



First United Methodist Church

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Dear Members and Friends of First United Methodist Church, Morehead City,

I was ordained and have served 37 years as a pastor in the UMC. The last 8 years I've been here at FUMC. I was ordained by Jesus and my first loyalty has been, is, and will always be to Jesus. The Bishop assigned me to serve here as Pastor – and so my responsibility is to guide this congregation in the way of Jesus. In that charge, I have boldly declared that I believe the most faithful approach for this congregation to maintain the Continuity and Momentum Christ has given us is to Disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. If we disaffiliate, we remain on this campus, change one word in our name, own this property, and continue to be the congregation we have grown to be, glorifying Christ and serving this community and world with passion.

Many of you have received a letter from those wanting to remain a part of the United Methodist denomination and embrace the changes in practices and principles that go with that (present and future). I clearly disagree and take exception with their reasoning, rhetoric, and use of scriptural analysis.

First, have the people called Methodist changed their positions over the years? Of course! We have learned and grown. Fundamentally, we have been changed by scripture. On the matters of slavery and women in ministry, it is not the world or our intelligence or our feelings that determine our beliefs, but scripture. When we turned to scripture, we heard God declare: God created us male and female in the image of God and called it good (Genesis 1:27). We read Paul in Galatians 3:28 that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” We saw biblical examples of women in ministry. The first persons charged with going and proclaiming the good news of Jesus’ resurrection were...women (John 20:17)! Yes, Paul wrote about women being silent in church (I Corinthians 14:34-35), but the context clarifies that Paul was integrating a Gentile and Jewish world where women were not educated and decorum in worship was important. Women were not to disturb worship but get home and freely ask questions and learn. Women have served in leadership in both Old Testament and New Testament. Regarding slavery: Peter and Paul lived in a world where slavery was acceptable (though nothing like our concept of slavery today). Rather than approve of it, they made the argument that being brothers and sisters in Christ was more important than worldly issues (read the Letter to Philemon); Christianity has rejected slavery in all its abuse and injustice.

Was the world and church wrong in their practices? Yes, because we were out of alignment with Holy Scripture.

I appreciate the challenges and questions around human sexuality, but disagree that we must adopt the world's standards regardless of scripture. From the beginning, God created us male and female for each other (Genesis 2:24) and Jesus endorsed that in Matthew 19:4-6. He spoke disapproval of all forms of sexual immorality in Matthew 15: 19-20. Claims that Jesus never said anything on these matters are wrong. The letter you received presumed that since people are born a certain way, that must be God's intent. That totally fails to take into account Genesis 3 which declares that we are all born in sin (regardless of sexual orientation). None of us are born the way God intends; that's why we must be born again (John 3). Current psychiatry says pedophiles are born that way and can't be changed. None of us would argue that is God's intent and will.

Yes, the Scripture speaks firmly of loving all. God loves all. We are to love all. But love doesn't equate to approval. Do we love the murderer? The thief? The adulterer? Yes, but all are sins. Jesus did not condemn the woman caught in adultery; but he did tell her to go and sin no more (John 8:11)! We don't judge, but God establishes what is and isn't sin; not us. So here's the challenge: show me one verse in scripture that positively commends any sexuality other than "celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage" and that marriage is between one man and one woman. (Referencing Solomon and David and their many wives simply confirms that even God's people can be out of step with God's revealed will – God never said that was okay).

The UMC official position is that we condemn practices of sin, not the person. We are all sinners being redeemed by grace. But we are to repent and stop sinning.

The Bible declares divorce is a sin. That means it is not what God intended to happen to marriages being lived according to the covenant in Christ. But we are human and fail. We've learned from Scripture not to condemn the person just the practice. People are able to be forgiven and given second chances (third and fourth and more!). Yes, we changed. But it was because scripture changed us, not the other way around.

The video of a speech (I can't call it a Christian sermon) being shared by the Stay UMC committee has a preacher using a typical rhetorical technique copied in the letter you were sent. Ridicule the other side. Use the absurd to avoid dealing with the actual questions at hand. Only partially quote Jesus.

Old Testament food and ritual and clothing laws were overturned by Jesus and the early Church (see Acts 11 and 15). Jesus and the early church never overturned the biblical teachings on purity and sexuality. If you disagree, then show me the verses. When Jesus said, "But I say to you," he wasn't overturning the Old Testament teaching, he was expanding it. Adultery, etc, was not limited any more to just physical acts, but even included lust. Jesus' point: not reducing the law to excuse anyone, but reminding us that we are all sinners in need of forgiveness and transformation.

I keep hearing that the Reverend John Wesley taught a "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" of scripture, reason, tradition and experience. No, John Wesley taught that scripture was primary. If we disagree with something in scripture, we are wrong, not scripture. Reason, tradition, and

experience never once was given veto over scripture. They are great tools to help us understand why scripture says what it does so we might submit ourselves to God's truth.

I also keep hearing the denial of any problems within the United Methodist family. How about the reality that we are losing 200,000 members a year? How about a bishop saying that Jesus is just a human and sinned like all of us (Bishop Oliveto); or that the resurrection doesn't have to be physically true? How about a bishop performing marriages in violation of The Book of Discipline or not exercising accountability over pastors who do the same (see same-gender marriages performed by UMC pastors in Durham and Wilmington)? How about bishops ignoring the Judicial Council's ruling that one of their colleagues was not eligible to be a candidate (the Judicial Council is our Supreme Court)? How about Bishops and Annual Conferences across this denomination publicly stating they will not obey the discipline, hold pastors accountable, or teach the faith/doctrines they committed to at their ordination? The North Carolina Conference passed resolutions in 2019 and 2022 expressing clear intent to work to change our current doctrine and discipline in matters of human sexuality.

You don't think it big deal that some bishops are ignoring the rules and doing what is right in their own eyes? How about if you took your child to learn to play baseball. The coach taught the rules. But the umpire behind the plate just decided independently that the strike zone would be half smaller than the plate and didn't call obvious strikes. This umpire didn't want to judge anyone so didn't want to call anyone "out."

That's where we are: It is time to acknowledge our differences and move into different denominations. I hope we can do this amicably. On Sunday, September 18th at 4pm in the Sanctuary our District Superintendent will preside over a vote by all Full Members of FUMC present. I will send a letter soon with the details of the process of the Conference and voting. Please be in prayer to follow God's leading.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Powell". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'P' and a cursive 'owell'.

Powell Osteen
Senior Pastor