



Salem United Methodist Church

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For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

Dear Salem family,

As you know, the last few days have been extremely troubling for our denomination, no matter where you stand on the topic of human sexuality. We live in a time when differences of opinions on several topics have been creating hatred, polarization and separation. Unfortunately, we don't always hear the voices of those who stand for compassion, dialogue and openness toward those who are different from us.

Last night in St. Louis, MO, the United Methodist General Conference passed what has been called the "Traditional Plan", with a vote of 438 to 384. You can read a detailed report here:

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/gc2019-daily-feb-26>

This plan restricts, further than our present disciplines, clergy from performing marriage ceremonies between "self-avowed practicing homosexuals". It also restricts the ordination of pastors who are "self-avowed practicing homosexuals".

In a time like this, it is crucial to remember that Salem United Methodist Church has always, and will always, welcome every person. We believe everyone is a beloved child of God. Throughout the history of this church, this vital message is what we preached, sang, and believed, and we will continue this important message in the days and years to come. Our strength is the diversity within our body. We need each other. We are called to be compassionate toward each other.

In the midst of confusing and contradictory news we receive from the media today, some clarifications are needed:

- 1) Parts of the "Traditional Plan" voted at General Conference appeared to be going against our own disciplines. For this reason, this plan will be submitted to the Judicial Council. The council will rule about this during its regularly scheduled next meeting, April 23-25, 2019 in Evanston, IL. We will not know until after that what portions of the Traditional Plan are actually valid.
- 2) Our bishop along with the cabinet will also need to study and understand what may be the actual consequences of all this for the Wisconsin churches. This too will take some time.
- 3) These processes may actually carry over to the next General Conference in two years. By then things may be quite different.

Some of you may feel deeply confused, discouraged and ready to retire your support from both our local as well as the general church. I strongly encourage you to "hang in there". The reality is that our financial support to the general church saves, and will continue to save, lives around the globe. Our faithful support, presence and prayers right here at Salem allow us to keep bringing healing, care, love and hope to us, our children, our grandchildren and all of those who are not here yet.

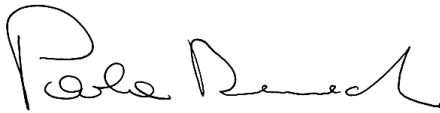
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You see, God's plans are a lot bigger than our plans and what we are capable of seeing right now. *Thank God!* God has plans of welfare, future and hope. On this promise, I stand firm. For this reason, we will continue to work on our dreaming and plans for the coming years at Salem. We stand on hope.

Finally, and most importantly, I invite you today to use compassion: compassion toward yourself and toward others. Give to God your troubles, uncertainty, and anger. Be compassionate toward those who are troubled by all that is happening, especially toward youth and young adults who are struggling with their identity and faith. Use compassion toward all those who have different opinions from you in this matter. Let's God's love shine through us.

This is a time of trouble, transition, separation and pain.
Yet I am hopeful, because I stand in God's hope.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paola Benucci". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P".

Pastor Paola