

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ. This morning in worship I shared this information and I wanted send it out to everyone.

I want to speak to you for a minute on behalf of the administration council. As many of you know, our denomination is in a tense spot. This all stems around the issue of homosexuality and a particular statement in the book of discipline which governs our denomination.

This is the paragraph: ¶ **304.3 Qualifications for Ordination**

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

There is a great divide on this issue that is splitting our denomination. Our denomination is set up with the general conference focused on maintaining the book of discipline and editing at need be. The General conference is the worldwide denomination and it usually meets once every 4 years. The book of Discipline in the book of church laws and structure for our denomination. The jurisdictional conferences, which are regional, elect and appoint bishops to serve the annual conferences. Annual conferences appoint and ordain local pastors. Finally and our charge conference and administrative council takes care of the business in individual churches.

At general conference several years ago there was a push to remove this paragraph from the discipline. Since then there have been plans to divide the church, and now that plan is in question and honestly it is a big mess that has been festering for over 40 years. Right now there is a stalemate between progressive and traditional leadership.

There is currently a way for individual churches to disaffiliate from the UMC. Currently all UMC church property is owned by the annual conferences. We pay a calculated amount of money to the conference and denomination through our apportionment to fund missions, health insurance and pensions, and operations beyond the local church. For churches who wish to disaffiliate there is a calculated cost to be paid to the annual conference based on this apportionment number and pension liabilities.

The process would require a vote of the administrative council to pursue disaffiliation which would start with a minimum of 30 days of discernment and discussion and information gathering. After that time if the church wants to progress forward there would be a church conference where 2/3 of active members would have to vote in favor to disaffiliate. If this happens then there would be a vote by a special called annual conference.

If the church disaffiliates, the church would pay their set amount to the conference and then the conference would transfer the deed to the property in the new churches name. Then church would apply for business licenses and non-profit status. It would then be up to the church to find and supply its own pastor and leadership.

It is a complicated process and a lot to digest. 10 churches have disaffiliated with this process from our conference already. Over 200 churches in North Carolina disaffiliated a few weeks ago. In all of this there are gains and losses whether this church chooses to remain United Methodist or disaffiliate. This issue has the power to tear us apart and that breaks my heart. The administrative council is planning to make a decision whether or not to explore this process at our council meeting on December 19th. The council wants to be as transparent as possible with this process. I have given a lot of information to you and this is just bullet points.

As I stated this issue has power to tear down and destroy to use the words of the prophets. But there is also potential to build and to grow. And again that is with either decision. With such a powerful issue before us, I long for us to face it together with patience. We may disagree and we will have to share in hard conversations but this is important to our future as a church. I want us to commit to each other. Commit to listen, to pray, and to love each other even if we disagree. Most of all I want us to listen to where God is calling all of us.

Lord in you Mercy, guide us to the path you have ordained for us to best serve your kingdom!

In Christ's Peace,
Pastor Tommy

Tommy Lewis-Crosby
Senior Pastor Sunset Drive UMC
pastortommyboy@gmail.com
(540)421-2216