

From Pastor Jan - News from the Denomination



"Changing Lives and Changing the World through Jesus Christ"

Dear Friends:

Good Morning to my Will Chap Family.

I wanted to share with you some **news from the broader United Methodist Denomination**. You may have heard bits and pieces about this on the news or social media. I've gathered the best information I can from resources I trust and I want to make that information available to you. First and foremost, I want you to know that I remain committed to being a pastor to all and in doing everything I can to ensure that the important ministry that God does through the people called Williamson's Chapel continues so that God is glorified and His people are blessed. We are on this journey together. If you would like to meet with me to discuss any of this information or how this is intersecting with you on your spiritual journey, I would welcome that opportunity.

We've been on this journey to find "a way forward" for a couple of years now and I've said I would share any new developments along the way. Here's what I will do in this correspondence.

1. I'll give you a quick overview of what is new and the next step.
2. I'll offer a prayer that you might use in the coming months so that we might **Unite in Prayer** for the sake of our beloved denomination.

3. I'll share a few basics which I hope will help you have a proper context for this development. (Many in the WillChap family do not have a United Methodist background and even some of us who do will need a review.)
4. I'll share what others (who I believe are both trustworthy and "in the know") are reporting.

Here's the quick overview.

The call for a division into two denominations is a **PROPOSAL** that is coming to General Conference in May. This one is perceived to have greater weight and a greater chance of passing because it has been developed by a team that included representatives of differing perspectives. It was actually initiated by and included Central Conference (Non-U.S.) Bishops. There was a mediator, negotiations, and compromise. But given the representatives involved, some of the groups who have radically different stances are supportive of this proposal. If it is implemented as stands, there will be two (could be more) denominations emerge. The General Conference meets in May and can vote to implement this or another proposal.

LET'S UNITE IN PRAYER

Good and Gracious God

We praise you for your gift of the Church and the way you have worked for good through your Church for generations.

We thank you for the difference the Church has made in our lives, for the relationships, the support, the spiritual growth and the opportunities to worship and serve that we have experienced in and through the church.

We confess that we have not always been the Church you created us to be nor have we done all that you have called us to do. We confess that at times we have been wrong, we have focused on other things more than we have the cross, and we have failed to share the love of Jesus. Forgive us we pray.

We pray for our Church, for those who will represent us at General Conference, for those who lead at every level, including our own pastors. We pray that the power of the Holy Spirit will be at work in and through the General Conference so that your will might be done.

We pray for ourselves individually and as the people called Williamson's Chapel. May we be faithful to you and to one another. May the power of the Holy Spirit be at work in and through us so that your will might be done.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Here are the basics for review:

First, just to catch everyone up (this is an oversimplification but I'm doing my best):

- Like most mainline denominations, the United Methodist Church has been struggling with different attitudes toward the inclusion of LGBTQ people for many years.
- For the past 40 years or so, the official stance has been that all people (including LGBTQ) are children of God and are of sacred worth and are welcome to be part of our United Methodist Church. At the same time, the stance of the church was that the practice of homosexuality was incompatible with the teachings of scripture and thus
 - Self-avowed practicing homosexuals could not be ordained
 - Clergy were not allowed to perform any kind of same-sex union or marriage
- The current issue revolves around those two issues. Many in the church feel the ban on the ordination of LGBTQ should be lifted and clergy should be allowed to preside at same-sex marriages. Many in the church feel this should not happen.
- Labels have been thrown around and three seem to have stuck
 - Progressives --- want to move forward now with the ordination of LGBTQ people and allowing (not forcing) clergy to perform same-sex marriages
 - Traditionalists --- want to maintain the current language of our Discipline (United Methodist Law Book) and begin punishing clergy who do not follow the church law.
 - Centrists – Feel they can live and serve together in a church that could find a way to include people with different opinions around these issues.
- The United Methodist Church is structurally organized in a way that is similar to the United States Government. We have three branches of government.
 - The General Conference (Congress). Delegates to General Conference are elected from Annual Conferences (ours is Western NC) across the world. An equal number of laity and clergy are elected. The number of delegates from each annual conference is determined by the number of members. The General Conference is the only entity that can truly speak for the church. This decision like all decisions will be decided by this group (not to exceed 1000) of elected clergy and laity.
 - The Episcopacy (Bishops) are like the President. They have no vote at General Conference. Their job is to lead at the Annual Conference level,

assign preachers to churches, and see to it that the rules of the church are followed.

- The Judicial Council is like the Supreme Court. They make sure that the actions of the General Conference or at some other level of the church are in keeping with the Constitution of our church.
- This proposal will go to the General Conference which meets in May. The Judicial Council will have to decide if it is in keeping with the Constitution or if it would require a change to the Constitution. The decisions of the General Conference will then come back to Annual Conferences (ours meets in June.)

And so, the shared journey toward "A Way Forward" continues. I'm glad to be on this journey with YOU. Can't wait to meet you and Jesus at the table tomorrow. I'll be looking for you when the family gathers to worship, grow and serve.

Blessings and love,
Pastor Jan