COVENANT
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Dear Church Family,

The greatly anticipated General Conference of the United Methodist Church is now complete so we, your Leadership Board, want to bring some clarity and understanding to the complex issues that have caused disruption across the denomination over the last many years.

(Previous letters about these challenging topics are still available on our website: covenantumc.net/we-are-united-methodist)

The most important thing to note about United Methodist Church is that our mission remains the same; to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This is still the anchor of our work together, and it is on this we must continue to focus.

Our doctrinal standards have also remained intact. The Bible is our standard for faith and practice and that has not nor will ever change. In addition to the Bible, we rely on the Articles of Religion, The Confession of Faith, and Wesley's Standard Sermons and Notes on the New Testament. These standards have guided us throughout the Methodist movement and history and will for all of our future.

One of the most important, yet least talked about, acts of General Conference was to regionalize. The United Methodist Church is a world-wide church. We are active on 4 continents with more than half of our members outside the United States. Regionalization decentralizes the U.S.-centric governance of the church and allows the various regions of the world to adapt their ministries accordingly (or contextually). This action will require ratification, as it is a constitutional change, and every Annual Conference must vote on it. (Constitutional change ratification requires a 2/3 aggregate majority vote across all Annual Conferences in the world.)

Similar actions provided a "win" for every local church, which can now be fully contextual in its ministries. Bishop Frank Beard said it this way,

> *"No one is telling any local church what they must believe or proclaim. No one will send you a pastor that goes against the positions of your congregation. If you are a conservative church, you can continue being a conservative church. If you were hoping for a more progressive approach to ministry, the door has been opened for you to be more intentionally progressive."*

Regarding our polity, many key changes restored the language of our Book of Discipline to when we first began in 1968, and others embody that effort while making some modifications.

Marriage: The General Conference affirmed that marriage is between a man and a woman, but also offered that marriage can be between two consenting adults. This major change now allows pastors and churches to allow same gender weddings. Pastors retain the authority over what weddings they will officiate. No one, though, will be forced to violate their own conscience. Local churches, too, can decide what weddings are held in their churches and church owned facilities. The Leadership Board has already begun this discussion.

Removal of Restrictive LGBTQ Language: This includes lifting the ban on ordination and mandatory penalties for clergy performing same sex weddings. Language throughout the Book of Discipline was adjusted to accommodate these changes including removing the statement "Homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" which was added some years ago.

Other important changes include: Reducing the General Church budget by 43% which will reduce the apportionment to Annual Conferences, allowing clergy to be appointed across annual conference boundaries, giving authority to Deacons to administer the sacraments, and creating a revised Social Principles that reflect the global nature of the church.

Amid all of these changes, what is important to note is that most actions restore the Book of Discipline to a neutral stance, preventing discrimination against any group. This approach accommodates differing opinions within The United Methodist Church by avoiding broad mandates. It reflects the inclusive spirit of the United Methodist Church's foundation in 1968 and reaffirms our commitment to unity - to being the church together. (See the letter on our website from June 2022 for more on this.)

So, while a lot has changed in the United Methodist Church, the reality is not much has changed. Especially the ministry we provide at Covenant UMC.

We ARE United Methodist. We first made this statement in 2022 recognizing that Covenant United Methodist Church already holds a variety of theological perspectives and yet we work side by side in ministry every day. We live what John Wesley described a long time ago about Methodists,

> *"Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences."*

Even then, Wesley understood the great differences among us under the same banner of Methodism. And yet, the Methodist movement grew like crazy with this theological diversity.

So what is next for Covenant UMC? We will continue our ministry by connecting people to Jesus, building communities, and taking our next steps of faith together. Your Leadership Board continues deep conversations over these and many other issues seeking and working toward solutions that benefit the whole church. Mostly we are looking forward so that our ministry can be productive and Christ-honoring in all we do.

We are Covenant United Methodist Church and are committed to vital ministry for many decades to come. We are striving diligently to be a welcoming church for all people like we always have been. We are not all on the same theological page, but we are on this journey together. May we hold the same attitude reflected in a statement attributed to many in Christian history including John Wesley, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

In Grace,

Covenant UMC Leadership Board

Rev. Chris Nunley
Lead Pastor

Rev. Allison Yankey
Pastor of Connections

Be sure to catch the June sermon series, "**Forward: Methodism and the Future**". It's a look at the foundations of the UMC and explanation of the many changes recently adopted.