

Dear Friends,

As I am sure many of you are aware, our denomination, the United Methodist Church held its worldwide General Conference in Charlotte, NC from April 23<sup>rd</sup> to May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

As the primary decision-making gathering of the church, the General Conference held 765 delegates from all over the world comprised of clergy and lay leaders. In this gathering there were many important decisions made over the future of the denomination. Notably, delegates effectively removed restrictions on LGBTQ candidates for ministry which had been used by some to deny LGBTQ candidates for ministry from reaching full ordination in the church. Language was removed from the social principles that labeled homosexuality as “incompatible” with Christian teachings. Also, deacons in the United Methodist Church were granted full authority over the sacraments.

There is so much more that happened in the space of 11 days that this body accomplished and there are several resources to explore that work. Click [here](#) for a letter from our Bishop.

It is no secret that human sexuality has been one topic of conversation and tension in our church for decades. Naturally, as we share our lives together as a church family, we become aware of the healthy differences that we all share. Diversity in the body of Christ has been a cornerstone of the Church and its impact on society since the very beginning of its inception. In this season of Pentecost, we are reminded that from day one of Gods Church on earth, the Holy Spirit swept through an upper room of Jesus’ disciples and blessed them with a spirit of unity and understanding amid confusion! I believe that our differences are blessings and opportunities to grow rather than reasons to put distance between one another.

Some of our United Methodist Church family have expressed that the direction of the United Methodist Church has made them feel like the denomination does not have room for their beliefs. I have found [this video](#) to share a very helpful reflection on that concern. It is important to remember that when it comes to the core orthodox beliefs of the United Methodist Church, nothing has changed. We are still and always will be a church that confesses Biblical truths such as the divinity of Christ, the wonder and power of the triune God as well as Jesus’ resurrection and our salvation as a gift of that sacrifice. For more information on the United Methodist Church’s’ beliefs check out this [resource](#).

As a new part of this faith community, I can only share what I have seen so far in the brief time that I have been here at Canton Central UMC. I see a community that deeply cares about one another and embraces the meaning of being a spiritual family. I see an environment that welcomes everyone who desires to grow closer to God. I have experienced firsthand the excitement, hope, and vision that this church has for the future. I have also seen a community that truly believes in living out its faith by making a positive impact on the community around it. I know that there is so much more to learn, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be blessed by this congregation. I firmly believe that the soul of this church will remain the same in the years to come.

I also know that this is just part of a continuous conversation that healthy church families have. Through Bible study, prayer, worship, service, and our shared lives together we will continue to take this spiritual journey and grow together. As Proverbs 27:17 reminds us *“Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.”* Praise God for one of the greatest gifts that we are given, one another.

Sincerely,

Rev. Tom Henderson Owens