



January 12, 2023

A NOTE FROM THE PASTOR



A Message to the Church of Madison First UMC Regarding the Pause

Greetings in the name of Jesus, the Light of the World!

It has been my practice to address and to communicate with the entire congregation any events, especially those that are news-related, that I refer to as “surprises.” My preferred communication medium has been emails entitled “From the Pastor,” which are posted on the website as well. Lately I have come to the realization that many of our members do not read the church emails or regularly access our website, so I shared this information prior to the sermon on January 8, 2023, and I am reprinting it here for you.

On December 28, 2022, Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, the Appointive Cabinet, and the Board of Trustees of the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church issued a statement calling for a “pause” of the disaffiliation process in North Georgia. You can read full statement by [clicking this link](#).

The conference statement concludes that the cabinet will not accept disaffiliation requests in January and the conference Board of Trustees will not negotiate disaffiliation agreements as previously announced. Therefore, the conference will not schedule church conference votes in March and April as previously stated. The statement does not specify how long this pause will last. The Q&A contained at the end of the statement (see above link) says that after General Conference 2024 (April 23 – May 3, 2024) this process would be reconsidered. The difficulty in the above statement is the disaffiliation process terminates on December 31, 2023, when Paragraph 2553 expires, five months before General Conference 2024.

For now, please consider my initial thoughts.

1. We understand this action will be upsetting to many and pleasing to some. Until this matter is resolved, we, Madison First UMC, will renew our focus on our local church, our local ministry, our mission and outreach, and our love for one another. Let us band together as we continue to worship, grow, and serve our Lord.

2. Madison First UMC has done nothing to violate the Book of Discipline and is in good standing as defined at Annual Conference 2022. Additionally, Madison First UMC has done nothing to engage in any of the negative conduct outlined in the December 28, 2022, statement from the annual conference.

3. I am aware that, for many of you, there is a growing lack of trust concerning conference leadership. At Madison First UMC, I ask you to trust our lay and clergy leadership. I believe God put us here for “just such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). For now, let us remember the One to whom we belong (1 John 3:1) and not fall prey to the temptation of fear, anger, gossip, or

speculation. God is in control of His church, and He will be faithful to fulfill the ministry to which we have all been called. Let us walk in unity with confidence and assurance of that fact.

4. The sermon I delivered on January 1, 2023, was to encourage everyone “not to lose heart for we look not at what is seen but what is unseen” (2 Cor 4:16-18). Friends, “let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time, we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up” (Galatians 6:9). We can trust in the sovereign power of a Holy God.

So, what do we do now?

First, we should be praying and fasting. James says, “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results” (James 5:16). NOW is the time for God’s people to be calling on the Lord to move in power and glory. Our Intercessory Prayer Ministry is already on the task. Our call to fast is part of the three General Rules of the Church (Attend to the ordinances of God) so we will be attentive to Holy Spirit.

Second, we need to continue to support our local congregation and not engage in harmful actions that will compromise the “good standing” of Madison First UMC. Deborah and I will continue to tithe to this church, this United Methodist Church, because this is our church. If we cannot do this in good faith, then we will need to go to another church where we can. To withhold the tithe is not only robbing God, but it is also defiling the church, which is the Bride of Christ.

Let us also refrain from taking to social media and expressing outrage or support for these actions. Put your hands and fingers together in prayer and give keyboards a rest. Facebooking seldom promotes peacemaking and only drives the wedge of division deeper.

I am conservative, traditional, orthodox, evangelical. This is no surprise to most, if not all, of you. Our love for one another also indicates this is not ugly or offensive to you. We may not all believe alike, which is the beauty of the diversity of the United Methodist Church, but we can all love alike. I ask you to trust that the traditional leadership in the conference is hard at work discerning and moving toward restarting the process whereby local congregations who have asked for a vote concerning disaffiliation will be permitted to proceed. Pray for them.

If your group, class, or study would like to schedule a time to meet with me, please do not hesitate to email or to call me. I am willing to meet with all groups.

I am sharing with you the names and contact information of our conference leaders should you have the desire to express your thoughts directly to them. Please include in your communication that you are part of Madison First United Methodist Church.

Let us continue praying that God’s will, which is “good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2), will be done on earth perfectly as it is in heaven.

May God’s grace and our faith in Him prove stronger.

Your pastor and shepherd,

Grady

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