

## 1). For the Future (leaving/separation/next steps)

(Referencing Questions: 4, 8, 9, 11, 14, 20)

- Practical Questions
  - Are WE leaving the Conference/UMC?
    - Not at the present time; however, there is a NEW thing on the map for both the conservative side of the denomination and the more progressive? We don't do anything quickly as a denomination, and there's far too many decisions that cannot be more clear until June, 2020 – so we are set to do nothing impulsively, but to continue to be very prayerful and intentional.
  - What happens to our building?
    - Trust Clause (reviewed): with the building also comes the debt we would leave behind to the United Methodist Church, which is in our case, presently, \$700,000. The new legislation, should we make a decision to leave the UMC, would allow us to purchase the facility at fair-market value (if found constitutional). A Trust Clause essentially says that New Song is in charge of paying for and maintaining the facility, but that ultimately, the contents, facility and property all belong to the denomination. This has been fought in court and has been lost by other denominations experiencing division, especially the Episcopal Church. In their case, the denomination was able to hold (all the way up to the Supreme Court), especially the cases from here in Virginia (The Falls Church Episcopal Church, for example).
  - Other:

## 2). Logistics Facing New Song

(Referencing Questions: 2, 3, 7, 10, 12, 13, 18)

- Logistical/Theoretical Questions
  - Marriages: will you & Cindy Lee marry persons of the same gender?
    - No, we would not marry persons on- or off-site as we are bound to our Ordination Vows & the Questions asked by the Bishop. We will uphold what we agreed to at Conference. Same-Gender weddings are legally allowed in the US, but not in the UMC. Our Ordination is not tied to just the building, it is for here and beyond. Therefore, we will abide by the decisions of our leaders, General Conference and our vows.
  - Marriages: would you be required to perform a same-gender wedding if the other plans had passed?
    - No. We are presently allowed to turn down any wedding, and we have. Pastor Chad explained that he has declined participation in heterosexual weddings and the same rule would be true for any other arrangements, as well, and would be protected by both denominational and legal statutes (despite references to the baker's case in Indiana, etc.).
  - What's next?
    - Great question: The Judicial Council will meet in April, 2019; Annual Conference will meet in June, 2019; General Conference will meet in May, 2020 – a lot of clarifications for how our UMC holds together and/or backs away/embraces and CLARIFIES our positions as a UMC will be decided at each turn in this journey. NEW SONG will operate very much be just like NEW SONG has always operated: we will welcome those who come to our building, period.

Question #2: “why do you even let those people in here?” This question smacks of hatred and does not represent Christ. All are welcome to be here & hear of God’s love. Our Leadership Council continues to work on gleaning all the details from official sources – and we will make more and more prayerful decisions as time goes on. It is a difficult time when so many hold such passionately-held views and cannot see eye-to-eye on a way forward. It is wise in moments like these to remember how much we have in common – not just how much we hold in disagreement. It is sometimes easy to hit the ANGER button; what more might we learn of working through and holding together in times such as these? What if we were to hold conversations about how we make God’s love more widely shared and received? What if we were to hold more crucial conversations: the importance of context when seeking to understand the Bible more clearly, the role of faith in the presence of disagreement, how the Church is “the hope of the world” – even when in disagreement, how God is so much mightier than our best or worst anything! We have much to process, and this will all take time.

- Other:

### 3). New Song’s Teachings/Practice

(Referencing Questions: 5, 6, 8, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22)

- Stances

- What is taught to our children & youth? (**FROM LESA BERLINGHOFF, Student Ministries Director**)
  - “To address your inquiry, no one has specifically asked us that question before. Steve and I, based on what we read in Scripture, find that Jesus accepted all kinds of people in the Bible and tended to hang out with the people society shunned. We are called to love God and love people - to model our lives after Jesus. We will always default to that precept in this ministry. Teenagers are at a key place in life - trying to find themselves, establish their identity, etc. In some cases they are really struggling: sometimes, they’re completely alone. We have chosen not to “teach” on this subject in the large group setting. We don’t want to isolate anyone. We want to maintain a trusting and loving atmosphere for all of our kids so if they do find themselves struggling with any number of issues they know they have people who will lovingly stand with them and navigate life’s challenges together.”
  - Our curriculum is available for review by any parent with Cindy Lee, Amy or Lesa. Specific to the question about relationships and marriage and LGBTQIA+, we have typically not taught with black/white responses. We have presented content on the global concepts around relationships that include: Christ-like character, faith-filled integrity, prayer, Christian values, communication, Discipleship, etc. But we have not taught on this topic in the way the question has been asked with the understanding that we have a range of responses, home situations/circumstances and different ages in one group (younger/older).
  - A study was released just last week that says Suicide rates for teens among church-going youth are 4 times higher than teens who do not attend church. And I don’t know all the answers, but I do know **we have to do better** than to let kids exist within that cloud of concerns and US as the Church not have a response.

- How does New Song present on LGBTQIA+ concerns and the Bible?
  - *This is a sermon coming up in May, 2019. I have shied away from getting a congregation excited towards the side of judgment/condemning everyone who does something one (or more) doesn't agree with. Instead, I have sought to lead at a church whereby our example would be so inspiring ... that all would understand the heart of God all the more. Jesus has a ton of examples where he LOVED the PERSON and not the LABEL. In Christ, the Bible says we are made a new creation... and that supersedes our behaviors and other practices. I look at the alcoholic: I'm so glad they're more than a bottle. With the woman at the well – no one saw her as worthy of their time... that is, except Jesus. When Jesus was condemned for healing on the Sabbath, people looked at what he DID and not at WHO he was. When Jesus was being tested by the Pharisees, there was a scene where Jesus says to let any perfect one there to throw the first stone. She was an adulterous woman, which has consistently been against Christian teaching, and yet Jesus stays long enough to draw in the sand longer than anyone remained with rocks in their hand.*
  - *Sexuality IS in the Bible: the Leviticus passage is quoted at least 5 times in the Bible; I'm not advocating you don't read that & work to understand the context and application all the more. We WANT you to be biblical scholars. We WANT you to read the Bible, we WANT you to understand and apply it. We live in a world where Jesus ate at the table with those in Luke 15 that others called notorious sinners.*
  - *So, at New Song, we fight for the seat at the table – that ALL can hear Christ, too. It's not to say that everything everyone does is applauded. There's a distinct difference. But we do open the doors – as Jesus did – to God's love for all to hear and receive such a love that changed the world forevermore.*
  - *We also are very careful about weaponizing the Bible. Both sides use the Bible to make their case: liberals, conservatives and centrists. We don't uphold slavery because it's 100% against the character of God from the beginning to the end of the Bible. We don't uphold the application of Scriptures that shun, segregate, denigrate or espouse values counter to God's own heart. We don't empower one group to lord over another group that some are invited to hear about God and others are disallowed.*
  - *Matthew 7:3-5*  
*Can straight people do sinful things? Can Christians do things that aren't perfect and/or against the Bible?*  
*(see the LIST - attached)*
  - *So here's the deal – this issue has been written about for more than a thousand years: we likely won't be able to solve any areas of disagreement tonight. But we can agree to speak truth in love AND to be together? Did you know there are Democrats & Republicans here? You have Lee-Davis & Hanover & Atlee high school grads? You have Pro-Vaccines & Anti-Vaccines. Duke-UNC, UVA-Tech fans are all here. You have CNN & Fox News watchers. You have Redskins and Cowboys fans – all in 1 room. It's the eternal blessing of Church! **How we learn to disagree in an agreeable way may reveal more about our faith than just a victory or a notch on our belt about labels and categorizing people's sins.***

## 4). General Conference specifics

(Referencing Questions: 1, 8)

- Votes
  - o We are not aware of what the votes were from our delegation; votes have not been shared and are likely not available without soliciting directly from the delegates.
- What happens if the petitions are found to be Unconstitutional?
  - o Great question; for right now, nothing changes in the *Book of Discipline* if the votes are found to be unconstitutional. However, there are lots of things happening either way. One General Conference's legislation cannot bind future General Conferences. As such, we are scheduled to have a General Conference next year, (May, 2020) and it could be that we see an entirely new crop of motions, proposals and legislation before the General Conference. Some have called for everything from:
    - making our language even more conservative
    - making our language much more inclusive
    - dissolving the United Methodist Church as it currently stands
    - allowing for the North American church to operate as a Central Conference; this would allow for much easier process so far as allowing the United States' context of United Methodism to look much more inclusive than the African and global context is comfortable for it to be. Under these types of solutions, the Church could remain as ONE, but function very differently between Africa vs. the United States, for example.
- What can I do if I disagree with this decision?
  - o Well, I always start by saying: PRAY! Stay and dig in! It is understandable to leave or quit when our preferences are not affirmed in something. But working for change takes everyone's effort – those of like minds and those with differences, and all helping to prove to a world who celebrates our animosities all too often, that WE in the Church CAN survive – we can model UNITY! My recommendation is to get on a team! Speak up and continue to put pressure on the leadership of the local congregation and the District and Conference and Global Church! This is probably not the best answer. It applies to all sides, though: pray over where God would want you to be and then help that point that God is stirring in your heart be heard!
  - o There are new avenues of United Methodism popping up all over the place – some will be even more conservative in nature, some will be more progressive, some will be even more mission or justice oriented while others will be more theological in their approach and/or inward-focused, outward-focused, etc. There WILL BE lots of options; all of these expressions will take time to sort through and figure out. In the meantime, keep growing in faith, serving and loving God and continue to pray: lots of prayer partnered with lots of action!

## Open Mic Q & A

#1

A church member shared that they have had concerns throughout and they recalled their granddaughter had a friend at elementary school who eventually shared he was transgender. Now living as a female, our member's granddaughter has stood up for this friend and spoken out against

bullying that has taken place. She is very proud of her compassion – the way her granddaughter has rallied support for her friend.

#2

A story was shared with the congregation about a same-gender couple from a different state that used to be neighbors with one of our members. They were incredibly nice and have always been great friends –

Another story was shared by the same person who was about a friend who had been gay in this person's earlier years. After some time passed, he went on to find a love attraction to a person who had come into his life. Our member shared that this person has shared "God allowed me to fall in love with her – I have genuine love," and they eventually were married quite happily. God is never done with us; God gives us new days and new dawns no matter where we are in life's journey. So have hope.

#3

A question was asked about taking on a statement of welcome and of becoming a Reconciling Congregation. The point was made that this had been extremely hurtful to many who are able to see God's love for all, including persons from the speaker's own family, who were LGBTQIA+. (It was discussed that this would certainly be something the Leadership Council could take on and decide in their upcoming meeting held on April 1.)

#4

A question was raised about why we need to pull up and have these types of conferencing events? Why can't we trust God's ways and leave them be? Why do we have to keep protesting God's Will until "what we want" happens? Wouldn't it be easier to just trust God, read the Bible and believe what it says? (Pastor Chad addressed that not everything in the Bible is a practice we want to keep practicing: slavery, forbidding women to speak in ministry, tattoos, etc. There are plenty of reasons to READ, UNDERSTAND and APPLY the Bible, but Jesus often pulled up and held prayer sessions where it says he aligned with God all the more. The Church is following Christ's example, in many ways, so far as why we conference and why we make "course corrections" when we are not aligned to the will of God.)

An invitation to continue the conversation was offered; please send in questions to the Church Office as they become available in your heart & mind.

A reminder that our BEST days are very likely ahead of us, not behind us... that we have much more in common than in disagreement.

We are going to move prayerfully, slowly, intentionally, strategically... no knee-jerk reactions here.

What we celebrated about our church for its first 21 years... we will continue to celebrate.

Please pray. It is hard to serve as shepherds of a flock when we enter these scenarios – it can feel like lose-lose situations if we're not careful. But the end of the story is that God's still in charge, God's still great, God still has plans ... and there's this:

GOD'S not done with us or this story that's being written here at New Song!

STAY in prayer. Stay in the Scriptures. Stay in worship. Stay with us. We have places we're going... and we're growing – and we're trusting God not only leads us forward, but that God has been to where we are going. So let's do this: let's stay tethered in prayer and uphold one another.

Breathe deeply of this Holy Spirit – thanks for coming out tonight.

Let's pray before we go & please remember to retrieve your kiddos from childcare before heading out!

<<6:31pm - 8:05pm, 03.07.19>>