



June 7, 2022

A Note from Scott Merillat

Dear Friends,

No matter what, my son is worthy of unconditional love — and you are too!

I'm happy to be celebrating HUMC's first anniversary as a reconciling ministry with you. *We love because he first loved us.* Because the HUMC congregation chose *love*, I chose you.

Before celebrating my son's first gotcha day, Covid shelter-in-place restrictions abruptly halted my new adventures as a single parent. Overwhelmed, I was not able to parent as I had hoped. I trusted in God's plan to move my family to Hilliard, which allowed me to get parenting support from my parents in Northwest Ohio. The summer of 2020, God made the impossibilities of moving fit into place.



I searched for a spiritually safe place for us. On the surface, that probably sounds simple in our click-done culture. I'm your average middle-aged, coffee-guzzling, over-educated, single gay guy who chose to become a parent. My son is a resilient 14-year-old who loves everything cute, soft, cuddly, and shiny. Finding the right community where we belong required patience.

I prayed for an established community that believes God's plan includes forever-families, made with imperfect humans, like mine. I have seen my son thrive in a community that smothered him with love and acceptance. I wanted him to beam with joy again when folks mirror the goodness in his heart and rejoice in his milestones.

God's customized plans have brought me back to the Methodist tradition.

Hearing God's word and the community discussions at HUMC spoke to my spirit. Unlearning Together and the anti-racism speaker series brought awareness and compassion to the spiritual wounds in our community. In 2022, the Great Story is honestly retold without glossing over humanity's indiscretions or cultural disparities (<https://hilliardumc.org/current-message-series/>). Telling the whole story, wow!



From our first in-person visits to HUMC, my son Marcus (the tall one) knew several middle schoolers from Heritage, and some rode the same bus. Lindsay and Nikki welcomed my kiddo into Godly Play. April and the youth group leaders are fun, and they support his path with Jesus; yes, the cake helps too. Plus, he found a kindred spirit who plays the viola. Last Sunday, you saw his excitement and joy to serve pancakes; that's God's love.

I pray all of our kids experience the undeniable feeling of belonging and acceptance.

Seeking assurance of God's plan, I spent time discerning and re-learning the United Methodist Church. HUMC's commitment to diversity, safe sanctuaries, and community outreach put their words into actions. It is an inclusive community that is supporting and affirming of each person's spiritual journey with Jesus. **At HUMC, acceptance of all families is the heart of this community.**

Joining a reconciling church means that I (we) will be psychologically safer. It sows seeds for the next generation to believe their worth, love, and quirks are safe within Jesus — a place where all of God's children have a spiritual home that will support them on life's journey, no matter what.

So, why is a reconciling ministry so important to me? Long ago (in 1860), the conservative UMC members split off to form the Free Methodists. I grew up in the FMC. I love the people. Yet, humans don't flourish in a judgmental environment enforced by anger and fear. Those sermons planted seeds of shame, guilt, fear, and self-loathing. I will not subject my son to those messages.

I came to terms with the fearful, judgmental God of my childhood, who reserved his love for those who are worthy. In the most private spaces of my heart and mind, I need God's love, just as God loves you. Trust cannot exist in the same space as fear.

To thrive spiritually we need love, compassion, and acceptance, which has been my experience at HUMC.

On Ash Wednesday, we Christian people wear the sign of the cross as a mark of our faith. For the 40 days of Lent, we reflect on how we may grow in our faith.

For 30 days in June, we LGBTQ people take pride in our human diversity to live a more authentic life. Pride month builds awareness and diversity in the community to end the isolation and the stigma of being *different*. Our pride flag signifies diversity, openness, and acceptance.

I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him (1 Samuel 1:27). I am blessed to be Marcus's forever dad. I'm grateful to be a member of the HUMC community.

All of my life, I have clung to God's promise: I will never leave you or abandon you (Hebrews 13:5), No Matter What!



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