

May 4, 2024

Hi, Church.

On May 1, 2024, the worldwide United Methodist Church (the General Conference) voted overwhelmingly (93%) to remove restrictive language from our governing document (Book of Discipline) concerning the life and ministry of LGBTQ+ persons in the United Methodist Church.

I welcome this action as it affirms the value, worth, and calling of LGBTQ+ Christians and it frees clergy, churches, and Annual Conferences to open avenues of life and ministry to LGBTQ+ persons that were closed by General Conference action forty plus years ago.

First United Methodist Church of Festus-Crystal City's 2019 Church Council issued the following statement in response to a previous decision of the General Conference that had "a negative impact upon the roles of the LGBTQ+ community within the church.

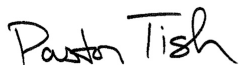
First United Methodist Church of Festus/Crystal City re-affirms our commitment to be in ministry with all people - reaching, forming, and sending disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We believe God has called us to relentlessly love one another amidst our differences and that upholding this unity is the indisputable witness of God at work among us. We, therefore, welcome all persons into the full life of First United Methodist Church. Jesus said, 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:35).

We believe this statement of inclusion is consistent with our Methodist way of faith in Christ. John Wesley, founder of Methodism wrote, 'The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinion of any sort...as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.' We will adhere to the rules of our denomination, respecting progressive and traditional views, while working toward a full expression of God's love in and through us. We encourage each one at First UMC to remain focused on the mission of sharing the love of Jesus Christ with the world and to remain committed to one another in Christian love. - The Church Council of First United Methodist Church of Festus/Crystal City, March 19, 2019."

On Wednesday, May 15 at 6:30pm, I will hold an informational session on General Conference actions in The Parlor.

Let us lead with grace as we grow in ministry together at First UMC.

First United,



Rev. Tish Green

**Read a letter from our
Bishop Robert Farr
on the back side.**

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1).



**From the office of
Robert D. Farr
Bishop**

May 1, 2024
Dear Missouri Conference colleagues,

I want to be sure our clergy and lay leaders are aware of action taken by the General Conference today in Charlotte, North Carolina. I encourage you to share this communication with your key leaders. After years of intense and prayerful conversation, the General Conference, comprised of delegates from all over the world, passed legislation that prevents superintendents from penalizing clergy or churches from holding same-gender weddings.

I would like to share some important things about this decision. First, there are no requirements that pastors perform weddings for any couple, let alone a same-gender couple. United Methodist pastors have always been able to decide who they will marry within the bounds of the Book of Discipline, and that will continue. There is no mechanism in the Book of Discipline, in our Conference structure, nor desire on my part as your bishop to determine who a pastor will marry.

Second, pastors, in consultation with their church leadership team, will continue to determine their building's wedding policy. We know that different people have different opinions on these matters, and our churches are in different contexts within the bounds of Missouri. Pastors should continue to be mindful of those contexts while exercising their own pastoral discretion, the same way they evaluate many theological decisions within their ministry context. Clergy should be in a prayerful consultive process with church leaders if they serve churches where holding a same-gender marriage on church property would bring division within the congregation. If you need help with healthy conversation models for these decisions, please seek out the resources of your district superintendent and the Office of Connectional Ministries. It is my expectation that the diversity of everyone's opinion and everyone's context be honored. Further, the desires of all clergy on the matter of performing a wedding are to be honored and not judged by others.

The General Conference also voted to remove restraints from Annual Conference Boards of Ordained Ministry to credential gifted and called LGBTQIA people for vocational ministry. Qualified LGBTQ+ persons approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry can now be licensed, commissioned and ordained effective immediately.

As the bishop of the Missouri Conference, the Cabinet and I will continue to work with churches and clergy to ensure we have the best match possible when making appointments. We want everyone to have a vital ministry rather than one defined by conflict. We will identify churches open to an appointment of a LGBTQ+ pastor so that the pastor can thrive as the congregation's spiritual leader, and their ministry can be fruitful within that church's mission field. Your district superintendent will continue to be your primary contact on appointment-related issues. The Missouri Cabinet wants to be sensitive to regional and cultural attitudes toward contentious issues.

For those who identify as LGBTQ+ and believe God is calling them into ministry, they should speak to their pastor about their call and consider following the steps toward vocational ministry through The United Methodist Church's candidacy process. You may also reach out to Rev. Mark Statler, director of the Center for Leadership Excellence.

I celebrate the ways these recent decisions focus on God's abundant love and inclusiveness. May we continue to become a brave, empowering place for people from diverse cultures and generations so that we can become a Church for all God's people. I also recognize how these decisions will add complexity to our life together as United Methodists.

I invite you and your leadership teams to join me virtually via livestream or in person, if you are a registered member of the Missouri Annual Conference, at 10 a.m. on Friday, June 7, for the Opening Plenary. I intend to spend that plenary session discussing General Conference and its impact on United Methodist churches in Missouri. That session will be livestreamed on our Facebook page and at MOACInfo.com. The recording will be available for you to view and download after the plenary at MOACInfo.com.

Friends, there is one other thing that will not change. Every United Methodist Church will be open to anybody who seeks to know Christ. This year's annual conference theme is Share the Love of God for All. We will continue to be focused on Christ-centered disciple-making and connecting new people to Christ. Part of our cultural identity as United Methodist people is making room for people to experience the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our communion table is open, and I pray that our hearts might be so as well.

In Christ+

Robert D. Farr
Bishop, Missouri Annual Conference
of The United Methodist Church

**Note from Pastor Tish:
On Friday, June 7, 10:00am
Bishop Farr will speak
regarding General Conference.
Livestream at www.MOACInfo.com**