

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You  No Matter What

June 1, 2022

A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

This month marks ten years since I was ordained as an elder in the United Methodist Church (UMC).

I was raised in the UMC, but it really wasn't until seminary that I began to understand myself as a United Methodist. There were two things that resonated deeply with me.



The first was the foundational understanding of God's grace that is so woven into Methodist theology and history.

By grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit.

This grace surrounds us before we are even aware of it. It lives within us, helping us to awaken to the presence of God within us. It leads us and guides us throughout every season of our life.

This grace reminds us that we already belong, that we are already enough, and that we are loved... no matter what.

The second thing that resonated with me about United Methodism was its focus on the practical work of putting faith and love into action.

Methodism did not arise in response to a specific doctrinal dispute. John and Charles Wesley and the early Methodists were focused on summoning people to experience the grace of God and to grow in their knowledge and love of God through personal and collective disciplines of the Christian life.

As a clergywoman in the United Methodist Church, I knew that I wanted my life and ministry to be focused on these two things. It is my joy to get to do that work with the people of Hilliard United Methodist Church every day.

This weekend, Pastor Jon and I will join more than 2,000 other clergy and laity for the virtual gathering of the 2022 West Ohio Annual Conference.

This Annual Conference will feel different. It will be our first gathering since the Global Methodist Church launched its break-away denomination on May 1 and began inviting local United Methodist Churches to affiliate and leave the UMC.

The Global Methodist Church is being launched by the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA), a more conservative group within the UMC that arose in 2016. This group has been committed to preserving the language in our Book of Discipline that prevents same-sex weddings in UM churches, prohibits members of the LGBTQ community from serving as clergy, and imposes consequences on clergy who officiate same-sex unions.

The path that has led us to this moment has been one of challenge and heartbreak. For more than 40 years, United Methodists have not been of one accord when it comes to our understanding of human sexuality and full inclusion.

Efforts to remove the hurtful and exclusive language in our Book of Discipline toward members of the LGBTQ community have failed to reach a majority. Our last General Conference in 2019 not only failed to give us a decisive path forward, but it also further emphasized the place of brokenness and polarization.

Ideally, the creation of a new denomination would happen in conjunction with a General Conference gathering. This would allow for representatives from around the world to forge a path to divide property and assets in ways that are just and thoughtful. With our next General Conference now delayed until 2024 due to COVID-19, the leaders of the new Global Methodist Church decided to move forward anyway.

Does this change things for Hilliard UMC?



The short answer is NO.

Last year, our congregation voted to join the Reconciling Ministries Network (<https://rmnetwork.org/>). This decision was the result of a two-year lay-led process of discernment.

We made public our decision to be a church of full inclusion and affirmation of LGBTQ persons and our commitment to advocate for the rights of those who find themselves on the margins of church and society.

The decisive nature of the vote (more than 90% in favor) made it clear that the people of Hilliard UMC would continue to stand with the United Methodist Church.

Our church will remain a part of the United Methodist Church. Our name will stay the same. Our values and our beliefs remain true. Like the Methodists who have come before us, we will remain committed to being a church focused on the practical work of putting our love and faith into action, ensuring that our community knows about God's grace and love for them... no matter what.

What can we do during this time in our denomination?

Pray. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are not in communities of faith where the decision will be as clear cut. Imagine how hard it would be for a faith community that was evenly divided. There will be some very painful moments in the next year for many of our fellow United Methodists as their local churches decide to break off and join the Global Methodist Church.

Engage the work of sharing God's love with our community. We need it now more than ever!

On June 11, we will be at the **Hilliard Pride** festival talking with individuals and families about God's love for them and sharing about the ministries of HUMC.

On June 12, we will celebrate our first anniversary as a Reconciling Congregation. It's a great time to invite a friend to worship.

Pastor Jon and I particularly ask for your prayers during this Annual Conference session. May we all be surrounded by grace and find ourselves focused on the work of putting God's love into action.

Grace and Peace,

April



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