

faith meets life...

Making Sense of the UMC This Week

February 28, 2019

Well, that is a tall order so let me manage expectations. I want to share as best I can, a basic explanation of what happened and some thoughts regarding the work done.



On Tuesday the called special General Conference of the United Methodist Church ended after 4 days of prayer, vigorous debate, lots of votes, parliamentary procedures and lots of heartbreak around the topic of same gender marriage and ordination of gay and lesbian clergy. No matter your position on this topic, it was hard on everyone. By the end of the day here is some of what happened over the course of the Conference:

1. The Traditional Plan was approved by the body of the Conference by a vote of 438-384 where 412 votes were needed. Clearly not a resounding majority so again, our body shows a lack of consensus on how best to discern God's will on this.
2. A version of The Traditional Plan passed by a vote of 438-384. A total of 412 votes were needed for passage. Twenty-six votes is not a resounding majority. So again, our body shows a lack of consensus on how best to discern God's will. The Traditional Plan upholds the current Book of Discipline and more specifically defines the language around homosexuality.
3. An Exit Plan for churches that disagree with the denominational stance on sexuality was also passed. It is only effective through December 2023. The intent is for a church to be able to exit with its property so long as they pay certain apportionment and pension

obligations. Currently, there is no defined exit path for a church. Property issues are very tricky in The United Methodist Church because of our Trust Clause that states that all property is held in trust for benefit of the denomination. If a church ceases functioning as a church the property reverts back to the denomination.

4. Another petition that passed rather resoundingly was a plan to protect unfunded clergy pension responsibilities when any clergy or churches choose to leave the denomination.
5. The One Church Plan did not make it out of legislative committee sessions to the plenary floor of Conference. It was 38 votes short of making it on to the floor for a full vote. Again, just making the point of how close all of these votes were.
6. Unfortunately, a great deal of the Traditional Plan and the Exit Plan have already been ruled unconstitutional by our Judicial Council, and the legislation was not amended to address the Judicial Council rulings before it was passed by the General Conference. There was a petition passed requesting all of the petitions adopted be reviewed by our Judicial Council so we are now waiting for their verdict. It will be several weeks before a decision comes down.
7. We don't know if just some or if all of The Traditional Plan will be deemed unconstitutional. . And if just some, what parts would become law? Based on the prior rulings, it is very possible not much would remain. Which could put us back largely to where we started..
8. It is going to take time for this to settle and for us to truly understand what this actually means for our denomination.

Because of that last point, I personally believe it is critical to wait and see what transpires over the next couple of weeks. While some of the exchanges and speeches on the floor of General Conference were difficult for many to hear for a variety of reasons on both sides of this topic and while it was disappointing to see the bulk of the work of the Commission on the Way Forward fail to receive full discussion and vote by the whole plenary, the dust just hasn't settled yet.

As I have studied what has happened, read and talked with some of the delegates that were there, and learned from my husband who is the Conference Chancellor for the WNCC and has heard from his fellow Chancellors as they try and make sense of the legal implications of all of this, there are still a great deal of unknowns. I know that there are groups like the Wesley Covenant Association (WCA) that are trying to discern whether they want to remain in the denomination or not. The Western Jurisdiction of the UMC (the west coast essentially of the US) has already declared that while they want to stay in relationships with the global UMC they will remain inclusive as necessary to do mission and ministry to the people in their contexts but want to continue to dialogue about what that means in the United Methodist Church. Who will stay? Who will go? There are a lot of moving parts that I personally, want to wait and see where they land before being able to make sense of the implications of the votes this week.

While there is much I do not yet know or understand, I do know this. Boone UMC is still a church community that will gather on Sunday to worship and serve and glorify God and help others do that as well. We are a church that will continue to live into our mission to love our community and invite all to discover life in Christ. We will do our best to continue to live into our vision to become transformed disciples who live for the transformation of hearts, the Church, our community and the

world. No vote at General Conference changes that for us.

The other thing I do know is that God is not done with this process in our denomination. God loves the Church too much and God loves each of us, and God especially loves God's creation so much that the murk and muck we find ourselves in at the moment is not where we will stay. And I truly believe God will help us figure out a path forward so that all can be cared for one way or another. But friends, I don't know what that means yet or what that looks like. I just know I have peace in my deepest spirit that we have been brought to a place of action, and those that are way smarter than me will figure out how to make sure everyone is tended to on both sides of this equation. It just may look different than it looks now. And it may look differently than what we thought it might have been a week ago. I'm a theologian so I am ok with the gray.

We are both sinfully flawed and beautifully created. We are both forgiven by God and capable of turning away from God in the next breath. We are both amazing witnesses to God's love in our lives, and yet we make horrible choices that are no example to anyone. We see the Kingdom already arriving, and we see the not yet part of a future Kingdom that feels far away. I'm good with the gray.

I find it interesting that Tuesday morning St. Francis of Assisi's Prayer was part of my morning devotion. What a beautiful reminder that we live in a world of great contrasts and how God calls us to seek the light and be the light in the midst of the pain and darkness we might be surrounded by. Again, whether you are supportive of the Traditional Plan or supportive of the One Church Plan or neither, people are hurting right now, our denomination is in flux, and seeking peace in the midst of it all, this was a balm to my weary soul. These words might be helpful to you right now as well.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen

-Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

Let's all take a breath. Let's wait for clarity and understanding. Let's remember the whole world is watching. Watching what we say, what we do, how we treat one another. Let's look for God's signal and next step. And let's try and be an instrument of peace and people who love God and love neighbor with the core of who we are. The rest will continue to sort itself out. Of that, I am sure.

Grace and Peace,

Lory Beth