

Dear Friends in Christ,

While BUMC continues to uphold the discipline of the UMC as determined in the special session of the General Conference in February, there remains widespread division in our denomination concerning full inclusion of the LGBT community. With multiple organic conversations taking place across Methodism and yet another General Conference scheduled for May 2020, it is possible that the denomination as we have known it, may not continue in the same form. It also seems likely that such divisions may not be settled legislatively. I have been involved in many of these conversations across the theological spectrum as have some of our clergy and laity.

While this is happening denominationally, the ministry of BUMC remains strong and vibrant! The mission of making disciples remains our top priority.

As a lead church in our denomination, our Church Council has seen fit to appoint a team of clergy and lay leaders to engage in a season of prayerful discernment over the next 6-8 months. According to the New Testament, discernment, or discerning the spirits is a gift of the Holy Spirit which enables the church to find clarity in confusion for the sake of unity and mission. Those appointed have been chosen because they have this gift. The purpose of this team is to help us gain a clearer sense of where we are as a church on the issue of inclusion and how best to move forward.

Discernment is not to be done in isolation, but in community. It includes study of Scripture, listening ears, prayerful dialogue, understanding hearts, patient spirits and a willingness to put aside personal agendas for the sake of the good of the body, so that we may be able to say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," (Acts 15). Discernment is not a substitute for action, nor is it a smokescreen for a secret agenda. Discernment is a means of seeking God's way and will for his people in covenant community and prioritizing what is best for the whole.

The team will be processing and analyzing feedback from our members, conducting communal discernment sessions and communicating the process as we go along. Information will be available on our website on the Way Forward link. We will also be teaching on discernment at Refuel on Wednesday evening, September 18. We seek to be open and transparent about our work. We ask for your engagement as these opportunities take place. We also ask for your prayers and patience. Our bishop and district superintendent are supportive of this effort and hope that it might become a model for other churches.

The following persons have agreed to serve on the team: Brandie Bracy, Laura Brantley, Davis Chappell, Sharon Cox, Susan Graham, Laura Hickman, Jenny Hyams, Rusty McIntire, Judy Norris, Doug Ralls, and Lynn Webb. Carol Bumbalough will assist in facilitating the team. We are grateful to these faithful members.

It is a privilege to serve our Lord in partnership with you.

Grace & Peace,

Davis