

February 28, 2019



A Pastoral Letter: General Conference 2019

By David Alan Bard, Michigan Conference Bishop

Sisters and Brothers in Christ in the Michigan United Methodist Church,

The much-anticipated special called session of the General Conference has come to an end. The days leading up to the General Conference were filled with hope and prayer. Not all of the hopes were realized, as people had differing hopes. Not all the prayers were answered in the way people hoped, because people were praying for different outcomes.

The United Methodist Church will maintain its stance on human sexuality. In addition, enhanced enforcement provisions were approved as a way to encourage pastors, bishops and churches to follow *Disciplinary* requirements. The plan encourages those who disagree with these positions to consider leaving to form another Methodist organization. It is not yet clear which of these provisions will be ruled constitutional or how they may be implemented.

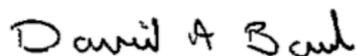
What is clear is that many LGBTQ persons find this language hurtful and feel it leaves them on the margins of our church life. We need to acknowledge that hurt and pain and sadness, which is shared by their family members. People who were hoping for more space for LGBTQ persons are deeply disappointed. I invite us to remember that our *Book of Discipline* acknowledges that all people are of sacred worth, and that remains fundamental. The plan approved will likely mean additional conversation and perhaps voting at our Annual Conference, but, again, much remains to be sorted out.

We need to acknowledge the entire range of feelings people are experiencing, and the varying reactions people are having. I would invite us to acknowledge the reactions without becoming “reactive.” Part of being human is to know what it is like to experience a gut-level “flight or fight” response. I invite us to move through that to a fuller human response that engages our feelings, our thinking, our pondering and our praying. If you feel you need to take some action about your place within the UMC, I invite you to wait. Nothing need be done right now.

There are many unanswered questions that need to be answered. I will communicate more in the coming days and weeks, providing additional information about what happened and possible next steps.

In inviting us to a more fully human response, I am inviting us to reach deep into our hearts and souls to embody Christian virtues of a humble mind, a tender heart, and mutual affection. St. Irenaeus once wrote that the glory of God is a human person fully formed, fully alive. In this difficult moment, may we give glory to God by, in God’s grace, calling forth our best and deepest selves.

Grace and Peace,



Bishop David Bard
Michigan Episcopal Area