

A Covenant Community of Faith

"I will be your God and you will be my people."

"I will be loyal to the United Methodist Church and uphold it by my prayers, my presence, my gifts and my service."

"From the historic examination for admission into full connection asked by the ordaining bishop (1327, 2000 Book of Discipline)- -

8. Have you studied the doctrines of The United Methodist Church?
9. After full examination, do you believe that our doctrines are in harmony with the Holy Scriptures?
10. Will you preach and maintain them?
11. Have you studied our form of Church discipline and polity?
12. Do you approve our Church government and polity?
13. Will you support and maintain them?"

We United Methodist are a "Covenant People" - - our connection is held together in a covenant bond that all of us are accountable to.

I do not know of a person, lay or clergy, that has answered "No!" to any of the above questions. It is always an affirmative "Yes!" An audible "No" would have brought the covenant making to a screeching halt!

Any "pastor-in-charge" worth their salt tries everything in their bag of tricks to keep the promises all of us made before the church concerning prayers, presence, gifts and service ever before us. They pull out all the stops, especially when it is "pledge" time. They are continually reminding us of our obligation to pay our fair share of the world wide mission funds of The United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Church is a connectional church - - that is who we are, it is part and parcel of our uniqueness. We each depend on the other to be a strong link in that connection. When one link is weak we hold on even tighter to help each other. Our form of church governance and polity is formed out of a representative body coming together every four years to again open up our entire "Book of Discipline". We call that the General Conference. It is made up of equal number of lay and clergy persons who were elected out of the body of their respective annual conferences. The General Conference struggles with the hard issues of our connection. The debate takes place within that covenant body. Votes are taken, some win and some loose - - some get mad and some are glad. Some go home and begin making plans to try again in four years. Friends that is our way - - it is not the only way - - but it is our way! The covenant trust comes when we all go home and depend on each other to be faithful to our words of covenant and promise until we meet again and do it all over again. For the glory of God, or not, that becomes our doctrine and polity for another four years.

Is that a perfect plan? Is it what God ultimately wills for us? Yes or no, by the grace of God, it is who we are right now.

A new phenomena has arisen across our covenant denomination during the last three quadrennia. It goes something like this - - "General Conference you might have spoken - - but you did not speak for me, and I am not going to abide by your policy and doctrine and I am going to do everything I can to disobey that covenant and to demonstrate my opposition."

That is precisely at the place where we are just now across our church - - especially in the area of sexual orientation and practice. The 2000 General Conference witnessed this first hand - - up front, personal and "in your face".

Our accountability within the covenant community is measured on our ability to honor the covenants all of have said a resounded "YES!" to.

Are we covenant keepers?

Ours is not a pretty story. From the beginning of time we have been covenant breakers! The gospel assures us that God still loves us and in spite of our brokenness God is always a covenant keeper! And that is the Good News that makes a difference!

Beloved what are we to do now?

Is there no balm for this Gilead?

A Jim Lane Commentary
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