

I Will Continue Working with Jesus in the UMC

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Some leaders of Northwest Texas Annual Conference recently asked us to clarify our attitude about staying in the UMC or leaving for a new denomination, the Global Methodist Church. Our district superintendent asks local churches to decide this in an extended charge conference, a church conference, this year. So, I would like to clarify my stance as a senior pastor and as your pastor to help you to understand this situation.

- 1) I do not accept the push to decide about leaving at this year's charge conference because it is unlawful: (1) Our General Conference did not confirm any process for the division of the UMC. This will be decided at the General Conference of the UMC in 2024. The General Conference must make a new law for dividing the UMC before we can lawfully be required to make such a decision. (2) The Judicial Council, the United Methodist Church's top court, ruled that current church law doesn't allow U.S. annual conferences to leave the denomination.¹ For an annual conference to push the churches within an annual conference toward leaving the UMC goes against the spirit of this ruling. (3) Although the 2019 General Conference established provisions for churches to leave the UMC, these were not approved with the intent of dividing the UMC. To use them for dividing the UMC is disingenuous. For these reasons, we do not have an ethical way to leave for the new denomination now. I do not agree with the campaign to break the order and law of the UMC. I respect and follow the official decisions of the UMC because this is my responsibility as an ordained elder of the United Methodist Church.
- 2) But I can agree with the desire to understand my stance. In fact, I do not need to decide anything about leaving for the new denomination because I will continue working in the UMC as an ordained elder of the UMC. If we have not wanted to leave for another denomination, we also do not need to decide anything because we will continue being United Methodist people. We can decide early, without waiting until 2024, because we are not waiting for a new law to allow our leaving. By deciding early to continue being the UMC, we can have a solidarity with other United Methodist people who do not want to leave. In this meaning, I can agree with an early question about our attitude.

To clarify my attitude:

1. I do not agree with the separatists who assert this is about LGBTQ. I think that they are not honest about that as I already showed under the title "Misunderstanding the UMC" in St. Mark's Messenger (May 29, 2022). The rules of the UMC, *The Book of Discipline of the United*

¹ Decision Number 1444: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/church-court-conferences-cant-exit-unilaterally>; <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/judicial-council/judicial-council-decision-home/judicial-decisions/decision-1444>, May 10, 2022.

Methodist Church ¶304.3, clearly state that a person who professes to practice homosexuality cannot become a minister of the UMC.² The *Discipline* ¶161.C defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman.³ And, the *Discipline* ¶341.6 states that same-sex wedding ceremonies are not permitted in the United Methodist Church.⁴ These are the basic positions of the United Methodist Church.

Alongside these, the *Discipline* ¶330.5c(4) states that all ordain ministers are called to relate in ministry to all persons without regard to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, social status, gender, sexual orientation, age, economic condition, or disabilities.⁵ We welcome all persons as having the image of God, without any discrimination.⁶ This is the spirit of the UMC: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.”⁷ This is a proud tradition of the UMC, unity in diversity.

Situations may arise where we wonder if others are following the *Discipline*, but I cannot find the moral justification from that to break the order and law of the UMC and separate from the UMC.

2. I have seen secular and political intentions instead of spiritual direction in the campaign of the separatists. In the center of the campaign to separate, there is, as a strong leadership group, *Good News Magazine*. This group leads this campaign according to their political ambition: against Methodism, diversity, minority, or equality.⁸ They want to build an exclusive church. I cannot find their spiritual direction. Instead, I can see their political and secular ambition. I think they use the LGBTQ issue for gaining their hidden plan. So, I do not trust in their intention in campaigning against the UMC. I think that their campaign does not come from theological or spiritual issues. Instead, their ambition is political or secular.

Some of them say that the church has been declining because of LGBTQ. Their assertion has no reasonable proof because it is clearly not true, as I showed in the first reason. Additionally,

² “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,” *The Book of Discipline 2016*, 278.

³ “We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman,” *The Book of Discipline 2016* ¶161.c), 111.

⁴ “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches,” *The Book of Discipline 2016*, 278.

⁵ *The Book of Discipline 2016*, 257.

⁶ *The Book of Discipline 2016*, 113, ¶161. G). “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

⁷ *The Book of Discipline 2016*, 57, ¶103.

⁸ If you want to know about this issue, see the article of Rev. Jeremy Smith, “Global Methodist Church: Where did it come from?” https://hackingchristianity.net/2022/04/global-methodist-church-where-did-it-come-from.html?fbclid=IwAR13ykuihhtKcVBoW2BtJPggJ1NgiPTIWQmwM0vwTN_2JqvhYiqmuI4_eBs

not only the UMC but also most American churches have been declining. As my dissertation demonstrates, the serious problem of today's Christians and the church is the loss of Christian vocational spirituality. If they want to revive the church, they need to discuss about how to form Christian vocational spirituality instead of blaming LGBTQ.

3. I am an Ordained Elder in Full Connection of the United Methodist Church. All of us, the United Methodist people, walk with, work with and follow Jesus through the structure of the UMC. When I see the structure of the GMC in their statement, their structure almost follows the structure of the UMC. Therefore, I cannot find a serious reason to deny the UMC.

I am an ordained elder of the United Methodist Church. I showed my spiritual and vocational identity and responsibility in St. Mark's Messenger (June 26, 2022). The ordained elder is appointed to a local church to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus, and keep the structure and doctrine of the United Methodist Church. In this meaning, I am an elder of the United Methodist Church and have been appointed to St. Mark's UMC since 2017.

Although I was baptized by a Presbyterian church a year after I began attending the church, I became a Methodist man a year later because of the prominent points of Methodism I found through reading books: theological balance; integration of scripture, tradition, experience and reason;⁹ and an open and inclusive church spirituality ("In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity"). This balanced spirituality of the UMC has been called "Unity in Diversity."

I continue loving, respecting and following the proud tradition of the UMC—making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world¹⁰—and I also continue accepting the doctrinal standards, *Discipline* and authority of the UMC.¹¹ Even though the UMC is not perfect, all beings are imperfect. I will continue loving, respecting and following the proud tradition of the UMC.

All human beings are created with the image of God by the Creator, the life-giving Spirit, the creative love, God. All Christians were called by Jesus to love God and each other (Matthew 22: 37-39) through recovering the image of God, the life-giving Spirit, the life-giving love from God. Therefore, we confess that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). The United Methodist people were called by Jesus to actualize the life-giving love from God in this world. The United Methodist Church has practiced this vocation. The Holy Spirit of God has worked with amazing miracles through the United Methodist Church. In this meaning, we can confess that the UMC is an amazing and powerful source for the kingdom of God in this world even though we are not perfect. I will continue loving the United Methodist Church.

⁹ *The Book of Discipline 2016*, 83-88.

¹⁰ *The Book of Discipline 2016*, 91, ¶120

¹¹ *The Book of Discipline 2016*, 225-226, ¶304.1j.