

Bishop Jung Statement: Special Session of the General Conference

Published: 27 February 2019

My beautiful Wisconsin people, I am greeting you following General Conference. What a difficult process we experienced trying to find our way forward as The United Methodist Church! We knew this would not be easy, but it was as hard as anyone might have imagined. We are a wounded church. We are a divided church. We are a church in pain, and we are doing harm to each other. Very messy, and very hard. We worked hard for four days – and I want you to know that your elected delegation represented you well. Be proud of them and be thankful to them. They worked hard – but there were many difficult situations, and it became clear just how deeply our divisions go within our church. And I would say we are evenly divided. Many of our votes were close; one even 50%-50%. Strong, strong feelings on each side. This was a short time to try to resolve long and big problems. God was with us; the Holy Spirit was with us, but we are in a very troubled and divided time. Take heart though – God is not finished with us yet!

It would be too easy to say we failed at General Conference. That is one way to look at it, and many people will. But perhaps God revealed to us that we are not yet ready to make these big decisions that will forever change our church. Our more conservative members who hold to a very clear and simple reading of scripture felt challenged and misunderstood, yet a strong support for this position was evident. The concerns of our Central Conferences were voiced and challenged, yet there was strength in this area as well. Our LGBTQI+ brothers and sisters felt judged, disrespected, and attacked, yet parts of the community rallied around them with incredible love and compassion. What became painfully clear is that we are a broken church, but with large segments of agreement within our disagreements. Where we met an impasse is over the issue of who should stay and who should go, who will be The United Methodist Church and who should have to leave. This is where we are stuck, and I believe our General Conference showed clearly we are not in the right place to make this our only decision. With the exception of a small handful who only want to leave, the vast majority of people are still proud to be United Methodist and they are not ready to destroy the faithful and sacramental

covenant that we share. While we may disagree over issues of human sexuality, we are still proud and protective of being United Methodist, and we will not take action that will force anyone to give that up.

I cannot tell you I am happy with what happened at General Conference. I cannot tell you I think we did a good job. I cannot tell you that I think we engaged in abject humility and obedience to God's Holy Spirit. But what I can tell you is that people of faith – laity and clergy, male and female, old and young, local and global, straight and gay – did the best job they could to serve the church and the God they love. It shows again why we still need a Savior, why we all stand in the need of prayer and God's perfecting love and grace. There is great work to do ahead of us. I believe that we will move forward together in Wisconsin as well as any group of Christians within our connectional church. I know this because I know you are a people of love, with a heart for ministry and a passion for mission. I know we will work out our future together in faith because I know we are good, beautiful people of mercy, compassion and justice. And I know we will create a wonderful future together because the God who has not given up on us will not allow us to give up on one another. Thanks be to God.

Here is my prayer for all of us:

Gracious God,

Forgive our inability to see new possibilities.

We seek to be faithful, and we seek to be a light in the world.

We are not perfect, and we are not able to fully be the people you need us to be.

But you continue to work in us, through us, for us, and between us.

Help us to serve you first.

Come Holy Spirit, transform us.

Come Holy Spirit, redeem us.

Come Holy Spirit, fill us.

Come Holy Spirit, forgive us.

Teach us to honor and glorify you in all that we do,

And heal our woundedness that we might be a strong and mighty witness to your love and grace in the world.

Amen.