

North Carolina United Methodists, Bishop Connie Shelton here coming to you from the Charlotte Convention Center for the postponed 2020 General Conference. There is a palpable fresh wind of the spirit. Delegates' conversation and debate reflect deep listening and a desire for unity.

Today, May 1, The United Methodist Church made history. The General Conference removed the harmful and restrictive language from The Book of Discipline prohibiting United Methodist clergy from performing weddings for same-gender couples. This change allows churches and clergy to operate according to their conscience, without consequence.

Be clear. Pastors decide when and for whom they will officiate a marriage. Removing the prohibitive language in The Book of Discipline regarding a same-gender wedding does not mean all United Methodist pastors will be required to officiate same-gender weddings. Pastors choosing to officiate same-gender weddings will abide by the wedding policies adopted by the local church to which they are appointed. Pastors desiring to officiate a same-gender wedding whose local church policies prohibit same-gender weddings may partner with other United Methodist churches open to sharing their facilities. Please honor and respect the desires of all clergy and congregations without judgment.

Secondly, the delegates of the General Conference also voted to remove prohibitions that prevented a Board of Ordained Ministry from recommending a gay or lesbian person for ordination.

How does that impact your local church and your pastoral leadership? In the appointment-making process, the cabinet uses a core set of values, and prayerfully considers the gifts of a pastor, the advisory feedback of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), and the missional needs of the congregation. We make appointments seeking the best match of a gifted pastor to the missional needs expressed by the SPRC for the congregation.

We acknowledge that North Carolina United Methodists' views differ regarding same-gender marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ persons. Yet, I am confident that we can celebrate our theological diversity without further division or hurt. In Christ, we can live in unity and remain together, even when our scriptural interpretation and contexts vary regarding same-gender marriage and the acceptance of LGBTQ clergy. Our mission remains clear... to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Join me in continued prayer for The United Methodist Church and for this General Conference, and for grace to love God and love our neighbor to fulfill the mission of our North Carolina Conference: “Healthy Congregations and Effective Leaders in Every Place Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.”

We’ll be sharing information soon, so please continue watching your email and the website for updates.

Will you join me in prayer?

“Oh God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come, Our shelter from the stormy blast, And our eternal home.” We are so grateful for your faithfulness. We are so grateful for your church, and we are so grateful for The United Methodist Church, who on this day discerned together a new expression of our life together, with full inclusion of all.

I pray for each one and each congregation, praying with me now, that you will awaken us to all that you are inviting in that local church’s community to welcome people across their neighborhoods and villages and cities, urban and rural, metro and suburban. Help us to see, Lord, all those who are suffering, marginalized, who don’t feel like they belong, Lord.

And may our life together bear witness to the way you stretch out your arms and welcome all of us through your grace, Jesus Christ. Amen.