



## Kenmore United Methodist Church

32 Landers Road, Kenmore, New York 14217  
E-Mail: [info@kenmoreumc.org](mailto:info@kenmoreumc.org) Website: kenmoreumc.org  
Phone: 875-5091 Fax: 875-5092



### Ministry Staff:

Senior Pastor: Rev. Rebekah Sweet  
Pastoral Associate/Children's Ministry Coordinator: Deacon Bonnie LeValley  
Pastor of Visitation: Rev. Dr. Donald Weaver  
Pastor Emeritus: Rev. Eldon Snyder  
Preschool Coordinator: Ms. Sara Kane Music Director: Ms. Susan Schuman

Sunday, March 3, 2019

### *A Pastoral Letter from Rev. Beckie Sweet*

Dear KUMC Members and Friends,

Grace and Peace to you from the Christ of extravagant love! I celebrate **you** as a vibrant and faithful expression of the church of Jesus Christ!

I write to you with a heavy and broken heart in the wake of the 2019 Special Session of General Conference. You may remember that this Special Session was called during the 2016 General Conference in response to the request that the bishops of our denomination lead us in finding a way to unite our denomination over disagreements regarding issues related to LGBTQIA clergy credentialing and same gender marriage. The goal was to find a way for those with differing theological stands to continue to function together as one diverse denomination in order to enhance our united witness for Christ and to continue our amazing mission ministry strengthened through our unique connectionalism.

In response to that call, the bishops formed a "Commission on the Way Forward," a group of diverse laity, clergy, and bishops from around the world, charged with the task of drawing up at least one plan to accomplish the above mentioned goal. Our friend and neighbor Dr. Scott Johnson was one of the members of this Commission. The Commission drew up plans (The One Church Plan, and the Connectional Conference Plan) which were presented to last week's General Conference, along with The Traditional Plan (composed by a small group of bishops), the Simple Plan (composed by the Reconciling Ministries Network), and several independent petitions.

As a delegate from the Upper New York Conference to the General Conference, I realized that the anxiety level going into General Conference was very high. That anxiety level increased when the most highly prioritized petitions to be considered were those which would provide protections for property, pensions, and other assets. That told me that the focus was on wealth and power, rather than on persons. Then, the Traditionalist Plan was adopted by the General Conference by a very slim margin. This plan maintains the wording in our Book of Discipline stating that while all persons are of sacred worth, the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. This stance then carries over to the policy that no "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" may be ordained or appointed to pastorates in the UMC, and that no pastor shall perform same-gender weddings and no UM churches may host such weddings. And, the Plan increases the penalties for those who disobey these policies.

Now, this Plan is intended to go into effect January 1, 2020. AND, several portions of this plan have been deemed "unconstitutional" by the Judicial Council (the equivalent of a UM Supreme Court), and the entire Plan is already under that Council's review. So, it is possible that this Plan may not be able to be completely enacted without significant changes.

It may also be helpful to know that 60-70% of the U.S. delegates voted against this Traditional Plan. The plan was carried to a majority primarily by delegates from Africa, Eastern

Europe, and the Philippines. In my opinion, this is the direct result of some unhealthy colonialism-style evangelism to these areas of God's earth. Here, in our Upper New York Conference, there is a diversity of conservative, centrist, and progressive congregations and clergy.

Friends, I believe in a Savior whose commandments are to love God with our whole being, and to love our neighbors – all of our neighbors -- as ourselves. During his earthly ministry, Jesus reached out to those on the margins of society in order to let them know they are loved, valued, and worthy of God's grace and redemption, as are all of us. There were no exceptions to Jesus' love and care. The Traditionalist Plan does not represent the United Methodist denomination of Christ-followers that I love. Nor do I believe that it represents the Wesleyan theology that has shaped this denomination which is evangelical, sacramental, missional, and connectional.

As for us at Kenmore United Methodist Church, we will continue to gather for meaningful and inspiring worship. We will continue to study God's Word together, to feed the hungry, to support one another and reach out in mission, to bless one another in fellowship gatherings, and to build upon the legacy of Christ-followers who have built a foundation of love and care offered in the name of Christ. Our faithfulness to our call in Christ will continue. Our denomination, and perhaps even our congregation, remains divided over our understanding of human sexuality. I do not believe that means that we cannot love one another and the whole human family together.

We may have some difficult decisions to make in the future. The Kenmore UM Church will be asked to make decisions, and your pastors will be required to make decisions – all concerning how, and with whom, we will continue to be in ministry in Christ's name.

This poem by Beth Richardson is especially poignant this week:

*I hear the sound of breaking hearts.  
Tender, young hearts, open and hopeful,  
Facing betrayal from the church which formed them.  
Scarred, resilient, older hearts,  
Once-healed wounds torn open by hatred and prejudice.  
I know the pain of a breaking heart.  
The shock, the sadness,  
The emptiness that has no end.  
Beloveds, you are held, you are loved.*

*Your wounds are tended by the One who knew you before you were imagined,  
The One who whispers, "I created you, and I love you, just the way you are."*

May the Grace and Peace of Christ be with us,  
that we may freely share that love with all,

*Rev. Beckie Sweet*