

## **General Conference Church C.H.A.T. (Christians Having Amazing Thoughts) Notes—**

### **Saturday, May 11, 2019 Meeting at SPUMC Fellowship Hall**

\*Welcome by Pastor Jenny, who Read Matthew 16:13-17 (The Message)

\*Cassi Benedict read our SPUMC vision, mission, Reconciling statement.

#### **The Sun Prairie United Methodist Church**

***Our Vision:*** To be a welcoming home where we share God's love.

***Our Mission:*** To invite and welcome people to be committed and compassionate followers of Jesus Christ, through worship, spiritual growth, fellowship, and service to others.

Our welcome knows no boundaries.

The people of the Sun Prairie United Methodist Church open our doors and our hearts to all God's children. We celebrate the diversity of God's creation. We answer Jesus' call to 'love your neighbor' by embracing every person as a full participant in our church family, including people of all ages, nations, races, abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities.

We proclaim this statement of welcome especially to anyone who has known the pain of exclusion or discrimination through religion or in society. The people of the Sun Prairie United Methodist Church strive to love as God loves and welcome all to grow in their relationship with God.

\*Pastor Jenny shared a history of who we are as United Methodists, starting with John Wesley.

- Trace our roots back to John Wesley
- Wesley was not looking to start a church, but to renew the Anglican Church, which was decaying and declining. Began what became known as the Methodist Movement. A movement of the social gospel that reached out to the poor and marginalized; and spiritual holiness of individuals.
- Wesley an Anglican priest
- Methodist Episcopal Church formed in 1784. The UMC is now 12.5 million members; one of the largest mainline protestant denominations.
- First Book of Discipline 1785: book of polity, guiding principles

-The General Conference (GC) is the only decision-making body of the denomination. Meets every four years as a world-wide body. Only body that can speak for the church. Delegates to GC elected from Annual Conferences. Half clergy, half laity. Number of delegates based on Annual Conference membership.

-Bishops have no vote at GC. Role of the Bishops is not to be judges, but to be preachers, teachers, shepherds, who appoint clergy and lead Annual Conferences to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

-Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church split in 1844 over slavery. ME Church North and South. During that time many other bodies of Methodism, especially African American churches formed.

-Other splits in Methodism over race in 1816, 1820

-1939 many came back together as the Methodist Church. Creation of 'Central Jurisdiction' which was a Jurisdiction for the Black Conferences.

-1968 Methodist Church merged with Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB) to form The United Methodist Church.

-1956 Women given full clergy rights; 1980 first female Bishop, Marjorie Matthews, served Wisconsin.

### **Special General Conference 2019**

-Met in St. Louis in February, 2019

-Out of the 2016 GC, the delegates asked the Bishops to offer leadership in the standstill over matters of human sexuality.

-Formed the 32-member Commission of the Way Forward. Met over two years. Gave three proposals to the Bishops for consideration at the Special GC in 2019.

-Bishops supported what was known as The One Church Plan. Would have given discretion to individual Bishops and pastors when it comes to ordaining LGBTQ persons or officiating at same-gender weddings.

-Bishops decided to bring all three plans to the special GC and let the GC body decide.

-The result of the Special GC was that what is known as The Traditional Plan passed by a vote of 438-384; just 54 votes. Two-thirds of the U.S. delegates voted for the One Church Plan, but the votes from delegates outside the U.S. were able to pass the plan through.

-The Traditional Plan put stricter penalties on the already exclusionary language in the Book of Discipline regarding matters of human sexuality.

-What was passed at the Special GC was passed on to the Judicial Council of The UMC, which is like the Supreme Court, for decisions on the constitutionality of the plan and also a plan of disaffiliation for individual churches looking to leave the denomination.

### **Decisions of the Judicial Council--**

-The Judicial Council met the last week of April, 2019. The Council ruled some parts of the plans from GC as constitutional and some as unconstitutional.

### **Parts of the Traditional Plan that will go into effect January 1, 2020 in the U.S. and May 2021 in Africa, Europe and the Philippines:**

-Expands the definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” to include those “living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union, or is a person who publicly states she or he is a practicing homosexual.”

-Prohibits bishops from consecrating, commissioning or ordaining self-avowed homosexuals.

-Mandates penalties for clergy convicted of performing same-sex wedding ceremonies. Those penalties are a one-year suspension without pay for the first offense and termination of conference membership and church credentials for a second offense.

-Prohibits conference boards of ordained ministry from approving candidates not meeting ordination standards regarding sexuality.

-Establishes ‘limited rights’ and requirements for churches to disaffiliate for reasons related to church law on homosexuality and retain local church property (effective immediately in U.S. and January 1, 2021 in Africa, Europe and the Philippines)

\*Since the Special GC and the Judicial Council’s rulings, there has been much talk and many meetings of groups in favor and opposed to the decisions.

-There have been ‘secretive’ meetings and other more public meetings that are planned.

-May 20-22 there will be a gathering of 600 people at the Church of the Resurrection (Adam Hamilton’s church) in Leawood, KS. 10 people from each conference have been invited to talk about a new form of Methodism that could be formed.

\*The next regularly scheduled General Conference is in May of 2020 in Minneapolis, MN.

\*What Now?

-Churches could leave if conditions of the disaffiliation plan are met.

-Find a new way to stay united, but allow for different expressions of Methodism.

-Dissolve The UMC and new Methodist churches form as in the past.

-Most likely new way of being Methodist will come before GC in 2020.

-Remain open to new possibilities for the Church.

\*What about SPUMC?

-We will continue to be a Reconciling Church. Continuing to expand what our wide, reconciling welcome means to all people

-Currently, SPUMC will maintain our Apportionment/Connectional giving. SPUMC Apportionments for 2019 are \$106,668. Some churches are talking about withholding their Apportionment giving or holding it in escrow until more is learned about possible new forms of Methodism.

\*All church is local

-The heartbeat of our denomination comes through the local churches and Annual Conferences.

-Comes down to relationships within our local churches and our witness.

**\*Other Questions/Comments:**

-2020 is the next General Conference with the possibilities of petitions that would offer other forms of Methodism to be debated and voted on. The General Conference can relook at any of this in 2020.

-SPUMC mortgage is held by the United Methodist Foundation with a remaining mortgage of \$1,283,182.67. Our insurance is through Church Mutual.

-A lot of things come down to property and money. This is all fuzzy including Pastors pensions and Appointments.

-Delegates to GC are based on membership in the Annual Conference. Wisconsin is considered 'small' and will have 6 delegates that will be elected at the June Annual Conference. Delegates to GC are half clergy, half laity. The fastest growing UM Church is on the continent of Africa, which means they have more delegates. In some parts of Africa, homosexuality is punishable by death. Cultural difference can be challenging.

-In the United States the Traditional Plan was not supported by 2/3 of the U.S. churches, who voted for One Church Plan. There are still traditional churches in the U.S. and we are still separated by North and South.

-Current Book of Discipline says that no same gender marriages/unions can take place in our UM churches or by UM Pastors even off-site.

-The U.S. churches support the African churches financially at a level of about 90%.

-We are not the only denomination that has dealt with this controversy over matters of human sexuality, but most other denominations are not as worldwide as The UMC.

-Pastor Jenny can be supported by us as the local church through prayer. These decisions are different for her as the clergy. There are ways we can all stay engaged without causing harm.

-The Wisconsin State Journal included an ad today that put together by the SPUMC reconciling team and included other Reconciling UM churches in the Madison area. The ad emphasizes our welcome to all people. This is a great witness to our community.

-There is a lot of uncertainty as to what will happen next or what our next steps will be. We are waiting, witnessing, welcoming, and praying.

-As a church, we do need to be talking and doing more. Bring our ideas to the Reconciling Team, Pastor Jenny or the Leadership Board.

-Our members of our Annual Conference this year are: Pastor Jenny, Lisa Wink, and Mike Vavrus. Connie Meyer also goes to Annual Conference as a lay leader from SPUMC and part of the Conference Program and Arrangements team. If you have things you would like to talk to them about please do so.

-The United Methodist church does not change quickly.

-We will continue to have more meetings to brainstorm ideas about what to do next and how to live out our vision.

**\*Closing Prayer:**

-After a time of silence, call out words or phrases to this statement:

The Church I long for is\_\_\_\_\_

-Some answers included: Open to all your children, without restriction or judgement, kind, justice, courageous, accepting, graceful, understanding, shows love and joy.