

## Pre-General Conference Pastoral Gathering Summary

On Sunday, April 21, Rev. Dr. Eric Bryant held a pre-General Conference Pastoral Gathering with about 70 people in Fellowship Hall. Pastor Eric welcomed attendees shortly after 4 pm and thanked them for being there and recognized how we all care about the ministries of Christ Church and about the ministries of the world-wide United Methodist Church.

After a centering prayer, Pastor Eric read 1 Corinthians 13 from The Message (see page 3). He noted that nothing in the church works unless love is present. In the early church, things fell apart when they weren't loving each other well.

Pastor Eric indicated that the language in the Book of Discipline that disallows gay and lesbian persons from being ordained as clergy and that prohibits clergy from marrying same-sex couples will be a topic at the General Conference, which will be held in Charlotte, NC April 23 – May 3. The language could be removed, it could be revised, or it could remain with no changes.

Pastor Eric recognized that for some in the Christ Church congregation, there is anxiety around General Conference. For some there is hope. We at Christ Church adopted a Statement of Welcome and Hope (see page 4) that informs us. Two key points of the Statement of Welcome and Hope were noted:

1. Christ Church imagines a big table where everyone is welcome; everyone is invited. Because each belongs.
2. Christ Church has expressed hope that the restrictive language in the Book of Discipline be removed.

Two other topics that were likely to come before General Conference were mentioned by Pastor Eric:

1. Regionalization – allowing different regions of the UMC to have more autonomy based on their context.
2. Updating some outdated language in the Social Principles of the UMC

Pastor Eric mentioned there will likely be an effort by groups outside the United Methodist Church to extend the timeline for churches to leave the denomination through disaffiliation.

Two assurances were made by Pastor Eric. No one will lose their church over this. Everyone will always be welcome and always belong. Second, all communication that Christ Church puts out via our website, social media and eNews will be accurate and true. There is a lot of misinformation out there.

The remarks of Pastor Eric concluded with an invitation to a Covenant over the next two weeks:

1. Honor John Wesley's Three Simple Rules
  - a. Do no harm
  - b. Do all the good you can
  - c. Stay in love with God
2. Trust the work of the Holy Spirit in ourselves and in each other

3. Take care of each other
4. Pray daily for General Conference

Those gathered read a prayer written by Christ Church member Rev. Karen Kidd Lovett (see page 5) and sang two verses of *They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love*.

### Q&A Session

Q1. What is the website for information?

A1. [ccum.net](http://ccum.net)

Q2. If the restrictive language is removed, when would it take effect?

A2. Probably January 1, 2025

Q3. Where can I find the Statement of Welcome and Hope?

A3. On the About page of [ccum.net](http://ccum.net) and at [ccum.net/welcome](http://ccum.net/welcome)

Q4. What happens to CCUM the day after if the language is changed?

A4. We will have a post-General Conference meeting on Sunday, May 5 at 4 pm to discuss any impacts for Christ Church as the result of actions taken or not taken by General Conference.

## 1 Corinthians 13 [The Message]

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

2 If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

3-7 If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.  
Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
Love doesn't strut,  
Doesn't have a swelled head,  
Doesn't force itself on others,  
Isn't always "me first,"  
Doesn't fly off the handle,  
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,  
Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always,  
Always looks for the best,  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.

8-10 Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

11 When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

12 We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

13 But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

## Statement of Welcome and Hope for Christ Church United Methodist

At Christ Church United Methodist, we are becoming living proof of God's love, one person at a time. This mission is alive every day in the many ministries of Christ Church United Methodist. We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, God alone is the judge, and the Bible is essential. We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God, and that we are called to love and welcome all.

Through a process of church-wide prayer and discernment, we have listened to the perspectives of our diverse church community regarding human sexuality. We hear the pain that many in our church feel, we hear the reverence our church has for Holy Scripture, we hear the anxiety many have, and we hear that while we as a church are not of one mind, God calls us to a common mission together. Above all, we hear the deep love we all have for our church.

Together, we can all wholeheartedly agree and proclaim that, as our communion liturgy reminds us, "Christ our Lord invites to his table ALL who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another." Therefore, we welcome and include everyone into the lay leadership and ministry of our community of faith, regardless of sexual orientation, views, or differing interpretations of scripture. We extend this welcome specifically to all those who feel hurt or excluded by the church. We believe that all members and friends of Christ Church United Methodist can live in the tension of agreeing to disagree, with love and respect regarding many issues, including human sexuality and the church.

In order to more faithfully recognize the humanity and image of God in our LGBTQ friends and to show more compassion for them, we support the elimination of the exclusionary language regarding homosexuality in our United Methodist Book of Discipline. While some congregations are leaving the United Methodist Church over human sexuality, we have been, are, and intend to remain United Methodist. As such, we are required by our vows and connectional covenant to abide by the Book of Discipline with regards to same sex marriage and ordination. We understand that while this statement brings joy to some in our church community, we likewise understand that it brings pain to others. While this statement may seem to go too far for some, it may not go far enough for others.

There are a variety of Biblically-based interpretations on this subject formed by earnestly seeking God through scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, but there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, along with one God and Father who calls us to ministry together. We pray that, as a church, we model respectfulness, humility, and love in our conversations with one another so that we may be instruments of God's peace. We pray that all of us, as members of our church community, new and old, whether agreeing with this Statement or not – will recommit ourselves to our mission of becoming living proof of God's love, one person at a time, and we pray that, through all of this, God may be glorified in our hearts and in our lives.

Administrative Council – June 20, 2022

## Prayer for General Conference by Rev. Karen Kidd Lovett

Holy God of Grace, we confess that grace is a word that falls so easily from our lips but sometimes is difficult to put into practice. Strengthen us during this time of General Conference as we truly want to show grace to one another.

We pray specifically for those who will attend the General Conference. Many are going there wounded, broken and hurt. We pray for your guidance for those who will be about the business of the church and who may arrive with bruised egos and battered spirits. Some come to the gathering with dread, and others with the anticipation of success for a cause they believe heartily in. But no matter the attitude, we know in our very souls that we are a broken connection. Many of us feel as fragile as a bird's wing, tattered and easily broken. And Lord, so many have been broken and wounded during these days of infighting and exchanging hateful words. Forgive us.

Forgive us our desperate clinging to the belief that we know what is completely right. Forgive us our willfulness and arrogance. We stand, knowing we should be on our knees. We preen, when we should be humble. We gloat, when we should be begging for a clearer understanding of one another. Forgive us our pridefulness and unwillingness to even consider the viewpoint of others. We pray for mercy and for wisdom.

Grant us your guidance and your peace so that we may be about your business of spreading healing, love, peace and mercy to all of your people. Amen.