

February 2019 Caller



Pastor Ken's Message

This article is longer and more involved than usual, but it is vital that we have an understanding of what is happening in our beloved United Methodist Church, so please read it through and do not hesitate to contact me with questions or to have a conversation.

A Special General Conference will be held in St Louis, MO, February 23-26 to seek to discern "A Way Forward" for The United Methodist Church regarding our inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) persons in the life of the church. You may have read or heard information about the Commission on A Way Forward in the conference paper, previous Caller columns, my General Conference sermon/report in 2016, Facebook, blogs, or in personal conversations. Here is a summary of the process and legislation. At the end, I will share what I hope, expect, and fear will happen.

In 1973, language was inserted into the Book of Discipline which stated, "Homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." United Methodists have been debating and legislating around that language ever since. As you are aware, my understanding is that our language and practice are discriminatory. I have actively worked throughout my 25-year ministry to change our stance to welcome all people. Hughes/EI Buen Samaritano UMC has declared that we are a reconciling congregation, fully and openly welcoming all people.

A resolution was passed at General Conference 2016 asking the Council of Bishops to lead the church to discern a way forward regarding human sexuality

and forming the Commission on a Way Forward. The bishops recruited the 32-member commission from across the geographic, theological, and cultural spectrum of United Methodists, including at least 2 openly LGBTQ members. The Commission met nine times over a 17-month period building relationships with one another and discussing several options for moving forward. Additionally, the Council of Bishops called a Special General Conference to receive the work of the Commission and determine a path forward.

Three plan outlines were presented to the Council of Bishops in November 2017, which included a Traditionalist, One Church, and Connectional Church plan (The plans will be discussed below). The bishops asked the Commission to set aside the Traditionalist plan and continue working on the other two. Full plans were refined and presented to the Council in May 2018 and more than 80% of the Bishops voted to support the One Church plan, but decided that the report to General Conference would include the other 2 plans as informational footnotes, which then expanded into full enabling legislation. A group of bishops worked to fill out the traditional plan, which had been set aside. The bishops also asked the Judicial Council (The UMC Supreme Court) to rule on the constitutionality of the plans. They found large portions of the Traditional Plan unconstitutional, nearly all of the One Church plan constitutional, and refused to consider the Connectional Plan due to the complexities and number of Constitutional amendments necessary to implement it.

Now, for the plans themselves:

The **One Church Plan**, recommended by Council of Bishops, allows for local option determined by majority vote, and individual choice based on personal conscience. Annual Conferences can choose whether or not to ordain LGBTQ men and women as clergy. Local congregations can determine whether or not to hold same-gender weddings on their property. Clergy can decide for whom they will perform weddings, without penalty. Bishops will have to take into consideration the theological positions of congregations and clergy when making appointments, but they already do that now. This plan leaves the General Boards and Agencies intact.

The **Connectional Plan** creates three theologically-based conferences under one United Methodist umbrella. A traditionalist conference would be established for those conferences, congregations and pastors who will not allow ordination nor marriage of LGBTQ persons, with severe penalties in place for breaking these rules. A Centrist conference would be established with local option and individual choice, much like the One Church plan described above. A Progressive conference would be established which is fully inclusive of LGBTQ persons, with no restrictions on ordination or marriage due to sexual orientation. Annual conferences, local congregations and pastors would choose the conference with which to align. Administrative boards and agencies would remain intact and serve all three conferences, while discipleship and mission boards would be evaluated and redesigned.

The **Traditionalist Plan** keeps the current prohibitions of LGBTQ clergy and marriage intact and strengthens the penalties for breaking the rules. Clergy and annual conferences would be required to certify that they are upholding and will uphold the Discipline. Conferences, local congregations, and clergy would have the option to leave the denomination and form a new denomination or denominations, but the financial penalties for doing so are significant. General boards and agencies remain largely intact.

These are quick sketches of the primary plans which will be considered later this month. Other plans have been proposed, as well, including the **Simple Plan**, offered by the Queer Clergy Caucus. This plan removes all language which excludes and penalizes, without mandating how conferences, congregations and clergy are in ministry with LGBTQ members. This is the plan which I would like to see passed, as it truly allows for local and individual choice, without legislating how to accomplish it. It is precisely this lack of legislative control which will likely keep it from being approved.

Of the primary plans, I believe the Connectional Plan aligns the denomination in a manner which is the most honest regarding the variety of theological positions. However, it is incredibly complicated to implement, requiring several amendments to the Constitution, which has a very high threshold for change (and rightfully so). Due to its complexities, the likelihood of its passing is very small. The One Church plan is an incremental step forward, which the majority of us could live with, because we will find a conference and/or church which aligns with our theological thinking. However, it still allows for discrimination within the denomination. It maintains the *big tent* of Wesleyan thought and theology; agree to follow and serve Christ, disagree about some theological positions, but remain in relationship. Honestly, due to its exclusive, rigid, punitive and controlling nature, the Traditionalist plan is a non-starter for me, so I hope it does not pass. A friend has described that plan as, "catastrophic."

So what is going to happen in St. Louis? The short answer is, no one knows. Delegates have three days to make decisions about 78 petitions and resolutions, most of which are enabling legislation for one of the plans outlined above. Any work brought to the floor can be amended. Any decision will change the direction of the denomination. Many have speculated on which theological group has the votes; this is one time I doubt anyone knows. We are an international church with congregations in deeply

progressive communities and congregations in nations where it is punishable by death to be LGBTQ. No matter what decision is made, there will be some people and congregations who will decide to leave the denomination, and yes, there is the possibility of open schism. But, with the effort which has gone into this process, and the nature of large organizations, there is considerable momentum to find a way to maintain unity within our diversity. My biggest fear is that no decision is reached, nothing happens, and we remain status quo, postponing a decision until General Conference 2020 or beyond.

We need to be in prayer for our Baltimore-Washington delegation and all who will gather in St. Louis at the end of the month. A couple of things are certain as we move forward. We, and congregations across the denomination, will gather for worship on Sunday, March 3 (the first Sunday after General Conference). We will sing and pray, God's word will be proclaimed, and we will gather as community around the Table to be nourished by the presence of Christ. Ultimately, God is with us, to celebrate and mourn, forgive and guide, strengthen and renew, and lead us into God's promised future, where join together as brothers and sisters in the kin-dom of God.

Postscript: The conference will be sponsoring a livestream conversation and prayer service on Saturday, March 2. With our technology, I have offered our sanctuary as a remote site where people can gather to join in this event. Watch the bulletin for further details.

February Worship Opportunities

February 3 – Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Scripture: Matthew 6:7-21

Sermon: "Where is Your Treasure?"

Theme: Motivations for building relationship with God
A Celebration of Holy Communion

February 10 – Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Scripture: Matthew 7

Sermon: "Do to Others..."

Theme: Motivations for building relationships with our neighbors

February 17 – Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Scripture: Matthew 13:24-43

Sermon: "The Kingdom of Heaven is Like..."

Theme: Growth in God's kingdom

February 24 – Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-33

Sermon: "More Than Enough"

Theme: God provides abundantly for our physical and spiritual needs and sends us out to serve others.

Our Church Family

New Member:

David Merrick

Births:

Kimber Adelia Phang born October 16, 2018 (8 lbs 9 oz and 22 " long). Parents Addie Merrick and Pepe Phang. Grandparents: David and Lu Merrick.

Sasha Constance Magnuson born November 3, 2018. Daughter of Megan Moyerman and Sear Magnuson.

John Alexander Ripley born December 3, 2018 (9 lbs 9 oz and 23" long). Parents: Matthew & Elizabeth Ripley. Grandparents: Rick & Kathy Ripley

Risa Marie Whitney born January 9, 2019 (9 lbs and 22" long). Parents: Rob & Sophia Whitney. Grandparents: Ken & Carol Whitney. Brother Domini Whitney.



The Giving Tree a Success!

Thank you all for your continued support of the Giving Tree this holiday. We surprised three families with gifts, food and cleaning/hygiene essentials again this Christmas. Here is a photo of the tree decked out in ornaments. You have blessed many again.

Special thanks to Mark Weaver and Rick Ripley for extra help. -Jill Glixon and Kathy Ripley

Financial Snapshot

2018 Total Income

\$562,442

2018 Total Expenses

\$558,534

Kindly e-mail your Caller articles to Marty Weaver, Editor at caller@hughesumc.org or place them in the Caller drawer outside of the Church Office by the 15th of each month.

Please visit the Hughes Website at www.hughesumc.org



52 WEEKS
HOMELESS SCRIPTURE & PRAYER CALENDAR
Written by the District Laity

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 16-18

"In Loving Memory of Rev. Adrienne Terry: an Affordable Housing Initiative in her Honor".

In an effort to focus our meditations, prayers and funds on Homelessness this year, the lay leaders of the conference have created this spiritual guide. **Please commit to use the readings as part of your devotions for the year.** Churches are also challenged to give an amount of money equal to the number of the week each week of the year. (For example: on week 14 we would give \$14; on week 52, \$52). If you are called to contribute to this cause, you may contribute once or every week by marking your envelope or check with the "homeless" notation.

Adapted from Rev. Green's letter

In Christ's love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerard A. Green, Jr." in a cursive style.

Rev. Dr. Gerard A. Green, Jr.

District Superintendent Greater Washington

Week 1

Psalm 91:1-2

Those who live in the shelter of the most high will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. The Lord is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I will trust. The Lord alone is my refuge, my place of safety.

PRAYER O God of abundance, send angels to protect us and give us the courage we need to press on in your name. We are standing on your promise to shelter us through the storms of life and anchor us in the joy of your peace. Help us to hold on to make a breakthrough to the showers of blessings we need. Anoint us with assurance that we will receive the blessings we need on time, in God time. Even in our times of distress, help us to open our eyes to renew the spirit of trusting you to give us what we need. Touch us with the patience to wait on you and let you guide us to the places of shelter you provide. Then help us to open our hands to receive your new mercies and care, with gratitude and praise. Amen. Mary McCurty, GW District Lay Leader

Week 2

Psalm 61:3

For you alone are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me.

PRAYER O God of mercy we thank you for your everlasting love. We are thankful that we feel safe under your agape love. We find comfort and refuge in you because we believe in you. Lord we know that if we continue to put our trust in you, you will never leave us nor forsake us. Help us Lord as we continue to be strong in our faith journey, knowing you are always beside us. Amen. Emilia Deigh, Grace UMC, Takoma Park

Week 3

Psalm 61:3

For you alone are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me.

PRAYER Lord, we both know there are those out there who don't feel safe because they do not have a home nor enough food. You are their refuge... come and comfort them... be their fortress where the enemies of homelessness and hunger attack them. Amen. Larry Williams, Lay Leader, Concord-St. Andrews UMC

Week 4

Psalm 46:1

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in time of trouble. So, we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.

PRAYER Our Father our God, thank You for being everything that we need! You are the God who is more than enough. You are a constant reminder to us through Your creation when You spoke the Word everything came into existence like--the sun, rain, trees, and winds-- to show us that You are with us! You have not left us nor have You forsaken us. Thank You for the wind's breeze as it touches our skin to remind us that Your hands are upon us and Your air gives us life. Thank You for the rain that falls as it reminds us that Your Living water nourishes our soul. Thank you, Lord God, for the trees as it reminds us of growth, strength, stability in standing firm in Your Word no matter the situation. Thank you for the sun as it reminds of us of Your power and strength! God, you have always proven Your faithfulness to us in our darkest hours, and our darkest hours will not always be, because You are our All in All. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray! Amen. Karen Robinson, Lay Leader, UMC of the Redeemer

Week 5

Luke 9:3

He told them: Take nothing with you for the journey - no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.

PRAYER Most merciful Father we thank you for your most blessed assurance of your love and providence for your children. Father, we know that all things come from you and that you supply all our needs as we journey through life, we know that you provide for birds of the air so you will always provide for your children, too. May you continue to be the source of our needs. Amen Audrey Arthur, CLM, Grace UMC, Takoma Park

Week 6

Luke 14:13

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, and you will be blessed.

PRAYER Dear Lord: We thank you for your teaching of inclusivity to all. Jesus Christ taught your word of radical hospitality: to the woman at the well, the tax collector, the leper, the beggar, and Everyone he met, especially those who are often marginalized. Everyone is equal before God, and that is the fundamental truth of our humanity. May we live this truth with compassion and understanding for the circumstances of others. In Jesus name we pray. Amen Amy Duroska, Lay Leader, North Bethesda UMC

Week 7

Matthew 25:35

For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me into your home.

PRAYER Father, as you challenge us to grow in our lives to see beyond our own personal needs, our prayer is to come closer to perfection as we desire to feed the hungry, give water to those who thirst, to provide shelter to those who are unhoused and to clothe those who shiver and need warmth. God that you grace us and honor us to be your hands and feet, help us to see this as an honor as well as a privilege that you gift us. God fill us with your love so in meeting the needs of others we not only do what is right, we fulfill the purpose of our lives as we strive to follow the example of our Lord Jesus, not just because He did these things because He could, but because it was who He Is-Love. Let our desire to serve our brothers and sisters not just be a sign and symbol to say we did what is good to get a reward, but let our actions be as giving of ourselves the love that is within that comes from above and in the giving we have more to give as God enlarges our capacity to love even more. We thank you for the gift of giving, as it not only helps others and shows your love flowing and growing inside us, it fulfills the purpose you have for us. Thank you, almighty God, in Jesus name. Amen Valerie Stevens, Lay Leader in Training, Petworth UMC

Week 8

Proverbs 19:17

If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord. The Lord will repay you.

PRAYER Gracious God, you fill the earth with your bounty and you give us more than we need. All our desires and needs are known to you, and your grace is sufficient for all. We pray you will strengthen our desire to do your work and share with others in the world, to give shelter to the homeless, bread to the hungry, and clothing to the naked. O God, you have chosen us to be your servants. Guide us to the places where we can share your bounty, and our gifts, and spread your love throughout the world, so we will all be inspired to have hope and peace through Christ Jesus. Amen In honor of Rev. Dr. Gerry Green, GW District Superintendent

Week 9

I Corinthians 4:8

You think you already have everything you need. You think you are already rich. You have begun to reign in God's kingdom without us!

PRAYER O God of faithful assurance, help us to know with every breath we take, but for your grace, we would be seeking our next meal and shelter from strangers. Help us to remember we have no right to make judgements about the choices of others. We have nothing that you have not given us. Everything we have is a gift from you, and we want to be humble servants and generous stewards - feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and building shelter for the homeless. Guide us to be humble and to do more to make disciples in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen In memory of Rev. Adrienne Terry, who served the homeless