

Members of Valley United Methodist Church,

You are receiving this letter because the Leadership Team at Valley has become aware of some confusion and unrest that has arisen in our congregation as a result of the recent decision at General Conference. As leaders, we wanted to let you know that we have heard you, and we are doing our best to act in a way that is faithful, compassionate, and wise. So, for starters, we wanted to share a few of the most relevant facts with you, and offer an invitation to move forward together.

At the end of this past February, a Special Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church—which is a gathering of U.M. leaders and representatives from around the world—was called to respond to the growing tensions surrounding our ministry to persons who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer (LGBTQ; the acronym is the preferred way to talk about a very diverse group of people). The central issue of contention is a question: *should those who belong to the LGBTQ community ever be allowed to be ordained as clergy, or married (or otherwise have their same-sex relationship blessed)?*

And as many of you may already know, the outcome of the Special Session was that the ‘The Traditionalist Plan’ was adopted. According to that plan, the answer to the above question is simply: *no*. That has been the official position of the denomination since the 1960’s, **so none of that is new**. The primary change that accompanies the adoption of the Traditionalist Plan will be a stricter enforcement of the rules in the *Book of Discipline*, and the instatement of mandatory penalties for clergy who disobey them.

*So, what does this mean for us at Valley?*

Well, since the rules and stance of our denomination didn’t change, we are still in the same place as we have always been. The ruling does not make us any more or less welcoming, inclusive, or faithful than we had been before. Of course, for many within our church, this is precisely the problem. Many want to see a change on this particular stance; and some people want to expand our welcome, especially to those of the LGBTQ community. And it has come up that some dearly beloved people in our congregation feel they have no other option now than to leave.

Here, we wanted to offer a few reminders and some encouragement:

Our most vital work of faith doesn’t happen in rule books, but in how we personally treat others.

This ruling doesn’t change anything about what **you** can do to be welcoming and inclusive.

If this decision was big enough to make you consider leaving, it should be big enough to lead you to faithful action. If you have a heart for those in the LGBTQ community, be in ministry with them (there is *nothing* to stop you from that). Don't wait for the whole global denomination to change to be where your heart is; love, serve, and act out of your faithfulness now! Otherwise, you're just running away from bad P.R.

We are not all of one heart and mind on this *and that's okay*. It is not everyone's call to be in ministry to those of the LGBTQ community; but for those to whom this topic is a vital matter, that could be a clue to *your calling*. And as a church, it is our responsibility to hold you accountable, and to encourage you to serve as the most faithful version of you as possible. The church needs your ministry. The world needs your ministry. Let's find more ways to build relationships that help us serve, rather than perpetuating the violence that comes from cutting ties with those we don't agree with.

In order to help us move through this period of confusion and unease, Valley UMC will host two opportunities to discuss and learn more about this denominational decision.

If this is a matter of concern to you, please join us in the Fellowship Hall on Sunday, June 23<sup>rd</sup> at 2:00 p.m., or on Wednesday, July 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.