

June 18, 2019 Huntley UMC special email concerning Mountain Sky Annual Conference

Dear friends,

The MTNSKY Annual Conference concluded this year's session on Sunday, June 16, 2019 in Billings, Montana. It was a long, difficult few days as pastors and lay members met together. What is clear to me from our time together is that The United Methodist Church is no longer united, but divided over the inclusion of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. We are broken, and it is my opinion that we can never be put back together again.

When the results of the recent Special General Conference was realized in February with the passage of the Traditional Plan which strengthened the language regarding LGBTQ people, which included stricter penalties for those who perform same-sex weddings, I said then and I believe firmly today that it was the worst possible outcome for keeping our church together because it forever divided us on the issue of full inclusion for all people to an equal status in the church.

What will unfold over the coming months and years is not clear except that the church is so broken and divided that a split is almost guaranteed. What does this mean for us as a local church? Not much in the short term. We will continue living into this new reality as we have been for the last few years. We will continue to worship and serve as we always have sharing the Gospel with all who will receive it. In the long term, we will have to wait and see the direction the church takes and the options that are open to us.

One thing is clear to me: We will continue to be the church here in our community, the same church we have always been. What I mean by this is that we will be open and inclusive, inviting and affirming, sharing the love of Jesus Christ with all of God's children, no matter who they are, no matter where they've been, no matter what their struggles and triumphs. We may not agree on all things or issues, but we will treat one another with respect and Christian love, because we follow Jesus who said, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back." Jesus also said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

I am simply asking you to join with me in following Jesus' words. I invite you to let Jesus show . . . by your actions and your words. In the end, that is all we can do as followers of Jesus. Because we are better when we are together, we are better when we don't say, "I'm in and you are out," we are better when we seek to live as Jesus calls us, together, one body, each with distinct gifts, all doing our part. Methodists have always lived and preached a Gospel of Grace, and I will continue to do that as long as I am here, and it is my hope that all of us will commit to this way of life as well.

I recently posted on my personal Facebook page a picture of a church sign that reads: "At the end of the day, I'd rather be excluded for who I include, than be included for who I exclude." I will live by that standard through the coming months and years as our church tries to find its way, and I invite you to join with me in living out that value. At the end of the day, that is what I believe Jesus is calling us to do.

Your brother in Christ,
Pastor Gary Geiman