



Heath Christ United Methodist Church

1149 Hebron Rd., Heath, OH 43056

May 5, 2024

To Heath Christ UMC regarding 2020/2024 General Conference:

For the last eleven days, lay delegates and clergy representatives from all over the world have met in Charlotte, North Carolina for the postponed 2020 General Conference of the United Methodist Church. This is the governing body of our denomination that meets every four years to conduct the administrative business of our global church.

This year was markedly different than some of the past General Conferences. The tensions, fighting, and sense of division were gone. There was a deep sense of worship and an excitement to focus on sharing the Gospel of Jesus for the transformation of the world.

Significant legislative actions included the following: Those ordained as deacons may now preside over Holy Communion and Baptism in their ministry settings. Full connection with the Episcopal Church was approved, pending their mutual approval, which allows us to share ministers. Apportionments were decreased.

Additionally, the restrictive language dealing with homosexuality was removed by an overwhelming majority of 93% -- which signifies that individuals representing a wide range of theological perspectives believe it's time to focus on working together with people who may believe differently so we can be a church that is more about love than division. This is exactly what Heath Christ UMC has done so well since I have been here.

This brings our Book of Discipline into a more neutral place. It allows clergy and churches who are in settings where there are larger populations of LGBTQ persons to authentically welcome them. It does not require any church to receive a gay pastor. It also does not require clergy to perform same-sex weddings or for churches to host same-sex weddings.

There are many who are glad we can finally set this aside and focus on ministry. There are some who are being critical, particularly on facebook. I imagine you have friends in both groups and will hear a lot of different responses, and sometimes it's hard to know how to respond. So, with that in mind, I share the following :

Both sides and everywhere in between have biblical reasons for what they believe. It is not that one side is ignoring scripture and the other isn't. The passages in scripture that deal with homosexuality seem clear in English. Their meaning, however, is not quite as clear when read in the context of ancient Greek and Hebrew language and culture.

What is clear is this: Jesus said, "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. / Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. / Just as I have loved you, love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

There are a lot of people right now who are weary and carry heavy burdens in our family of faith, our families, our workplaces, and in our neighborhoods – who need to know the peace and hope

of Jesus. Determining who is right or wrong won't help any of them. Unconditionally sharing the love of God with mercy and compassion will.

May God continue to lead and guide us as a community of faith so that in all we say and do, we welcome others to know the love and grace of God.

You are welcome to contact me with questions regarding General Conference or to discuss any of this further.

Grace & peace,

Pastor Susan