

A PASTORAL LETTER TO FUMC IN THE WAKE OF GENERAL CONFERENCE 2016: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



I believe it will take four to eight years for a plan to begin to unfold from the leadership of our bishops. During this time, we can continue to advocate within our denomination and beyond for full inclusion and the full scope of ministry for LGBTQ persons. We can build relationships that, should the need arise, lay the groundwork for some other organization of churches to come.

There is much about the future that is uncertain. Will The UMC split or find some hybrid way to maintain unity? We don't know. Will we be pressured to conform to the current restrictions on our ministry or will we be able to minister beyond our current restrictions? We don't know.

Here's what we do know: *God loves us. And, part of the vision God has given FUMC Austin is of a church that is fully accepting and affirming of LGBTQ persons. Time and again we have prayerfully affirmed this.*

Regardless of what the denomination or annual conference does, we have to be authentic to our calling. We have to be faithful. To our calling to be accepting and affirming, but also to being authentic and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Regardless of what happens to the denomination, we have to be faithful and vital as a congregation. We have to reach out to share God's love with others. We have to grow in our discipleship and in the numbers of those in worship. We need to serve our mission field, those on the streets downtown, and those beyond downtown. We can't let traffic stop us from ministering and teaching and serving and gathering for fellowship.

We have to remember our calling to love God and love neighbor. We have to live out our faith as our way of living out our advocacy for inclusion. We have to be such a vital church that even those who vehemently disagree with our witness to inclusion can't deny that the Spirit is present in us and our ministry.

This week in the Washington Post I read that "49 percent of all adults and 63 percent of millennials expressed" that "sexual relations between two adults of the same sex [was] not wrong at all." I say this, not to follow culture, but to illustrate that the mission field is ripe for the harvest of the gospel with which we have been entrusted.

FUMC is positioned to share God's love with people who desperately need it. People who have been rejected by their families and friends, and by their church. God has not abandoned them and we have the mission to walk with them as friends of faith. Pointing the way to the One we follow, who loves us and makes all things new. Amen.

Reverend Michael Mumme

To learn more about the 27 petitions FUMC submitted to General Conference, visit
<http://fumcaustin.org/fumc-petitions-at-general-conference/>.