



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for your prayers for The United Methodist Church, for our Holston Conference delegation, and for me leading up to and during our called session of the General Conference, February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis. Your tangible expressions of love through prayers, emails, and texts provided meaningful support and reminded us of God's sustaining grace during long days of conferencing.

As we did our legislative work to determine language for the Book of Discipline related to human sexuality, the Holston delegation was surrounded by United Methodists from the Philippines, Western Angola, California, Illinois, and South Carolina. A 32-member commission presented organizational options to better fulfill our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. In their work, they modeled working together while acknowledging differences and building loving relationships grounded in their common love of Christ and his Church.

The conference experienced high moments of prayer, worship, and wisdom from the brothers and sisters in Christ gathered as delegates, observers, bishops, and volunteers. We also experienced the passion that is revealed when deep love and convictions are expressed within the confines of a legislative process. We came home with mixed emotions as we tried to do our work well, but we are also aware that our results are never perfect.

What was the outcome of the called session of the General Conference?

We retain our language in the Social Principles which includes our affirmation that all persons are of sacred worth and created in the image of God, that we are committed to be in ministry for and with all and that we continue to seek to live together in Christian community and implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. Within that statement we maintain the language that the practice of homosexuality is considered incompatible with Christian teaching. We reaffirmed our current stance on prohibiting the performance of same-gender marriages by our clergy or in our churches and prohibiting the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals.

It became clear that we were not ready to take the step of removing or modifying our current disciplinary language to change our position on same-sex marriage or ordination as proposed in the One Church or Simple Plans.

While we passed the Traditional Plan, it also became clear that much of this material was not fully prepared to be in compliance with our constitution or supported by the committee on central conferences. The approved legislation is under review by our judicial council. The parts that are in compliance with the constitution will be fully determined when the council meets in April.

As has been true at every General Conference, the expected passionate convictions of the delegates and observers were evident during the legislative debate. While some were reassured by the outcome of our legislative work, others were greatly disappointed.

The fruits of our ministry continue to be in our local church settings, in the relationships we build with each other and our communities, and in the ministries we share as a larger Church as we work in partnership all around the world. We continue our commitment to our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

For complete coverage of the conference, visit umc.org. Wil Cantrell, one of Holston's delegates, provided daily summaries and reflections at wilcantrell.com. You are also invited to the Three Rivers District for a Post-General Conference meeting on Sunday, March 3, at 3:00pm at Gray United Methodist Church for additional information and worship.

What's next?

The report that was adopted may bring you joy or concern. It will take time for the dust to settle, for the legislation to be reviewed by the judicial council and finalized. Ultimately, God calls us to carry on, living as faithfully as we know how, to share the love of Jesus Christ with a hurting world. May we remember that Munsey has engaged in meaningful and transformative ministry across these years of debate and we are still poised to continue fruitful ministry.

As we prepared for the conference, many of you shared your hearts, your hopes, and your concerns and I thank you for that gift. I kept your faces before me as I sat through the sessions. You helped me do my work better as I learned from you and your reflections. We will continue to learn from each other and to pray for each other. I trust we will bring the same level of passion to our ministries that we have brought to this conversation.

Munsey is blessed with a diverse congregation. That too is a gift from God that I pray we will honor and treasure. This is a time for us to remember the power of kindness and for us to model the strength of Christian community marked by grace and forgiveness and humility. On our first day of prayer, the delegates offered to each other these words: "If I have ever harmed or hurt you, either intentionally or unintentionally, I ask your forgiveness and offer the peace of Christ to you." I offer those powerful words to each of you and invite you to offer them to each other and to our neighbors beyond the church as we seek to live as faithful disciples and witnesses to the world.

This Sunday as we gather for Sunday School and worship we will be with those who love us into faith, support us through life's journeys, and with whom we serve side by side. I look forward to the opportunity to be together. It's good to be home with you.

Blessings,

Carol