

Dear beloved ones,

I want you to know, loud and clear, that you are God's beloved. That each and every one of you is created in God's own image. No matter your sexuality. No matter your race. No matter your age. No matter what language you speak. No matter your gender. No matter your ability or disability. But for today's purposes, it needs to be said especially to members and friends of the LGBTQ communities - **You** are loved. **You** are of sacred worth. And **nothing**, not even any church declaration or vote can change that.

As you may already know yesterday concluded the Special Session of General Conference of the United Methodist Church that took place in St. Louis. The purpose of this gathering was to find a way forward for the United Methodist Church with regards to our intense differences on human sexuality. Delegates from around the world came together to vote on plans that would potentially change our rule book (The Book of Discipline) specifically with regards to the ordination and full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in The United Methodist Church, and with regarding the permission of clergy to officiate same sex weddings.

The General Conference passed the Traditionalist Plan. This plan aims to change the Book of Discipline by strengthening discrimination and exclusion. This plan prohibits clergy from officiating same-sex weddings, prohibits "self avowed practicing homosexuals" from becoming clergy, and increases accountability and punitive measures for any clergy person who violates these rules. The practical reality is that so much of the traditionalist plan has already been ruled unconstitutional by our Judicial Council. The Judicial Council will review the plan again in their meeting this coming April. This means that what this truly means is unknown and still unfolding. As much as we would like quick answers so that we can decide our response, I encourage you, if you can, to hold steady as we untangle what is happening.

Here's what I know. Even if it is eventually gutted or thrown out, just the passing of the traditionalist plan has made a statement that wounds many beloved children of God. The first of our General Rules is Do No Harm, and we, as the UMC have violated that. We have failed, and we have done harm.

The General Conference was made up of about 860 delegates and the traditionalist plan passed by 54 votes. That means we are still deeply divided. 860 people do not speak for the entire 12 million people in the denomination. It does not speak for the vote among delegates from the US, two thirds of whom supported the One Church Plan. And it does not speak for our local congregation of Eastport UMC.

Written on our sign are the words "All Souls Welcome Here." LGBTQ+ people, we love you, we affirm you, we are blessed by you, and we need you to be whole. It is my hope and prayer that EUMC will continue to care for all people. That we will continue to welcome all people. That we will continue to love and serve all people and affirm their sacred worth and divine image. The General Conference's decision does not and will not change who Eastport is. As long as I am the pastor here, I am committed to our church being a church open to all.

Let us pray for all those who were in attendance in St. Louis which was a very difficult and painful gathering. Let us pray for all our LGBTQ+ siblings and their families, friends, and allies who are grieving right now. And let us pray for our leaders as we sort out all the details and begin to find a way forward.

I'm here to listen. And I promise to share with you whatever information I receive and to try to answer whatever questions you have. If you would like to watch our Bishop's response and town hall session you are invited to view it this Saturday March 2, from 9am-12pm through the conference website: bwcumc.org or to join the livestream in-person sites for our district at Severna Park UMC in Severna Park and West River Camp in Churchton.

As always, I am honored and privileged to be your pastor.

Love,

Pastor Michelle

EASTPORT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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