with stories about the splitting of the United Methodist Church. Based on some of these stories, people have been asking, "has the United Methodist Church split? Has the decision been made?" The simple answer to those questions is no.

On Friday, Jan. 3rd, an independent mediation team, comprised of eight Bishops and eight representatives from advocacy groups, announced a proposal for the separation of The United Methodist Church that it intends to introduce to the 2020 General Conference. This "Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation" is one of several proposals that have been prepared for consideration by the General Conference.

It is vitally important to remember our polity and our process. General Conference is the only body that can speak for the denomination and make changes to The Book of Discipline. At this point, no decisions have been made and none will be made until the General Conference meets May 5-15, 2020 in Minneapolis. The Protocol itself says it was developed in service to the General Conference delegates who will decide on its adoption or amendment. While there were some Bishops involved in this mediation process, this proposal does not come from the Council of Bishops but is the work and proposal of the independent mediation team.

I have attempted to be consistent in stating that I believe deeper conversations are necessary regarding the future of The United Methodist Church, our differences and the ways in which we might find a path that blesses one another to be the Church we are called to be. This Protocol, along with many of the other proposals and legislation already submitted to the 2020 General Conference, invites us to such conversations. I am grateful for the individuals who have invested in this hard work and the proposals they have shared.

I hope you will continue to look for ways to engage one another in these conversations with love and respect as we seek a way to faithfully and fruitfully live out God's call upon our lives.

While these important conversations continue and we live amid the uncertainty of The United Methodist Church, I am reminded that our mission is not uncertain. God continues to call us to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

In Upper New York, this mission is lived out through the local church in every community. So, don't stop looking for ways to shine the light of Christ in the place you have been called. Continue to make Jesus known in word and deed. Continue to pray for God's guidance and support. Continue to trust that, whatever the future holds for The United Methodist Church, your call to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be God's love to your neighbors in all place remains the same. Please continue to say yes to that!

Pray for the delegates to General Conference from Upper New York, that God will grant them wisdom, courage and peace amid the work they do and the decisions they will make. Pray for your sisters and brothers in Christ who seek to follow God's call upon their lives. Pray for the future of The United Methodist Church. Know that you are in my prayers.

Blessings,

Bishop Mark J. Webb