

## **Summary of Responses to the Survey of BUMC Congregants Regarding Human Sexuality and the United Methodist Church**

### **PURPOSE**

Congregants submitted 656 written and online survey responses between March and September of 2019. The primary purpose of the survey was to invite congregants to share their views regarding the debate over human sexuality in the United Methodist Church and for this information to be available to our Lead Team and Discernment Team as we determine the way forward for our congregation.

### **METHOD**

It is important to note that the survey was qualitative (i.e. open-ended responses) and not quantitative or numbered in the responses solicited and that the survey respondents were self-selecting. *For both of those reasons*, no final conclusions can or should be made regarding the survey results in terms of representing the sentiments of all BUMC. This was primarily a listening, communication tool. The results presented below represent only the opinions of the persons who completed the survey.

Although the data was not collected to be quantitatively analyzed, there has been a lot of interest from the congregation regarding the opinions shared. Thus, within the limitations explained above, we formed a team to code the responses into a format that could be summarized. A careful approach was taken to ensure reliability of coding of responses. We required a minimum of 3 independent raters to agree on the coding of each response. Thus, items were only coded to represent a specific opinion only if there was clear evidence to do so. Items where agreement could not be achieved were coded as "unclear." We believe that the information provided below is a fair representation of the opinions submitted while acknowledging that coding of qualitative data is, by its nature, subjective.

### **SUMMARY**

Overall, one of the most frequent comments we heard, regardless of the person's opinion on the questions of sexuality, was a desire to keep BUMC united and strong. There was a deep love for the mission and ministries of this church. The following is a summary of the surveys as coded by the data analysis team:

1. **How did you become a United Methodist (UM)?** The plurality of respondents (42%) have been lifelong Methodists. This was followed closely by those who made an adult decision to join our denomination (39%). Many joined because they found BUMC to be a place where they could ask difficult questions and find a reasonable understanding of their faith based on their interpretation of scripture, experience, and reason. The next largest group (12%) came to the UMC through marriage, either because they married a

United Methodist or because they found the UMC when each spouse came from different, sometimes polar opposite, denominations.

- 2. What keeps you a United Methodist?** A plurality (43%) responded that the theology of our church was what keeps them United Methodist. Among the more common theological factors were open communion, emphasis on grace, Christ-centeredness, and the opportunity to have open discussion about theological questions without feeling judged. Other responses included relationships, biblical teaching, preaching, mission, worship, and social justice. About 24% did not respond or responded in a way that was unclear.
- 3. How did you feel about the 2019 General Conference Decision?** Roughly 53% of respondents disagreed with the 2019 General Conference decision to support the traditional plan. A few others (1%) disagreed with the tone and process but did not specify whether they disagreed with the decision. About 33% of the respondents agreed with the General Conference decision to support the traditional plan.
  - a. Support of Full Inclusion for LGBTQ Persons** – Although not explicitly asked, many respondents volunteered information about whether they supported or opposed full inclusion (i.e., marriage and ordination of LGBTQ persons). Roughly 36% stated that they supported full inclusion and 29% stated that they did not support full inclusion. The remaining 34% did not clearly state their opinion or had a mixed opinion (e.g., a few supported either marriage OR ordination but not both).
  - b. NOTE:** Of the 53% who disagreed with the 2019 General Conference decision but did not indicate that they supported full inclusion, the responses tended to emphasize a value in maintaining a denomination and church that allowed for theological difference on this and other social issues and a view that the traditional plan does not allow for these kinds of differences.
- 4.** Overall, there was an abundance of evidence that respondents across all views love Christ and this church. Persons from all perspectives relied on Scripture and the example of Christ to support their position. There was a lot of grace exhibited in the face of strong opinions across the whole spectrum of beliefs.