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¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

Dear Members of Mt. Horeb,

I'm writing to share important news about the United Methodist Church. For over 40 years, there has been a long debate focused on human sexuality, particularly homosexuality, in the church. Our United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, which is grounded in Holy Scripture, recognizes that while all persons are persons of sacred worth and are to be loved and welcomed in the church, the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore we are not allowed to marry homosexual couples and self-avowed practicing homosexual persons are not to be ordained for ministry.

This is a controversial topic in our culture and in the church. We want to be clear with you that love is at the center of our beliefs at Mt. Horeb. Our desire is not to condemn or condone but rather convert everyone to a living and transforming faith in Jesus Christ. We fully believe God's grace is available for all people and all people are of sacred worth. We believe that all of us have "practices or problems" in our Christian life that are incompatible with Biblical Christian teaching but we also believe people are not incompatible with God's grace and love. We are all sinners and would be lost without the grace of God.

Therefore, all people will always be welcomed at Mt. Horeb.

There have been many debates at the local church level among Bishops, Clergy and Laity. There have been debates and resolutions presented at Annual Conferences and General Conferences. General Conference occurs every 4 years and is the only place changes to our polity, theology or biblical understanding can occur. General Conference includes clergy and lay delegates from every US Annual Conference, as well as, Conferences from around the globe.

At the General Conference of 2016, the Council of Bishops was asked to give leadership to this heated debate. In response, the Bishops formed *The Commission on the Way Forward*. This commission was comprised of laity and clergy from around the globe and after meeting for two years, reported back to the Council of Bishops. A special General Conference has been called for in February 2019 to consider three options submitted by *The Commission on the Way Forward* to help direct the church in the coming years. These are the three models known to us at the moment:

1. THE TRADITIONAL MODEL

Keep the same *Discipline* statements regarding human sexuality as in the *Book of Discipline* currently. However, since bishops, conferences, boards of ministries and churches are presently in open defiance of the *Discipline* as it now stands, close the loopholes and tighten the accountability sections of the *Discipline*. The Traditional Plan also allows a gracious exit strategy from the denomination with their property and assets for churches not willing to abide by this plan.

2. THE ONE CHURCH MODEL

Reverse the church's historic teaching in regard to human sexuality. Remove all references to homosexuality and marriage as between a man and a woman. Let individuals, churches and conferences decide for themselves what standards they wish to follow. Churches would be allowed to perform same-sex marriage and gay

clergy would be ordained and appointed to serve. Build assurances that the convictions of traditionalists will be honored.

3. THE CONNECTIONAL CONFERENCE PLAN

Divide into three separate branches of United Methodism and let each branch adopt their own *Discipline*, select their own bishops, adopt their own criteria for ordination and set its own standards for human sexuality.

As your Senior Pastor, I want you to know I am openly supporting The Traditional Model and what I believe is a clear Biblical definition that marriage is between a man and woman. On July 15th, the Mt. Horeb Administrative Council also endorsed a resolution which supports The Traditional Plan and the traditional biblical definition of marriage. I believe it's important to know this is not a new position for Mt. Horeb. The values, beliefs and mission that have grown this church are not changing. In fact, we are currently praying, dreaming and strategizing on our long range plan for the next 5-10 years.

It is also important to understand the issue of human sexuality/homosexuality is not the only issue at stake. There are many differences between orthodox traditional Christian theology and progressive Christian theology. These include but are not limited to: the understanding of who God is and His nature, the authority of scripture, the understanding of sin, redemption and the need for transformation by Jesus.

Our hearts and focus at Mt. Horeb remain committed to following Jesus, loving and living like Jesus and making disciples for Jesus. What ultimately will happen will not be known until the special General conference in February 2019. We are sharing with you now to be sure you are praying for the 2019 General Conference and are aware of the possible consequences. Mt. Horeb is a prayer-driven church. If you would like to join a church-wide prayer team to pray for the future of our denomination and God's preferred future for Mt. Horeb, please email Chris Carver (chris@mthorebumc.com) or Gerry Carter (wbulex@gmail.com).

I remain committed to presenting the Gospel of Jesus with truth and grace,



Pastor Jeff

⁴ "Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.'" ⁵ And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' ⁶ Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together." Matthew 19:4-6 (NLT)