

GENERAL CONFERENCE 2019

PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT ABOUT GENERAL CONFERENCE

IS IT TIME?

Dear Friends:

The 2019 Special General Conference of the United Methodist Church met in St. Louis, Missouri February 23-26, 2019.

This General Conference revealed how deeply divided United Methodists are over issues regarding the ordination and marriage of Homosexual persons in our congregations.

Consistently, 53% to 55% of the 820 delegates who were present voted to support various motions related to the implementation of the Traditionalist plan which would maintain the current ban on ordaining gay United Methodists or performing weddings in our churches for homosexual persons.

On the other hand, a significant minority of 45% to 47% of the delegates voted against the Traditionalist plan. The One Church Plan which would allow pastors, congregations and conferences to decide if they would ordain and marry gay clergy did not receive enough votes in the legislative session to be considered in the plenary session.

It seems obvious that we are a deeply divided denomination over this issue and that our best efforts to find a way to keep the denomination together over the past 40 years has not been successful.

This situation causes me to weep because I have good friends who are all deeply devoted disciples of Jesus Christ and are on opposite sides of this issue. I have attended 12 General Conferences since 1976 and have been part of countless dialogues and commissions which have tried to find a way to unify our denomination without success. In the past, I have opposed all efforts to divide our denomination.

However, this past General Conference convinced me that continuing to quarrel over this issue hurts people on all sides, does not glorify God, does not demonstrate unconditional love for all people, or help make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Therefore with a heavy heart and deep regret I believe it may be time for our leaders to find a way for United Methodist Christians to separate so that we stop harming each other and each side can get on with the business of sharing God's Good News with a hurting world in new and separate organizational structures.

This would not be the first time in the history of the Christian Church that Christians have separated into different organizational structures. Martin Luther sought to reform the Roman Catholic Church in the 15th century which resulted in separating the Lutheran Church from the Roman Catholic Church. In the 18th century, John Wesley sought to bring new life in the Anglican Church in England and this resulted in the Methodist Church separating from the Anglican Church.

Even in the New Testament, St. Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement over the faithfulness of Mark. Acts 15:39 says: "The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company." Barnabas took Mark

and they went to Cyprus and Paul took Silas and they went to share the Good News throughout Syria and Cilicia. Acts 15:36-41

At Mt Denali Visitors Center in Alaska there are the skeletons of two bull elk who fought against each other so hard they interlocked their horns and neither could disengage from the other so they both died with their horns interlocked. If we cannot find a way to peacefully disengage in this conflict, we may severely damage the mission and ministry of the United Methodist Church for decades to come.

Regardless of how the United Methodist Church is organized now or in the future, the mission of United Theological Seminary is to welcome any followers of Christ regardless of denomination, race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation to be a part of the United Theological Seminary community so that God can use us to become faithful and fruitful Christian leaders who make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world In whatever Christian tradition they choose.

Here is my daily prayer for the United Methodist Church: "O God, I surrender the United Methodist Church into your hands. Do with it as you will. Whatever you do I thank you. In Christ's name. Amen

May God bless us all as we seek to be faithful leaders in a challenging time.

Grace and Peace,

Kent Millard