

Summary of Video

August, 2022

Summary

In the last several years, the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusion in the United Methodist Church (UMC) has reached a point where the conversation has become about HOW (not if) the denomination will split. This has been a challenging time for the denomination and our local church, as devout Christians from both sides have been divided on issues related to human sexuality as well as church polity and doctrine. Bethany has been actively navigating these challenging times for several years, seeking more clarity from both the Lord and from earthly authorities on the best way for our congregation to move forward. This summer, the number of churches publicly making their intentions known has dramatically increased. The Bethany congregation will need to enter a decision-making process on whether to stay or leave the UMC, but leadership has decided to continue to wait until more information is available. This document attempts to give an overview of the current situation and some rationale for our decision to wait.

Brief History

Since there has been a Church, there have been philosophical/theological differences among its members. The United Methodist Church (UMC) has had its share since it united multiple Methodist denominations in 1968. Some of these have been substantial, but none as divisive as the topic of LGBTQ+ marriage and clergy.

The current position of the UMC, as governed by our rules known as the “Book of Discipline”, is that all people are individuals of sacred worth. But it does not support same gender marriage nor the ordination of practicing homosexuals. There are those who agree with these rules, often known as Traditionalists, those who completely oppose these rules, known as Progressives, and even those who fall somewhere in the middle and often refer to themselves as Centrists.

The legislative body of the worldwide UMC, known as the General Conference, is responsible for making any changes to our rules, and it meets every four years. No other entity or person is allowed to speak for the denomination or make changes to the rules except this worldwide body that convenes every four years. Because of the ongoing disagreements about LGBTQ+ marriage and clergy, the General Conference was scheduled to meet in the Summer of 2020 to discuss various plans that might result in a division of the denomination into one or more new denominations. As the pandemic disrupted all travel, this meeting was postponed to 2021, then to 2022, and now to 2024.

Current Situation

In the midst of this delay of the General Conference, some US congregations, typically with strong majority opinions (both traditional and progressive), have started discussing whether they

will leave the UMC. One development that is currently getting quite a bit of attention is the recent launch of a new “traditionalist” denomination called the Global Methodist Church (GMC). Some congregations have already decided to leave the UMC in favor of the new GMC. Likewise, other UMC congregations are making plans to leave the UMC for more progressive denominations. However, many congregations, especially those with mixed viewpoints like Bethany, are seeking more clarity to guide their next steps.

Bethany’s Response

The Lead Team believes it is premature for Bethany to make any decisions related to our staying or leaving the UMC, as BOTH options have significant unknowns. Leaving the UMC, regardless of the destination, has uncertain financial, property, and legal implications. Deciding to remain in the UMC also has many uncertainties, as the landscape of the worldwide general conference is very much in flux. However, the Lead Team is actively working to stay abreast of the ever-changing nuances of this situation, and is working to compile resources for you that provide balanced perspectives.

Any significant decision for the future of our church should be carefully considered with sufficient time, prayer, thought and conversations. In the future, we will have information sessions to inform the congregation about developments as they arise and solicit feedback. Throughout such a process, we will strive to be transparent and open, doing our best to help you understand the pros and cons of any decisions.

Congregation’s Call to Action

The most important thing we can do is to pray for wisdom and discernment. In this time of waiting, it’s essential to remember that we are called together to be brothers and sisters in Christ, and to be the light of Christ in a world that increasingly needs it. We must continue to bear fruit and be in communion with one another to reach others for God’s kingdom. There is so much work to do in this world and in our own neighborhood, to further the Kingdom of God. We remind you of the “HEART Principle” from “Partners in Ministry” that states, “Even when we disagree, please don’t make me wrong.” In the same way a clergy person in another conference has encouraged their congregation, we are calling upon our Bethany family to pray, listen, learn, discern, and not to “borrow anxiety” as we move through these days.