



A Pastoral Letter to the Good People of the Michigan Area From Bishop Deborah Lieder Kieseey

October 5, 2015

Dear Friends,

Since the 2015 Annual Conference, our two conferences have experienced some great 'highs', and some painful 'lows'. We celebrated across the state and across the denomination, with the nearly 90% affirmative vote, on becoming one conference, something desired for over twenty years. I celebrate that still!

And, we have also experienced the painful 'low' of the events around Cassopolis (<http://bit.ly/cassopolis>) and the ripple effects of misinformation, and single-minded passion that have threatened to divide us. Sadly, the anger and frustration over the issue of human sexuality has caused those on all sides to speak in hateful and hurtful ways against our own brothers and sisters in Christ.

I write to you now for two reasons.

First, to let you know that after literally hundreds of hours of work, conversation and good faith efforts on the part of your leadership to find a compromise that would lead to a just resolution in the complaint process, we have reached an impasse. It is clear that no compromise on our part will be sufficient to resolve the situation or to bring healing.

For this I am deeply, deeply saddened.

This impasse has forced me into the position of having to choose between two options. By Discipline, when a just resolution cannot be reached, my only options are to either: 1.) Dismiss the complaint, or 2.) Hand over everything to the Counsel for the Church for a possible church trial. I remain open – and will always remain open – to conversation that might still lead to a resolution, but all efforts have thus far proven futile.

My heart is broken, and I weep for the continued harm either of these next steps will cause – to you, to the Michigan Area, to the Body of Christ, and even to the very cause at the center of this controversy. Unfortunately, someone will be harmed by either of these two options available to me. My prayer is to cause the least amount of harm.

I plead now for your prayers as I seek to find a path that will cause the least amount of harm to all of you and to the work of Christ that is before us.

The second reason I write, however, is to reassure you and reaffirm to you, my solid commitment to keeping the focus of our ministry here in the Michigan Area on the broader mission of making disciples, a mission which Jesus Christ has set before us. I am also deeply committed to helping guide the process for the creation of a new conference which you have desired and dreamed of for decades.

Friends, I believe finding a resolution to the UMC position on LGBTQ individuals is of tremendous importance. However, it is also clear that no number of letters, or complaints, or trials, or protests in the Michigan Area can ever change the fact that these important matters can only be addressed at General Conference in Portland, Oregon in May 2016. Faithful United Methodists do not agree on the issues surrounding human sexuality. For decades we have debated and discussed this matter, we must ask do we want to continue to use the majority of our leadership's time, energy and resources on matters that ultimately cannot be decided in the Michigan Area?

I have no desire to 'do battle' with any colleague, or to play political games with any cause (important as that cause may be), or to do anything that divides us further. My deepest desire is to keep my focus - and to keep us all focused - on the work of Jesus Christ that is before us and to work toward unity in the Body of Christ.

So, here is my promise to you, I will not allow any distraction to keep me from:

- Focusing my enthusiasm, energy and excitement on the creation of a new unified conference in Michigan
- Working to strengthen the vitality and fruitfulness of our local congregations.
- Supporting other vital issues, such as ending poverty, hunger, violence, racism, and despair.
- Remembering the work of Christ beyond our borders and to the far reaches of the earth.

And I am asking you to do the same.

The work of Christ takes all of us working together to transform this world into the world God envisions us to be. Until May 2016, when our delegates go to Portland, where I pray we will find a path forward on these painful and difficult questions, please join me in:

- Praying for the church – imperfect as it is.
- Praying for this Michigan Area.
- Praying for God's Grace as we seek God's guidance, wisdom and peace.
- Working with Michigan Area leaders to affirm our commitment to care for the whole church.

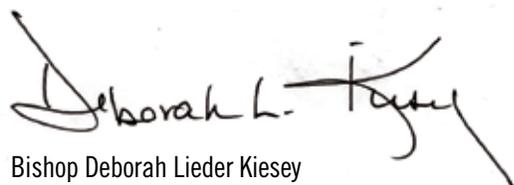
May each of us look into the eyes of every person we meet and see each as a Child of God. Even when we disagree, may we remember to treat one another with love and respect because every one of us is loved by God.

And let us all take to heart these words of Ephesians:

"...to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you (we) have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you (we) were called to the one hope of your (our) calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." - Ephesians 4:1-6

"And remember, I am with you always – to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:20

With you in the work of Christ,



Bishop Deborah Lieder Kieseey
Michigan Area