

UPDATE FROM GENERAL CONFERENCE

The United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis ended last night. For those of you who predicted that this meeting would be both frustrating and confusing, you were right. Most of the time when we have these big legislative conferences, there is a mixture of boredom and politics, but also some really rewarding moments when we realize how much difference we are making together in the lives of real people around the world. There is a sense that we are moving the mission forward with justice and health and discipleship.

This General Conference was limited to one issue – and seemed to have all the negatives with none of those rewards. The issue on the agenda was whether to remove the prohibitions against same-gender weddings and ordination of “self-avowed, practicing homosexuals.”

Many of us here supported the One Church Plan. That plan was defeated at the General Conference. The Traditional Plan passed. The other plans got very little support or consideration. There were a series of votes and the traditionalist items passed consistently with a majority of 55% to 45%.

As polls had predicted, it appears that 2/3 of the US delegates voted for the One Church Plan, with the other 1/3 of US delegates joining almost all of the international delegates (making up 40% of the total 864 delegates) supporting the Traditional Plan.

The delegates also passed a plan of “disaffiliation.” This has sometimes been called the “gracious exit” for churches who cannot in good conscience live with what has been decided by the General Conference.

Here is where it gets more confusing. During the deliberations, our church’s Supreme Court, called the Judicial Council, again ruled that much of the Traditional Plan is unconstitutional.

What happens now? The entire Traditional Plan will go back to the Judicial Council. That Council will meet again in April. At that time, many of us expect that the entire Traditional Plan will be thrown out as being in violation of our church constitution. That would put us back to the current Discipline and set up another big confrontation at the regular General Conference in Minneapolis in 2020.

At the very end of the General Conference in St. Louis, a representative of the Western Jurisdiction (made up of 7 Annual Conferences) stood up and announced that they will follow the One Church Plan. She further invited other Jurisdictions and Annual Conferences to join them in this action.

Will United Methodist Churches take the gracious exit? This option was approved to be effective as of today, but logistically would probably take a little time to work out. It is not clear, however, which churches might leave. Some of the churches supporting the Traditional Plan were the key backers of the gracious exit. We expect some of them will leave now that they can do this and take their church property with them. They have already had lawyers working on setting up a new denomination. Some individuals who have been pushing for full inclusion are saying that they may leave the UMC because they cannot stand LGBTQIA persons being treated as second class citizens. It appears that more, however, are saying that they are going to stay and fight for greater inclusion for all persons.

What does this mean for our local church? Your pastors will go to a debriefing session on Friday, and then a session with our Bishop on Saturday. We want to make sure we understand everything as clearly as possible. We will give you an update this weekend in worship.

Please seek us out if you have questions or need to talk. We care about you.

We may not know for a couple of months the real impact of this General Conference or what decisions we will need to make as a local church. We are committed to moving ahead as a church. We do not have to wait for a General Conference to tell us who we are. We have great ministry ahead of us. We will grieve with those who are grieving. We will continue to grow in our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus Christ. We will share God's Love and Grace with a hurting world. We will be family, together.

Everyone is welcome here, including persons who identify as LGBTQ+.

Talk with you more soon,

Pastors Kent, Kathy and Kim