

Dear Friends of Great Bridge United Methodist Church,

The special General Conference Session, with a focus on the church's position on homosexuality as outlined in the Social Principles and the resulting Book of Discipline prohibitions, ended yesterday evening in St. Louis, Missouri.

The "traditional" plan was passed. This means that the church's position remains the same. There will be specific consequences for any violations of the prohibitions, namely clergy officiating same-sex weddings and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals.

In addition, petitions for the exiting from the denomination of both clergy and churches also passed. This would allow both clergy and churches who do not wish to remain in connection to leave if they did not share the same theological convictions as the denominational church.

It is important to note that none of the above is in effect yet because the body voted to send everything to the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church for review due to the fact that there are outstanding questions having to deal with the United Methodist Church's Constitution.

So where are we now?

Emails, texts, and messages are what I thought they would be. Some are happy. Some are saddened. Many are trying to figure out what is the way forward for them on a personal level.

Some are suggesting taking some time away from church.

I hear you and I feel you. Please don't. What's on the world level is one thing. What we have at Great Bridge United Methodist Church is quite another. I promise you that I as your senior pastor will always be completely devoted to seeing to it that no one misses out on the grace of God.

Some are suggesting that come Sunday they will no longer be welcomed at Great Bridge United Methodist Church because they are homosexual.

I hear you and I feel for you. The takeaway message from the General Council could be interpreted that the church has closed hearts, minds and doors toward homosexual persons. I will greet you with love as my heart is open as well as my mind. The doors will be open! I promise you that I as your senior pastor will always be completely devoted to seeing to it that no one misses out on the grace of God.



Some are suggesting that we need more Bible study in the church.

I hear you and I feel the same. We need to study God's word more than ever before. In doing so, we need to look to scriptures not so much for all the prohibitions; many of which we are breaking on a daily basis. We need to let the scriptures reveal God's grace and how we are to respond to and rightly live into such amazing grace. My conviction is to free up my schedule from meetings after meetings and to replace these meetings with Bible studies with you; the people that I love and to whom God has called me to minister. In doing so, I promise you that I as your senior pastor will always be completely devoted to seeing to it that no one misses out on the grace of God.

Together we will be the way forward because I believe with all of my heart that the Holy Spirit is moving at Great Bridge United Methodist Church. I believe in all of you; each and every one. I believe in Jesus Christ: God's Son who takes away the sins of the world, our Savior who rose again on the third day, and the Lord of heaven and earth, whose name is above all names and by his love we know this to be true that nothing shall separate us from God's love.

Be God's Blessing,

Tim Craig