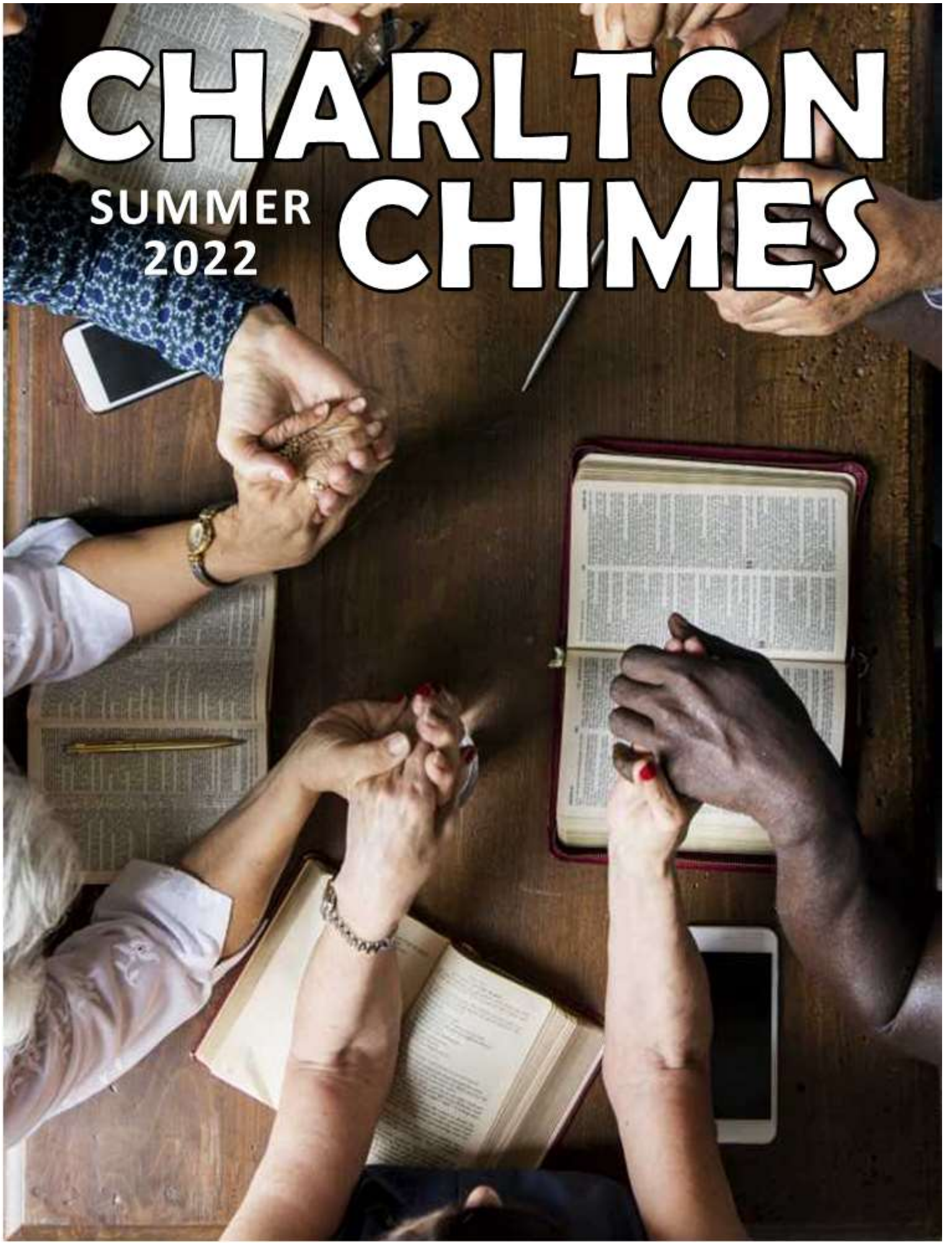


CHARLTON SUMMER 2022 CHIMES



As we head into the summer months, we will continue to have Sunday morning worship services at 9:00 and 11:00 am.

While it would be great to have a combined service as we have had in past summers, we do recognize that the pandemic experience has caused many people to be more aware of their 'personal space'. While our sanctuary will seat 150 persons, our Easter service looked very full, but there were only 110 people in attendance. This shows that people are more space conscious than they have been in the past.

However, we will have 4 special outdoor worship services at 9:30 am. These will be held on the following Sundays:

Sunday, May 29

Sunday, July 3

Sunday, August 7

Sunday, September 4



The Charlton Chimes

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A Message from the Pastor ...

***"One must maintain a little bit of summer,
even in the middle of winter."***

~ Henry David Thoreau

Who wouldn't appreciate the warmth and light of summer? It provides opportunities that we may not have at other times of the year. Summer offers life, growth, and fertility, which should encourage us to think about what we spiritually yearn for ourselves and our Church.

Christ is the Sun of Justice in *"His wings shall bring salvation"* (Malachi 4:2). He is *"the dawn that visited us from on high"* (Luke 1:78) and *"the Light of the world"* (John 8:12). Now, when the sun goes down (when

Jesus walks away), then it is a deadly winter for the Church. And, of course, we do not want that to happen. As a church, we want Jesus to continue to shine in our lives. And give us the warmth we need to feel the Holy Spirit acting among us even when situations seem like a cold winter day.

For this last month, our sermon series has been focused on how God breaks down barriers. Through the experiences of the early Christian Church, we saw how Peter and Paul were able to break down social, gender, religious, ethnic barriers, and much more to bring the gospel to all people. We learned that 'Yes! We can do it!' if we let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit and abandon all kinds of situations that accentuate our differences more than our essence as Christians, which is to love each other as Jesus loves us.

In the pages of this issue, you will find an article about the situation of our United Methodist Church and what we are experiencing as a denomination. Today, more than ever, we find ourselves in a situation where we must show what we say we are: a church with ***"Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors."***

May God give us the wisdom and courage to not allow any hurdles to stand in our way as we work for unity. May our eyes be opened to see opportunities to learn more about one another and to build bridges between us, remembering that Jesus is the One who calls us to unity despite our differences. Therefore, allow the Son to shine just one more time, as it has done thus far. Amen.

Pastor Miguel



PENTECOST SUNDAY

Sunday, June 5 :: Breaking Language Barriers

Acts 2:1-21 / Psalms 104:24-34, 35b / Romans 8:14-17/ John 14:8-17 (25-27)

Our "Breaking Barriers" sermon series comes to a close on this Pentecost Sunday. The resurrection and ascension of Christ make possible the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to empower congregations of believing people to reach all nations and overcome all ethnic and religious divisions in the world. That Holy Spirit work, seen so vividly at Pentecost, is the origin and the sustenance of the church. In the gospel reading, Jesus says, "*I am in the Father, and the Father is in me,*" Jesus proclaims to his followers. Then Jesus promises the gift of the Spirit, the Comforter so that God might be in you (v.11).

How do you communicate if you don't speak the same language? Speaking a different language can be a problem, not when looking for means to do it. We realize that those language barriers are broken. The Holy Spirit becomes this "*lingua franca*" that allows these people to communicate and be in the same Spirit. How do we let the Holy Spirit break down our communication barriers to do a better job as a church?



A CONCERT OF PRAYER

Sunday, June 12

We'll take a one week pause between sermon series and gather for a very special worship experience. No matter where you turn, it seems our world is in conflict. Geographical, political and theological differences are contributing to a very divided world.

Join us for a musically-oriented service that will call the Charlton family to pray for our world, our community, our denomination and our own mission and ministry.

F.R.O.G. - FULLY RELY ON GOD

You've probably heard of the acronym F.R.O.G. (Fully Rely on God) more than once. We have coined this term from the Christian fiction book of poetry written by Jerrilyn Ash, who tells us about the adventures of a frog that lives in a pond. Some of her adventures pit him against other animals that share the place and its surroundings. Some are predators who are willing to make him an exquisite delicacy. But he, in those moments of uncertainty, fears, and concern about what might happen to him, the little frog simply sings praises to the Lord, saying: "Fully Rely On God."

This term not only became famous among children in Sunday School and VBS, but many adults have used this little F.R.O.G. acronym to remind them what they should do in their Christian life: "Fully Rely On God." That is why the invitation is that this summer, between the sunny days, the opportunities to be in contact with nature, and more than a few vacation moments, we can continue to trust in God.

"F.R.O.G." (Fully Rely On God) is a series of seven sermons that invite us to fully trust in God. Through the Old Testament lectionary readings, we will discover how prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea faced trials. But they were sure that the One calling them to this specific prophetic mission was God himself. This summer, let us accept the invitation to continue trusting in God, despite the difficulties and tests that we may have. It may be that during this series of sermons, this little amphibian, who experiences daily trials in his life, becomes a reminder that we must "Fully Rely On God."

Sunday, June 19 :: Self-Care to Continue the Journey

1 Kings 19:1-15a; Psalm 42; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

In this summer season, when the sun is strong and intense, perhaps one of the ways to take care of ourselves is to protect ourselves from the sun, wearing UV-ray lenses and sunscreen. Self-care is essential in our life. As much as we rely on God, it will be challenging to continue the journey if we don't care for ourselves.

The prophet Elijah was exhausted, without strength or hope. He did not want to eat or live. His state of health required personal care. But God provided for him with food and company and made him aware of taking care of himself to continue the path and the mission that God had entrusted to him. Elijah trusted God, and God was with him. How do you experience self-care in your spiritual life?



Sunday, June 26 :: Mentoring for the Mission

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

A mentor is a person who can support, advise, and guide you. They typically take the time to get to know you and the challenges you are facing and then use their understanding and personal experience to help you improve. Mentors are essential to our growth, especially in matters of faith.

The old prophet Elijah seemed to test the devotion of the new prophet Elisha. As it was known that Elijah would soon go to heaven, Elisha did not want to waste time and tried to stay as close as possible to his mentor. Both relied on God. One in his role as a mentor and the other one as a mentee. Do you have a mentor in your spiritual life?

Sunday, July 3 :: The Miracle Seven

2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30; Galatians 6:(1-6) 7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

The number 'seven' means "attainment, wholeness, and perfection" (physical and spiritual). Its meaning is first seen in the book of Genesis as part of God's creation. And in several other passages of the Bible, this number represents the perfect presence of God. And how we are called to rely on this Perfect Presence.

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, enemy of Israel and Judah. No matter how good and successful everything else in Naaman's life was, he was a leper. And he asks the prophet, Elisha, to tie him up. Naaman relied on God, and God worked a miracle. What miracle has God worked in your life?

Sunday, July 10 :: Exalted in Humility

Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

At first glance, the ancient virtue of humility is not particularly attractive. Derived from the word humus (earth), it seems to clash with our current assessment of self-esteem and self-realization. But humility has nothing to do with meekness or weakness. And it doesn't mean being modest or submissive either. Humility is an attitude of spiritual modesty that comes from understanding our place in the larger order of things.

Amos, a caretaker and collector of sycamore-fig trees, a humble man with no pretense of greatness, is called by God as a prophet. His task is not easy, but his humility relies on God, and he trusts that God will sustain him in the task that he has to announce. What task for God do you humbly assume?



Sunday, July 17 :: A Basket of Summer Fruit

Amos 8:1-12; Psalm 52 or 82; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

At this time of summer, we all enjoy the fruits of the season. Perhaps when we can eat some fruits that we do not find at other times of the year. However, if we leave these fruits out of the fridge and catch the sun's heat, they will be ripe and ready to rot in a couple of days.

Amos, the prophet of God, sees a basket of summer fruit: this was ripe fruit that would not keep long. Just as the time is short for summer fruit, so the time is short for Israel. Israel has not been faithful to God and has committed injustices against her own people. They have not relied on God, and the prophecy must be announced. What does it mean for you to trust God when His will is not fulfilled?

Sunday, July 24 :: Sand in the Seashore

Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85; Colossians 2:6-15 (16-19); Luke 11:1-13

During the summer many love to go to the beach and enjoy the sea, the sand, and the sun. One of the most therapeutic ways to walk on the beach is barefoot. There the feet feel the countless amounts of sand, which show the immensity of God beyond what we can imagine. And we wonder how is this possible?

The word God had for Hosea wasn't easy. Hosea was told to take a prostitute for a wife. Why? Because the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord. The town didn't rely on God. But God promises redemption to the people. And the people will be recognized by their number, like the sand of the sea. Can you count the blessings of God for your life? Or are they like sea sand?

Sunday, July 31 :: Called to Reset

Hosea 11:1-11; Psalm 107:1-9, 43; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

When our computers or cell phones do not work, we are often told that we must reset it and return it to its original state. In our life, a reset allows us the opportunity to make improvements in our daily life in any shape or form we choose, at any pace we desire. When the world around us can feel overwhelmingly complicated, daunting, or uncertain, choosing to reset your outlook or situation delivers a refreshing sense of personal freedom.

Hosea, the prophet, announces to the people of Israel that they have been stubborn and reminds them of all that God has cared for and guided them since they left Egypt. But God asks them to change and rely on Him, as their God, in other words, to reset themselves and return to their original state, God. How are you resetting your spiritual life this summertime?



TREASURE MAP TO HEAVEN

Children are fascinated by stories of hidden treasures and excited by the idea of finding treasure themselves. When I was a child, I liked to read *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. That adventure story tells about a distant time when pirates and treasures were still hidden on desert islands.

Do you remember what you used to do to find a treasure? The first thing was to have a map, and the map needed to be understood, with all its symbols, signs, and instructions. But, the instructions were not always evident in the search for that hidden treasure. Many assumed certain things to go in search of that precious treasure.

As Christians searching for the Heavenly Treasure, we know that the Bible is God's treasure map, leading us to heaven. But to understand this treasure map, we need to become familiar with it. And not only that, we must follow the instructions, because otherwise we will be lost in our search.

"Treasure Map to Heaven" is a series of five sermons that will take us on the adventure of knowing some of Jesus' sayings connected with Heaven. In the scriptures, we will find some instructions, precautions, warnings, and a glimpse of what we must do to obtain this valuable treasure. The good news is that it is not a hidden treasure for those who want to find it. In this sermon series, we are all seekers and hunters of the heavenly treasure. We have the map. Now, it is our task to follow the instructions.

Sunday, August 7 :: Understanding the Instructions

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23; Heb 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

Finding a treasure can be quite an adventure, but if we do not follow instructions, the map, the compass, and the necessary elements, this search can take a lifetime. Jesus says, *"for where your treasure is, there your heart will be"* (Luke 12:34). We treasure things in our lives in a particular way; family, possessions, and other items. What are those things that have become an earthly treasure for you? How important are the instructions of Jesus in the search for this treasure in heaven? *(This is an Outdoor service at 9:30 am)*

Sunday, August 14 :: Misunderstood Instructions

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

One of the worst things that can happen to us on a treasure hunt is having the wrong map. It is likely that when reading the map, we will not find what helps us find the treasure. Not because it's not there, but because we misunderstand the instructions.

Jesus confronts his followers and makes them see that he came not to bring peace but division. For anyone who reads these words out of context, he will misinterpret them. So, what is Jesus trying to tell us with these statements that are so difficult to understand? How important is God's time and the signs of the times in correctly understanding the map to find this Treasure in Heaven?



Sunday, August 21 :: Reading the Map, Following the Compass

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

Reading a map is not easy, especially when we have become accustomed to using a GPS. We often follow that device without even questioning where we are going. In the treasure hunt, we sometimes get stuck in the minutiae of things, and we forget the purpose of why we are searching. We don't have to be distracted by the environment surrounding us. Instead, we need to concentrate on the primary goal. To do that, we need to know how to read the map well and follow the compass.

Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath, and many criticize him. These characters are buried in the minutiae of the law and religiosity and lose the direction that Jesus indicates to them so that they can find the Treasure in Heaven. What things distract you in life, disorienting you to continue with the search for God?

Sunday, August 28 :: Searching for Honor, Instead of the Treasure

Jeremiah 2:4-13; Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

Having the map does not always ensure that you find the Treasure. This is because looking for a treasure requires the wisdom to know how to read the map, follow the instructions, and be clear that you are not always the first.

Jesus challenges his detractors with a parable about a wedding party and the seating of guests. You don't sit in the best place, for if one takes the seat of the highest honor for oneself, one can be asked to remove it if the host prefers someone else to sit there. What lesson does this parable of Jesus offer your life searching for the Treasure in Heaven?

Sunday, September 4 :: The Cost of Finding the Treasure

Jeremiah 18:1-11; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Philemon 1-21; Luke 14:25-33

The adventures of those who seek a treasure are always full of many sacrifices. To get the Treasure, you don't just need to have the map; but know how to read it, interpret it, and sacrifice to find it. Nobody gets a great treasure without a high cost.

Jesus points out that being a disciple has a cost. It does not just intend to be, but you must sacrifice for it. Jesus says, "*anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*" (Luke 14:27). So, what does it take to become a disciple of Jesus and obtain the Treasure in Heaven?



CHARLTON CHURCH HAS

GIVING GRACE and HELPING HANDS are GOING STRONG!

Our Giving Grace and Helping Hands community outreach programs continue to operate as a drive-thru. The Giving Grace volunteers gather to organize and prepare the bags of household items for families and senior citizens that are in need. The Helping Hands volunteers gather to fill bags with food items to prepare a meal at home. A third group of volunteers gather on the first Wednesday of the month to distribute those bags to our clients when they pull up in the church parking lot. If you would like to help with this effort, please contact the church office.

SUMMER MISSION OFFERINGS

JUNE

Neighborhood Center

The Neighborhood Center builds a vital community by serving and empowering children, youth, and families in downtown Harrisburg.

JULY

**Center for
Spiritual Formation**

The Center provides a wide variety of retreats for clergy and lay persons both online and at their retreat center located in Millerstown, PA

AUGUST

Someone To Tell It To

Someone To Tell It To cultivates meaningful relationships through compassionate listening and trains others to do the same.

S A FOR MISSIONS



BACKPACK MINISTRY

During the month of June, we will once again be collecting items to provide backpacks for our Giving Grace families. We are in need of the following items: backpacks, binders, pens, pencils, erasers, crayons, colored pencils, markers, glue sticks, tablets, notebook paper, rulers, and other assorted school supplies.

FOOD DRIVE

During the month of July, we will be having a Food Drive to benefit a local food bank. We will specifically be collecting peanut butter, canned chicken and canned tuna. Place your items in the shopping cart in the lobby.



If you would prefer to make a financial donation for one of these efforts, please mark it and place it in the offering or give to the church office.

911 OUTREACH

During the month of August, we will once again be collecting items to fill baskets for our outreach to our area 911 responders, as a way of saying thanks for their hard work and commitment to keeping us all safe. We are in need of individually wrapped snack items, such as cookies, snacks, candy, juice boxes, etc.



PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY



The women of God's Hands @ Work are always hard at work making prayer shawls for you to share with people who need to know others are praying for them. You can pick up a prayer shawl at the display in the hall or in the Conference Room. If you would prefer a specific style or color, you may fill out a request card located next to the display.

Introducing the
CAROLINE ALLEN INITIATIVE

Does this person look familiar to you? This is our beloved Caroline Allen who passed away last November.

Among other activities at Charlton, Caroline served as chair of our Administrative Council and Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Caroline often asked a simple question at our meetings: What have we done for children and families today?

It is important to notice she didn't ask what have we *ever* done for children ... she asked what have we done TODAY for children and families.

And though Caroline is no longer with us, we must still ask ourselves that same important question. What have we done for children and families today?

At the recent meeting of Charlton's Administrative Council, members shared their memories of Caroline, especially those years she served as chairperson of the council. After this time of sharing, the council committed themselves to honor Caroline's memory by continuing to ask that question.

Out of this discussion came the idea of creating an initiative to encourage and foster the formation of ministries that would make our community and world a better place for children and families.

And so, we are excited to share the conception of The Caroline Allen Initiative and its first effort, the Family Promise program.



*Loving God,
your Son told his disciples to become like little children.
Lead us to work for the welfare and protection of all young people.
May we respect their dignity that they may flourish in life,
following the example of the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*



Family Promise is a national organization with regional offices in 180 cities that provides shelter and assistance to homeless families. In PA, one in every 24 to 36 children are homeless. While there are a number of shelters in our area that assist the homeless, there are no shelters where a homeless family can stay together. Families experiencing homelessness often need to separate in order to find shelter.

The Family Promise organization works with local churches to provide a safe place for those families for one week at a time, four times a year. In addition to sleeping accommodations, the churches also provide an evening meal and a grab-and-go breakfast.

Our regional Family Promise program operates a Recreational Center in Camp Hill, PA. This serves as a hub for the families in the program, where they are able to take showers and get ready for their day. Family Promise focuses on providing stabilization efforts, assisting with job placement, providing financial counseling and education, connecting families with social services, and supporting the family as they locate affordable housing.

Charlton Church will begin welcoming Family Promise families in July of this year. Here's how you can help:

DONATIONS

A variety of items will be needed for our participation in the Family Promise program. These include air mattresses, pillows, linens, and blankets. If you would like to donate towards or purchase any of these items, please contact and coordinate with the church office.

We would also like to have a couch or a few chairs in each of the three rooms where our guests will be spending the night. If you have a used couch or chairs that you no longer need, and that are in good condition, please contact the church office.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

COORDINATOR(S) – We are in need of a person(s) willing to take the lead in coordinating the program.

DRIVER(S) – We are in need of a person(s) willing to drive the programs 15 passenger van to provide transportation for the families to/from the Family Promise Center in Camp Hill.

PREP WORKERS – We are in need of individuals willing to prepare the rooms. This includes setting up/taking down the air mattresses, making the 'beds', etc.

COOKS – We are in need of individuals willing to make or provide the evening meal for the families.

HOSPITALITY – We are need of individuals willing to prepare the tables for the evening meal and to welcome the families as they arrive. This may also include preparing hospitality baskets prior to their arrival.

OVERNIGHT HOSPITALITY – We are in need of individuals who would be willing to spend the night at the church while we are hosting families. These persons are present in case of emergency or questions.

LAUNDRY – We are in need of individuals willing to wash the linens and blankets as needed.

STUDENT MINISTRIES C O N N E C T I O N

KIDs Club will continue to run during the summer months. All children from preschool through 5th grade will be excused from worship after the pastor's children's message. They meet in the lower level children's wing for a lesson, activities and games. Parents can then pick up their children at 10:30 am.

KIDs Club will not be held on the Sunday when there is an outdoor worship service.



KID'S NIGHT OUT

Our families have decided that in place of our normal week-long VBS program, they would prefer a weekly version of Kid's Night Out. The program will run from 6 to 8 pm on the following days:

Wednesday, July 6
Wednesday, July 13
Wednesday, July 20
Wednesday, July 27

We will be in need of adults to assist with this summer's Kid's Night Out program. You can sign up on your Sunday Connection Card.

YOUTH GROUP

Charlton Youth will be gathering for a bowling party in late June.

In July, they will help at the weekly Kid's Night Out on Wednesdays.

In August they will be having a day of service, helping with odd jobs for church family members.

The 2021-2022 school year has come to an end.

Our teachers will spend the summer preparing the classrooms for next year.

We want to say a big "Thank you" to everyone at Charlton Church!

We appreciate all the prayers, encouragement and donations throughout the school year. The children (and staff) had a great year thanks to all of your support!

~ Trish, Jen, Lauren and Heather (Charlton Preschool Teachers)



You can continue to support the Preschool during the summer months by purchasing grocery gift cards at church. They are available on Sunday mornings at the Welcome Desk, and are also available during the week during office hours. This is an easy way to support the ministry of Charlton Preschool.





MOVIE NIGHT

**Friday, July 15
6:00 pm**

Save the date!

CHARLTONE

Are you Single? Divorced? A Widow or Widower? One doesn't need to be a lonely number!

We invite you to join us for an afternoon of fellowship as we talk about the needs of persons who find themselves living alone and do some brainstorming on what we can do to make life less lonely. A variety of desserts will be available to feast on during our discussion.

**Sunday, July 31
3:00 pm**

In the kitchen



Porcupine Meatballs

1 tbsp butter	1 cup minute rice
1 small onion	1 egg
1 lb lean ground beef	1/4 cup water
1 packet (1.5 oz) meatloaf seasoning	
28 oz can tomato sauce	
23 oz can tomato soup	

Step One:

Saute finely chopped onion in the butter until soft.

Step Two:

Combine onions, beef, rice, lightly beaten egg, seasoning and water. Mix gently by hand until well blended. Form into medium meatballs.

Step Three:

Mix the tomato sauce and tomato soup. You may season to your liking; for example, Italian seasoning, etc.

Step Four:

Place meatballs in 3 quart sauce pan and cover with the tomato mixture. Bring to a soft boil, then reduce heat and simmer until meatballs are cooked through.

Serve over mashed potatoes.

MASK UPDATE



The health and welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ continue to be of utmost concern at Charlton Church. Following the instructions of our founder John Wesley, we aim to “Do No Harm” in all that we do and say. We want to take this time to remind you of the COVID policies to keep our church family safe during this pandemic. We strongly urge everyone to remain diligent, especially during those times where there is an increase in reported cases in our area.

Masks are not required for those who have been fully vaccinated while in the church building. Persons who have not been vaccinated are encouraged to wear masks. We ask that people observe social distancing whenever possible.

The rear of the sanctuary is reserved for those persons who wish to keep their masks on during the worship service. Please note that all persons sitting in the designated pews and back of the sanctuary are required to keep their masks on. It is important to remember that those who choose to sit in this section are doing so with the understanding that others in that section will be keeping their masks on as well.

Our children’s and youth ministries will follow the guidelines of the Central Dauphin School District. At this point in time, masking is optional for children and youth, and those working with them.

In order for Charlton Church to maintain our current masking policies, which includes no masks for those who are vaccinated, we need to be aware of the health of our church family.

If you test positive for the coronavirus, we respectfully ask that you notify the church office. It would be helpful for you to share who you may have had contact with while at church, so that we could notify those individuals. The church office will work with those individuals to handle the information discreetly.

As Methodists, we practice John Wesley's 3 Simple Rules:

Do No Harm

Do Good

Stay in Love with God

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS



Thank you to my friends and church family for your beautiful cards, prayers, phone calls and words of encouragement during my recent health issue. Surgery went well and I am recovering nicely. Thank you all so much for your thoughtfulness. I look forward to being back to worship soon.

Sherry Baker

Thank you to everyone for all the prayers, cards and delicious meals during my recent surgery and recuperation. My "nurse" and I really appreciated everything!

Barb Goss

Thank you for your cards and prayers for my mom when she was recently hospitalized.

Martha Brown



Had it not been for my heavenly Father and my faithful Sunday School class and church family, it would have been more difficult for me to face the death of my son. The sympathy cards I received are absolutely beautiful with all the kind words in each one. I received so many that I had to use my church directory to see who some members were.

My son is with his Heavenly Father of whom he waited for his prayers to be answered. A few days after he was gone his precious dog died. Thanks be to God for everyone

Merle Lebo

Special Thanks to everyone who helped with our annual Easter egg project ... whether you helped make, sell, or eat them!

An Update on The United Methodist Church



In the Spring of 2018, we began a series of articles in the Charlton Chimes about events happening within The United Methodist Church. Over the next 8 newsletters, we tried to provide an overview of the actions of our General Conference, the official worldwide governing body of the church. Our last article was printed at the end of February 2020 as we planned for what might have been a life-changing moment for the life of The United Methodist Church.

And then, in March 2020, the pandemic hit. General Conference was postponed, and then cancelled. The very strength of our denomination ... the fact that we are a world-wide body of Christians ... made it very difficult to move forward with any plans to gather the world-wide assembly. Travel restrictions and availability of vaccines made it impossible for the General Conference to convene.

Over the past two years, it may seem that nothing much has happened. But behind the scenes, many things have been in the works as we prepare for the next General Conference, now scheduled for 2024.

In an attempt to speak to the rumors and misinformation that is all too available, we have put together this article to give you a larger perspective of The United Methodist Church; our history, our successes, our struggles, and our future. Be warned: it's a long article, and there is a lot of information included. To fully grasp and understand this information, you may want to read it one section at a time. You may even want to read a section a few times before moving to the next section. It is our hope that this will help you understand the journey of The United Methodist Church in this time and place.

Let's Start at the Very Beginning: A Very Good Place to Start

With the words, “Lord of the Church, we are united in Thee, in Thy Church and now in The United Methodist Church”, our denomination was born on April 23, 1968; the result of a merger between The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church. The merger came after many years of prayer and discernment and was prompted by their similar roots in Wesleyanism and the Protestant Reformation.

While the desire to unite was strong, it was a very difficult and stressful process. Each denomination was forced to face several issues that had been difficult for them over the previous decades.

The Methodist Church was formed through a unification of Wesleyan bodies in 1939. The ordination of women was debated for many years, and in 1956, they began ordaining women.

The Evangelical United Brethren Church was itself a merger in 1946 of The Evangelical Church and The United Brethren Church. The ordination of women was a point of division during this merger. The

Evangelical Church had never ordained women. The United Brethren had ordained women since 1889. In order to facilitate the union of these two churches, the United Brethren accepted the Evangelical practice, and women's ordination was stopped. This point of division within the EUB church became an issue during the merger talks with The Methodist Church.

While the Evangelical United Brethren Church was in turmoil over the ordination of women, the Methodist Church was struggling with a growing uneasiness with the problem of racism in the church. Many leaders, both clergy and lay, were troubled by the fact that racial segregation was integrated into the structure of The Methodist Church.

The Methodist Church was organized into regional 'jurisdictions'. In addition to these regional areas, there was also a "Central Jurisdiction", which was reserved for black churches. For many people, this was a constant reminder of racial discrimination. As early as 1947, people were working for the elimination of the Central Jurisdiction. Proposals for the abolition of the Central Jurisdiction were presented at General Conference in 1956, 1960 and 1964; all of which failed. Finally, in 1966, as the talks began concerning the merger with The Evangelical United Brethren Church, it was decided to abolish the jurisdiction. Although the Central Jurisdiction was dissolved upon the merger in 1968, it actually took many years before black pastors were treated as equals.

These issues of racism and the ordination of women would be the first of other divisive issues as The United Methodist Church has grown into a world-wide church over the past 50 years. Cultural changes, such as the growth of nondenominationalism (and the development of megachurches), the rise of the charismatic movement, and the popularity of contemporary worship have been difficult for many churches to navigate. A differing world view have often been a barrier between the churches in the American/European and African/Asian continents. Probably the greatest challenge to our denomination has come in conflicts over abortion, gender identity and sexuality issues.

But in spite of these differences, The United Methodist Church remained UNITED in their commitment to make disciples for Jesus Christ and to be the hands and heart of Christ to a world in need.

United, Not Unified

As you can see, there have been many contentious issues throughout our history as a denomination. It is important ... perhaps even imperative ... to understand that we have never professed to be a church where everyone believed the same thing. Certainly, there are some things on which we must agree that are central to our faith, but there are far more issues on which we may disagree. John Wesley echoed the words of St. Augustine when he shared: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

As members of The United Methodist Church, we are united in our mission to "make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world", and in our ministry to serve, love, and extend God's compassion and mercy to all people without distinction.

Fulfilling Our Mission

Since our birth as a new denomination in 1968, The United Methodist Church has continued to grow around the world. As of 2014, there were upward of 12 million members, with 4.5 million of those members living outside the United States. Many of the issues that confronted the church from its inception still remain divisive today, especially for those from the African and Asian continents. But in spite of our differences, the church has remained steadfast in our commitment to making disciples of Jesus Christ and to partner with God in bringing compassion, mercy and justice to people in need wherever they may be.

The strength of The United Methodist Church is that we are a connectional system. Each local church is connected to a world-wide network of churches, agencies, commissions, structures and ... most importantly ... people who strive to build the kingdom of God among us.

The offering of our gifts and tithes goes far beyond paying local church bills. Through our connectional system, they are used to support the work of the church throughout the world. Wherever there is a need, whenever it arises, The United Methodist Church is there. We are usually one of the first to respond in the midst of disasters, and more often than not, we are one of the last to leave. We are known to stay and help people get their lives back in order long after governmental programs have moved on to their next program.

The 2008 General Conference created and affirmed the **“Four Areas of Focus”** for the church, which are used as a guideline to review the life and effectiveness of the church in today’s world.

1. Engaging in ministry with the poor. Thousands of persons have been trained around the world for ministry with the poor. A vision has been set to transform additional communities for vital, abundant living.

2. Improving health globally. 1,000 health care workers have been established around the world to eliminate preventable diseases of poverty. Together we will reach an additional 1 million children with lifesaving interventions and engage 10,000 churches in the US in developing support systems for treatment, education, and prevention in their surrounding communities.

3. Developing principled Christian leaders. Local districts and annual conferences are actively creating programs to further develop and nurture church leaders, both clergy and lay. The church is set to engage 3 million plus people in world-transforming activities.

4. Creating new places for new people. 2,000 faith communities were created between 2012 and 2016. The church is committed to continue this effort and to make 1 million new disciples.

Emily Innes, lay representative of the Southeast Jurisdiction for the Connectional Table, concluded her presentation with these wise words: “Disciple-making isn’t something you graduate and retire from ... it’s who we are, not what we do.”

A Difficult Journey

While the ordination of women and racial segregation were divisive issues during the merger of The United Methodist Church, the issues of abortion and homosexuality were the next issues to create dissension within our denomination in the 1970's. Ever since then, the issue of sexuality has been debated in every General Conference since 1972. Rather than reach any common ground, the discussion and debates have become more contentious and difficult, especially over the past 14 years.



At the 2016 General Conference, things escalated to the point of delegates beginning to talk of a church split, which would certainly be the end of The United Methodist Church. The Council of Bishops proposed that a committee be formed to “do a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph of the Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and explore options that help to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church.” The 2016 General Conference approved the proposal and The Commission on a

Way Forward was created. The Council on Bishops took great care in trying to convene as diverse (yet balanced) a group as possible. It was comprised of bishops, clergy and lay persons; male and female. They included people who were straight and gay, of many races and ethnicities, and represented the church from every continent.

The Commission met to work with one another in this tremendous task over a two-year period. In April of 2018, they presented 3 suggested options on how we can move forward. These proposals were presented at a special General Conference in May of 2019.

The Traditionalist Plan:

- Current restrictive language will be strengthened.
- Accountability to noncompliance will be increased.

The Connectional Conference Plan:

- In positioning with theological orientations and values (traditional, centrist, and progressive) three Connectional Conferences (branches) will be created.
- Annual Conferences and local churches could choose which Connectional Conference to align with.
- Each Connectional Conference establishes its own language in the Book of Discipline.

The One Church Plan:

- Current restrictive language will be changed into permissive language.
- It is up to the Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session to determine the standards upon which someone is ordained, to the clergy to determine who they marry, and to the local congregation to decide their marriage policies.
- No one will be required to do something against one's conscience.

Who Makes These Decisions?

The delegates to the General Conference are the only ones who can make decisions on behalf of The United Methodist Church as a denomination. This body is comprised of over 800 people from around the world, elected every four years.

Each year, Charlton Church elects our lay delegate to Annual Conference, who has a voice and vote on our behalf, along with our pastor. And every four years, all of these delegates elect their Annual Conference delegates to the General Conference.

It is important to note that the bishops of our church do NOT have voice or vote at General Conference. While they provide pastoral leadership, they do not make decisions on behalf of the denomination.



And the Vote Is In ...

In February 2019, a special session of the General Conference was convened in St. Louis to discuss the plans put forward by the Commission on a Way Forward.

The One Church Plan, which was supported by the majority of the Council of Bishops, was rejected. The Traditional Plan, which restricts churches from holding same sex marriages and bans LGTB+ persons from being ordained, was adopted.

It is important to note that prior to the special session, both the One Church Plan and the Traditional Plan were presented to the Judicial Council. A few parts of the One Church Plan were deemed unconstitutional, and many parts of the Traditional Plan were also deemed unconstitutional. As part of the General Conference, they tried to amend some of the Traditional Plan, some of which were accepted while others were not. The Traditional Plan, which was adopted, was then referred back to the Judicial Council. After careful review, many parts of the plan were ruled in compliance with our Book of Discipline, while many other parts were ruled as unconstitutional and out of compliance with the Book of Discipline.

The quadrennial meeting of General Conference, scheduled for spring 2020, would have been the time to amend and correct those areas of the plan that were ruled unconstitutional, and to plan for the ultimate implementation of the Traditional Plan.

It was also expected that other legislation would be proposed to replace the Traditional Plan. This should not surprise anyone, as this has been a very difficult and complex issue for our denomination to navigate. People on all sides of the issues have struggled to find ways to remain true to their convictions and beliefs, and find ways to work with persons who feel differently than themselves.

And then ... the pandemic hit ... and everything had been put on hold.

Digging a Little Deeper

The Traditional Plan, which restricts churches from holding same sex marriages and bans LGBT+ persons from being ordained, was adopted by a vote of 438 to 384. A disaffiliation plan, sometimes called an “exit plan,” was also passed. This provides guidelines for congregations who wish to leave The United Methodist Church “for reasons of conscience” regarding issues of human sexuality.

While this legislation “settled” the issue for some, it raised a lot of questions for many others. One of the most-asked questions has been “If the UMC has held a similar stance on these issues since our inception, why are people surprised that the Traditional Plan passed?” While there may be many ways to answer this question, here is one basic response:

Going into this Special Session of the General Conference, there seemed to be a perspective that this issue had divided our church into two camps. On one side you had conservatives (which represents about 40% of the American church) and the representatives of the African and Asian churches. On the other side you had the progressives (which represents about 60% of the American church) and the representatives of the European churches. Those two camps were pretty equal in size. But three additional factors needed to be included: first is the fact that the Council of Bishops recommended the One Church Plan; second is the fact that a good number of “centrists” (persons who tend to be more conservative) desired to move forward as one church with the progressives; and third, the African bishops put forth a statement in support of The One Church Plan. Those three factors seemed to tip the scale in favor of the One Church Plan. Therefore, when the Traditional Plan passed, it did take some people by surprise.

This leads to an important question. Why did the African delegation vote for the Traditional Plan when their bishops supported the One Church Plan? There are surely many answers to that question, but one representative from an African church shared that he and several of his colleagues supported the One Church Plan, but knew that they could not vote for it because doing so would literally put their lives at risk. They were literally in fear of being executed for supporting a church that was inclusive of LGBT+ persons because they live in a country where homosexuality is punishable by death. Think about that for a moment. This issue is so much bigger than what many of us would like to think.

There has been quite an uprising around the world since the adoption of the Traditional Plan. One of the first to take action was the Methodist Church in Germany, who quickly and strongly took action by stating they would stand in defiance of the Traditional Plan. A few other European conferences followed suit.

Several conferences within the United States also stood in defiance by ordaining openly gay and lesbian pastors. Several Boards of Ordained Ministry from around the US have also stated that they would not bar LGBT+ persons from going through the ordination process. Since the adoption of the Traditional Plan, over 900 churches have declared themselves “Reconciling Churches”, part of the Reconciling Ministry Network which works for the full inclusion of LGBT+ persons in the life of the church. And an entire confirmation class publicly took a stand and read a statement to their congregation that they would not join a church that practiced discrimination.

An investigation also discovered improper voting at the recent General Conference. They have been able to confirm that at least 4 votes were improperly cast using credentials of individuals from African countries who did not attend the General Conference because they could not secure the appropriate visas to travel. While this does not change the vote supporting the Traditional Plan, it does invalidate the vote on the disaffiliation plan.

What Continues to Divide Us?

The issue that is dividing the church during this time is the ordination and marriage of LGTB+ persons. But there is a strong argument that this disagreement is only a symptom of what truly divides us as United Methodists, and that is how we interpret the Bible. There are those who maintain that Scripture is clear on the 'gay issue'; but if we are honest, the Scripture is even more clear, and more harsh, on the issue of divorce. This is why many people consider focusing on sexuality as the reason for possible schism is a scapegoat.

Prior to the recent decisions by General Conference, it was generally thought that there were two 'camps' with differing perspectives on these controversial issues. But this process has allowed us to look at the church from a wider perspective, discovering that our membership is better defined by four categories:

Progressive Non-Compatibilist	Progressive Compatibilist	Traditionalist Compatibilist	Traditionalist Non-Compatibilist
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In reference to the current issue of human sexuality, these terms would be defined in the following way:

Progressive Non-Compatibilists are those persons who believe in the full inclusion of LGTB+ persons in the life and ministry of the church, which includes the ordination and marriage of LGTB+ persons. They believe this is a matter of justice and will not be part of a church that denies ordination or marriage to people because of their sexual orientation.

Progressive Compatibilists are those persons who also believe that LGTB+ persons should be allowed to be ordained and married; however, they find value in working for the unity that Christ prayed for, and want to find ways to work together with those who have differing opinions.

Traditionalist Compatibilists are those persons who do not believe that LGTB+ persons should be ordained or married; however, they find value in working for the unity that Christ prayed for, and want to find ways to work together with those who have differing opinions.

Traditionalist Non-Compatibilists are those persons who do not believe that LGTB+ persons should be ordained or married. They believe this is a matter of personal holiness, and will not be a part of a church that ordains or marries LGTB+ persons.

Kicking the Can Down the Road?

Many people have used this familiar phrase when referring to how The United Methodist Church has dealt with the topic of sexuality. In one sense, that has been happening, as the issue of sexuality has been debated at every General Conference since 1972.

However, hopefully you can see how complex this issue has been for us to deal with as a world-wide family of faith. Other denominations who have dealt with this issue have only had to do so as a national body. Our Lutheran, Presbyterian and Episcopal brothers and sisters have made these decisions on a geographical and regional basis.

Many of these geographical differences also include very strong cultural differences. It is extremely difficult for the church to make decisions on sexuality when the very issue is handled so differently around the world. In America, we are arguing over whether LGBT+ persons should be allowed to marry. However, in parts of Africa, it is legal to kill a person for just being a LGBT+ person.

While the pandemic may have caused the UMC to “kick the can down the road”, it is also very possible that it has allowed things to come into play over these last two years in a different way than they may have if we had General Conference in 2020.

So, Who Won?

Three years later, it's clear that the 2019 adoption of the Traditional Plan did not declare victory for those on either side of the controversy. Some would say that, to the contrary, it has made the waters even more muddy than they already were.

Even though the General Conference voted for the “Traditional Plan” that would keep the existing paragraphs in the Book of Discipline that bar the ordination and marriage of gay persons, there is still a lot of unrest within our churches. It is not surprising that those on the progressive side of this issue still plan to push for changes to be made at our next General Conference, which is scheduled for the spring of 2024.

What some people found surprising was that many persons on the conservative side of our denomination were not happy with the adoption of the Traditional Plan. While the Traditional Plan is what they voted for, they ultimately did not get the end result they wanted.

For well over a decade, a group of conservatives within the church, known as the Wesley Covenant Associate, have been working towards the formation of a new expression of their Wesleyan faith that would more fully reflect their conservative views. At the time of the General Conference vote in 2019, their proposed Book of Discipline was well in progress.

So, when the conservatives “won” with the Traditional Plan, they “won” something they didn't want: The United Methodist Church, with its existing structure and Book of Discipline.

During the time of the pandemic, this group of conservatives continued to work towards the creation of their new denomination, and on May 1, 2022, the Global Methodist Church came into being.

So Where Does that Leave Us?

Contrary to the rumors and misinformation that is being shared by some people, our bishops are very clear and stand firm on the main issue: **The United Methodist Church is here to stay. We are a body of believers who came together to form a denomination where we could be UNITED in mission and ministry, even when we have differing perspectives on various issues.**

With the formation of the new Global Methodist Church, some pastors and congregations may choose to leave The United Methodist Church. Until any official legislation is passed at the next General Conference in 2024, Annual Conferences are having to decide how to deal with churches who wish to leave the denomination.

There is no simple solution to this issue. In fact, it is a very complex matter. The Shares of Ministry that each church pays to the Annual Conference is what funds the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church around the world. These funds also support the pension program for our pastors. The Trustees of each Annual Conference are looking to the Book of Discipline and their own policies and guidelines to determine a plan for churches looking to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church. During this interim time until legislation is passed in 2024, these 'exit strategies' among the Conferences look very different from one another. In general, it involves an agreement to pay their Share of Ministry for two years (or more), as well as their share of pension funds. What often differs is how church assets are handled. Some conferences allow disaffiliation while maintaining their building and assets, while other conferences are requiring a percentage of their assets (which can be anywhere from 10% to 80%).

Our bishops want everyone to understand that there is no 'schism' or 'split' in our future. There may be some difficult days ahead as some of our pastors and/or congregations choose to leave the denomination. But the United Methodist Church will continue to be a church where conservatives, centrists, and progressives can be united in mission and ministry, despite any differences in our theologies or worldview. As we walk boldly into the future together, we will continue to discern how we can work together without asking others to compromise their convictions. We will continue to be a people known as the United Methodist Church around the world committed to our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

During this time leading to our next General Conference in 2024, it is extremely important that every local church engage in holy conversations with one another, even though they may be difficult. We all should strive to understand and learn from one another, so that we can remain a **UNITED** church; **UNITED** in our love for God and one another, **UNITED** in serving our brothers and sisters in need, and **UNITED** in our commitment to make disciples for the world today.



CHARLTON CHURCH

A United Methodist Community

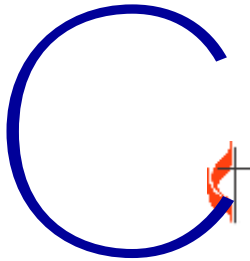
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