



April 27, 2019

Dear Centenary UMC Family,

At the close of the United Methodist Church (UMC) General Conference in February, I shared with you, via e-mail, that I would keep up with the news and events following the General Conference and would provide an update related to any developments stemming from the work of the General Conference. In that e-mail, I indicated that the next major step in the process would be a meeting of the UMC's Judicial Council, which happened this week.

The Judicial Council is essentially the denomination's supreme court. Its purpose is to determine the constitutionality of the actions proposed or voted upon by the General, Jurisdictional, Central, or Annual Conferences. It acts either via appeal of lower rulings or through a request of declaratory decisions. It is composed of nine persons (clergy and laity). This week the Judicial Council ruled on the constitutionality of the fourteen petitions that comprised what is known as the Traditional Plan, which was approved by the General Conference, and one petition that proposed an exit plan for churches which disagree with the denomination's position on human sexuality.

The Judicial Council declared that eight petitions of the Tradition Plan were constitutional. These petitions change the Book of Discipline in the following ways: provide clarity to the definition of a self-avowed practicing homosexual; prohibit Bishops from commissioning, ordaining, or consecrating a person who is a self-avowed homosexual; establishes minimum penalties for clergy who officiate same-sex weddings; prohibits the District Committee on Ordained Ministry and the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry from approving a candidate for ministry who does not meet the qualifications for ministry; refines the just resolution process for handling complaints and disciplinary action. These parts of the Book of Discipline will be effective on January 1, 2020.

The Judicial Council declared that seven petitions of the Traditional Plan were not constitutional and therefore will not be part of the Book of Discipline beginning January 1, 2020. These petitions would have: created an accountability process for Bishops through the Council of Bishops, and processes for Annual Conferences to certify the actions of the Bishop and the Board of Ordained Ministry with respect to the appointment of members to the Boards of Ordained Ministry.

In relation to the petition concerning an exit plan for churches, the Judicial Council ruled that petition is constitutional and will thus be effective January 1, 2020.

So, what is the result? The position of the denomination related to human sexuality was not changed. The action of the General Conference clarified the definition of a self-avowed homosexual, set the consequences for clergy who perform same-sex weddings, set parameters for the work of Annual Conferences' Boards of Ordained Ministry with respect to candidates for ministry.

What is next?

Over the last eight weeks, I have been reading news articles from UMNews and from the various caucus groups throughout the denomination. Some are advocating for petitions to the next General Conference (May 2020) to fix the petitions which were declared unconstitutional. Others are advocating for petitions to repeal the Traditional Plan and adopt the One Church Plan. There are conversations about forming structures within the denomination to allow the UMC in the United States greater autonomy. In addition to these possibilities there are preliminary conversations within some circles concerning the formation of a separate expression of United Methodism (maybe a new denomination) which would be more in line with the proposals of the One Church Plan. All of these conversations and possibilities are in their infancy and will be developed further before being presented to next General Conference. I will keep following these developments.

This summer, Annual Conferences will meet across the connection to elect delegates to the next General Conference. In June, our Annual Conference will meet to accomplish this work and to transact the business of the Annual Conference – approve a budget for 2020, set policies and practices for ministry in western North Carolina, commission and ordain ministers, and other business which may come before the assembly. Your clergy and an equal number of laypersons from our church will be fully engaged in this process. We covet your prayers.

Here at Centenary our mission is unchanged. The ministry of the local church is where the real work of the Church is performed. We are in the mission field and to that end we must be in mission and ministry to the world.

When I consider some of what we have already accomplished this year -- increased average worship attendance to 989; welcomed thirteen new members to our fellowship since the start of the year; greeted 1719 people in worship Easter Sunday; served 800 persons in the homeless community through Love Thy Neighbor; and packed and delivered 160 flood buckets to the Mission Response Center to help with the spring floods in the mid-west and in preparation for hurricane season -- I am in awe of what is possible when we focus on our mission and vision.

We will continue to follow Jesus, make disciples, and work for the transformation of the world. We believe that all persons are welcome here and thus will continue inviting people from all walks of life to join our fellowship and be in ministry with us to the world. This is our calling and our focus.

I am honored to be your senior minister and to work alongside our wonderful staff and lay leadership to fulfill our mission and vision to accomplish great things for God through Centenary UMC. I look forward to seeing you in worship and at Centenary.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'P. Glenn Kinken III', written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. P. Glenn Kinken III