

Open Letter to the People of the Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

June 23, 2022

Grace and peace in the name of Jesus Christ.

There is no separating from the love of Christ, as Paul discovered long ago:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38–39).

In this time of “separation” as our friends and fellow disciples discern where God is calling them, it’s worth remembering what cannot be separated. **We are convinced that neither disaffiliation, nor denomination, nor departing from the UMC, nor deciding to stay, *nor anything* can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. No matter our future, the love of Christ is our firm foundation.**

We are grateful for Bishop Scott Jones. We appreciate his leadership as Bishop of the Texas Annual Conference, wish him well in retirement, and commit to praying for him and his family, that God may bless them as God has blessed us through them.

We recognize that the news of Bishop Jones’ retirement has led to uncertainty about who will be the episcopal leader of the Texas Annual Conference on January 1, 2023, and this uncertainty has the most impact on local churches that are discerning whether or not to remain in The United Methodist Church.

For some, a change in episcopal leadership brings concern about the possibility of departing from our core beliefs and values.

For others, it brings concern that we might receive an episcopal leader who wants to obstruct local churches that wish to disaffiliate by adding unnecessary financial obligations to the disaffiliation process.

For all of us, the splintering of our beloved church has meant deep sadness, moments of bitterness and anger, and a season of weariness.

Though we cannot predict the future, we can and must remain faithful to who we are as God’s people called to serve Christ in the UMC, for “the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 7:1). Therefore, as people of power, love, and self-discipline, we will not let fear have the driver’s seat, and we are resolved to the following:

1. We put our whole trust in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Colossians 3:19).
2. We affirm the faith of the Church as expressed by the historic creeds, including the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and Our Doctrinal Standards including The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church.
3. We yearn for unity of heart in the UMC, believing as John Wesley did that “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may” (“On a Catholic Spirit”).
4. We urge the Board of Trustees of the Texas Annual Conference not to add any further financial obligations to the Principles Regarding Local Church Requests for Disaffiliation, which we believe are fair and gracious and have already assisted five local churches in disaffiliating from the UMC.
5. We ask all local churches who wish to disaffiliate to comply in full with the Principles as their final act of covenant in the UMC.
6. We are excited to be in ministry in the Texas Annual Conference – indeed, we rejoice! – and believe the best days of the UMC are ahead.
7. We ask the South Central Jurisdiction to assign an episcopal leader who
 - Loves Jesus Christ and confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord
 - Desires to lead the UMC in making disciples of Jesus Christ
 - Believes the best days of the UMC are ahead
 - Has a bold vision for spreading the gospel, renewing the church, and transforming the world
 - Lowers anxiety
 - Encourages collaboration and creativity in ministry.

May God bless Bishop Jones and his family. May God multiply the impact of the Texas Annual Conference. May God send the Holy Spirit for a Pentecost renewal of the people called Methodist.

In Christ,

That We May Be One (TWMBO)