



To the Members and Friends of Buncombe Street United Methodist Church

From: Rev. Dr. Bob Howell, Senior Minister

Re: 2019 General Conference

If we learned anything at the special called General Conference (February 23-26, 2019), we learned that the United Methodist Church is deeply divided. It is clear that the outcome of the General Conference would have been much different had the Conference been comprised exclusively of delegates from the United States. The United States is passionately divided. Look at political maps of the U.S. during election time with the red states and blue states. If we superimposed over that map the voting delegates from the General Conference, it would closely align with the political divide in the U.S. The vote at the General Conference on the issue of same-sex marriage and ordination was heavily influenced by the African delegates and the delegates from the Philippines.

As we all know, Christian denominations across the country are struggling with issues surrounding homosexuality and how we care for people without regard to their sexual orientation while maintaining a Biblical understanding of marriage and human sexuality.

The history of this debate in the United Methodist Church began in 1972 (the year I graduated from high school). For forty-seven years we have debated, struggled, prayed, and sought to find a position that can be embraced, morally and spiritually, by progressives, traditionalists and conservatives. The Bishops even named a group of pastors and church leaders to study and work on a document called "Finding Our Way Forward." Thirty months of work in this high-powered group resulted in a plan that was roundly rejected by the General Conference.

The result of the Called General Conference was to reaffirm the same position on the issue of same-sex marriage and ordination of LGBTQ clergy that has been upheld by the last thirteen General Conferences.

Only God knows what the future holds for the United Methodist Church. The denomination would be well served to dismantle its top-heavy bureaucracy and rebuild a minimalist system built around a sound statement of mission and vision that serves the congregations it serves.

As for Buncombe Street, we will continue to seek and serve God's people, stay faithful to our calling and live our lives according to our United Methodist vows to serve God's Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. Buncombe Street will be Buncombe Street. We will continue to worship, to live in fellowship with one another, to train our young, and to engage in service to the community and to the world.