



February 28, 2019

Dear members, pastors, and friends of the Rio Texas Conference,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many of you anxiously followed the proceedings from the Special Called Session of General Conference in St. Louis. These past few days have been emotionally difficult for every one of us. My heart broke watching fellow United Methodists fail to find a new path forward that breaks through the impasse that we've experienced in our church over the past 47 years over LGBTQ inclusion. We had many difficult and public conversations about issues that are tied to our identities as United Methodists, as Christians, and as children of God.

For those of you who have not followed the details, I offer a brief explanation of what happened over four days in St. Louis. After a full day of prayer, the 864 delegates from across the global church received the report of the Commission on a Way Forward, including the One Church Plan (which was recommended by the Council of Bishops), the Connectional Conference Plan, and the Traditional Plan. The General Conference decided to give priority focus to the Traditional Plan and the One Church Plan. After two days of debate, the One Church Plan was defeated, and the Traditional Plan was supported by a vote of 53% to 47%. The Traditional Plan keeps the current language regarding homosexuality in the Book of Discipline, and streamlines the processes to enforce penalties for violations related to marriage and ordination of LGBTQ persons. A number of elements of the Traditional Plan, however, were found unconstitutional by the Judicial Council and the whole plan will be reviewed again at the

council's meeting in April. This means some or all of what was approved may not actually take effect. During the weeks to come, I'll be meeting with various groups to process what the decisions mean for us.

So, what does all this mean for the mission of Christ through the churches and people of the Rio Texas Conference?

First, I continue to count it an honor to serve as a Bishop of the United Methodist Church, and especially of the Rio Texas Conference. My task is to help us order our life together as a conference and to focus our work on the mission of Christ. No matter how you may feel about the decisions of the General Conference or whether you agree with or are hurt by the outcome, we are still in ministry together. All of us are valued parts of the body of Christ. Our lives and ministries are interwoven by the Holy Spirit, and not by decisions made at General Conference. As bishop, I offer all my prayers and efforts to include and foster the ministries of every person seeking to serve Christ. No matter how you are feeling about the conversations going on at the global level of our denomination, I want you to know that every one of us and everyone we serve are of infinite value and matchless worth in God's eyes. No denominational legislation will ever change that fact.

Second, I ask us not to underestimate the pain that is felt by many of our brothers and sisters in this moment. Many people feel hurt, betrayed, and excluded by the decisions made at General Conference. Please pray for those most personally affected. Within every congregation in our Conference, there are people for whom this conversation is not an abstract debate, but rather a conversation that affects lives dear to us—sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, co-workers and neighbors. A great number of people from the LGBTQ community are committed, faithful United Methodists. This is a tender time in the life of our church, a time especially to bear with one another in love with all humility and gentleness. (Ephesians 4:2)

Third, we still have much important work to do together. While we were gathered in St. Louis, the need for a faithful United Methodist witness in Rio Texas has only grown greater. Across our annual conference, there are multitudes that need to hear and witness the love of God in their lives and communities. While we debated plans and passed motions, our members and churches have been continuing the good work of reaching out to new people in new ways. Our disaster response network continues to

bring hope to those lives devastated by Hurricane Harvey and other natural disasters. Our churches and partners continue to respond to the humanitarian crisis at our border. Our congregations continue to seek fresh expressions of the Gospel, reaching out into our communities and experimenting with new ways to go where people are to connect them with the good news of Christ.

I realize that, for some, these words will ring hollow. Many of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters question whether there is truly a place for them in our church, and many of our traditionalist brothers and sisters feel anxious. But I want to invite everyone—whether or not you agree with the decisions of General Conference—to help us forge a way forward together in Christ as an annual conference.

“Let’s not get tired of doing good, because in time we’ll have a harvest if we don’t give up.” Galatians 6:9

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” John 13: 34-35.

Join me in prayer that we might continue to bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ in our churches, communities, and throughout Rio Texas.

Yours in Christ,

Robert Schnase, Bishop  
The Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church

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