

Bishop Responds to General Conference

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By Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi

Grace and Peace to you. I greet you in the name and with the love of Jesus Christ.

In preparation for the 2019 Special Called Session of General Conference, the Commission on a Way Forward worked with great integrity and faith. As an annual conference we prayed for the work of the delegates. The delegates have now completed their work. They voted to affirm our traditional stance on the role of practicing homosexuals in the life of the church.

I acknowledge that in our annual conference some will be satisfied, some affirmed, some delighted, some hurt, some harmed, and some deeply saddened by the work that was done. I acknowledge the hurt and pain in the community of faithful LGBTQIA United Methodists and those who advocate for them. Know that God is able to hold us together in the midst of our diverse emotions. After all, we serve a God who is able to bring us to a place of simultaneously grieving and having joy - of simultaneously feeling despair and having hope. And so, in all things and at all times, we give God thanks and praise!

At the end of our three days of conferencing I remain confident that God is not yet through with the United Methodist Church. There is more mission and ministry that needs to be accomplished through the people called United Methodists. If you were watching through the livestream you know that several members of our delegation spoke on the floor. As a delegation they were, with respect and love, able to demonstrate the diversity and complexity of United Methodist opinions about the role of practicing homosexuals in the life of the church. I believe God was glorified by the witness of our delegation as they spoke their different opinions and called for points of order on the floor of general conference.

During the debriefing meetings in each of our districts, we've tried to share information about the special session, the legislation that was passed and the next steps. Participants submitted questions that delegates and I answered. We want to continue discussions among various groups in our annual conference as we await the rulings of the Judicial Council on

whether the legislation passed is constitutional* and will go into The Book of Discipline. The debriefing sessions continue through March. Finally, I want to invite you to continue to pray for our delegation. They will share at the debriefing meetings some stories about their own spiritual and emotional journey while in St. Louis. It was a deeply emotional time for all. Our emotions were more deeply impacted by receiving news that Faith Geer, a member of our delegation who was not able to travel with us, passed away during the session. Please lift Faith's family, church family and friends in prayer.

(* note: the Judicial Council is the "supreme court" of the UMC. The Book of Discipline contains the constitution of the UMC. Legislation passed at any general conference must comply with the constitution. This review is a normal process at general conference.)

So What Happened at General Conference?

Following General Conference our Bishop and delegates from Western PA Annual Conference have been traveling to each district reporting the actions of General Conference at "debriefings."

- General Conference voted to retain the language of The Discipline. It still states that all persons are of sacred worth, but that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching.
- The One Church Plan which would have eliminated this language from The Discipline and allowed annual conferences, local churches, and clergy to make decisions regarding their policy was defeated 3 times.
- Par. 304.3 of The Discipline, which prohibits the ordination or appointment of "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" was clarified. Openly living in a homosexual relationship is now included in the meaning of "self-avowed."
- Legislation was passed to define consequences of violations of The Discipline. This legislation may not be constitutional for several reasons. We must wait for the Judicial Council to rule.

It is clear that the 2020 General Conference will deliberate these issues again. It is also clear that the UMC continues to support the present language of The Discipline as it has at every General Conference since 1972. We must continue to pray for the Spirit's guidance for the whole church and for the unity of spirit within the church that Christ desires.