

## What We Have Believed, What We Still Believe, What We Will Believe

October 2, 2022: Rev. Heather Husted

Last week a member of Enon UMC came into my office with deep concerns about the future of the UMC. In their own research they had heard and read some claims about the UMC that made them, let's just say nervous. They had come across sources on the internet that claimed the UMC was about to deny her core doctrinal beliefs such as the belief that the Bible is the Holy and inspired Word of God, and that we would deny the doctrines of the Trinity, the virgin birth, and the resurrection of Jesus. This person found it deeply disturbing and wondered if there was any validity in these claims.

I became visibly and audibly upset - in all likelihood a cuss word may have slipped out. I wasn't upset that this person came to me and I wasn't upset that she was asking questions and doing research about the current state of the church. I was upset that there were misconceptions and misrepresentations of the UMC being peddled as the truth.

I am so grateful that this person came to me. I was able to agree with them that I too, found these claims deeply disturbing. I said while I can't speak for every United Methodist pastor or Bishop, that I could speak for myself, every pastor that I know, and every bishop that I know, including our own bishop, Bishop Palmer, in that the United Methodist Church is not abandoning its core doctrinal beliefs. I stand in confidence with our bishop and the vast majority of pastors I know, that the UMC has no intention of doing so in the future. In fact I proclaimed - and I had to apologize for the volume of my voice - that if our core doctrinal beliefs like the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Divinity and Resurrection of Jesus were to change in our Book of Discipline at the next General Conference or any following, I would be a pastor that would leave the United Methodist Church and I would encourage my congregation to do the same.

In our Book of Discipline there are three sections I want to share about today.

The first is the section entitled "**Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules.**" When I talk about this section, I often refer to the context as "Our Core Doctrinal Beliefs." In this section, we as United Methodists affirm things like

- Faith in the Holy Trinity
- The divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ
- The resurrection of Jesus Christ
- The work of the Holy Spirit
- The supremacy of Scripture when it comes to doctrine and the practice of our faith.

Another Section is called: **Our Theological Task**

In this section you can read: “The theological task, though related to the Church’s doctrinal expressions, serves a different function. Our doctrinal affirmations assist us in the discernment of Christian truth in ever changing contexts. Our theological task includes the testing, renewal, elaboration, and application of our doctrinal perspective in carrying out our calling “to spread scriptural holiness over these lands.”

This means that we take what we say we believe and together figure out the best ways to live that faith out. The UMC has always been a church deeply concerned with social justice and recognizes that over time people and contexts change and so we are willing to adjust the way we do things and change when it becomes clear to us that what we are practicing is unjust.

This leads us into the last section I want to talk about called: **Social Principles**

In this section we develop the church’s stance on a large variety of social issues like: The Natural World, food safety and food justice, the family, marriage, divorce, gender equality, human sexuality, abortion, human rights, rights of racial and ethnic minorities, rights of religious minorities, rights of children, adolescents, aging persons, women, men, and persons that are differently abled.

At the beginning of this section you can read:

“The Social Principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in the United Methodists traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of the United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.”

The UMC has a history of changing her stance on Social Issues: at one point in our history, the owning slaves was not thought of as contrary to God’s plan for humanity... but through the work of abolitionists that changed. At one point in our history, the church believed it unbiblical to let women be preachers and hold authority over men. Through the work of women called to preach and the support of men who supported their call, that stance changed. In my mother’s lifetime, the Methodist Church practiced segregation through setting up the Central Jurisdiction. Districts and Jurisdictions were geographically determined except for the Central Jurisdiction, which was made up of every African American congregation, regardless of where they were located. In 1968 when the Methodist Episcopal Church merged with the United Evangelical Brethren

Church, one of the conditions set by the EUB was that the Central Jurisdiction must be dissolved and all UM districts would be determined by geography regardless of race.

Throughout our history, some of our Social Principles have changed, but what has not changed are our core doctrinal beliefs. And I am confident that they will not change.

This person who visited my office told me, very boldly, Pastor, you need to share this with your people. You need to help us feel safe in remaining United Methodists if that is what we choose to do. And that is what today's message is all about. I strongly encourage you to share this message with those who couldn't make it to worship today. And if they have questions, encourage them to come to me. If they feel intimidated in doing that, offer to go with them and together we can find the answers we need.

There is a movie from the eighties, directed by Mel Brooks, who is famous for making funny, satirical films. The movie I'm referencing is called "Blazing Saddles." I want to go on record that this movie is wildly offensive and filled with inappropriate humor and I would never recommend it as a teaching tool. But if, like me, in your rebellious youth, you watched this movie, you'll recall that the film was set during the "Old West," and there is a scene when two men who were part of a work crew laying down train tracks, are going down the tracks on a pump cart. As they're moving down the tracks, singing "I've been working on the Railroad " the cart hits quicksand and they begin to sink. One says to the other... "Are we sinking or is the world rising?" The other says, "I don't know, but I hate it."

Through the years my family and I will quote this scene when things are changing and we're feeling anxious about what's going on. We quote it, laugh about it, and then encourage one another in the things that will never change - mainly God's love and care for us and our love for one another. Our faith is a boundary that grounds us and helps us to feel safe in a changing and chaotic world.

In one of the videos that I invite you to watch, one person says, "There's been more uncertainty in our lives lately it feels like than ever before but in the face of all that uncertainty, as a people who made a promise to God when we joined the United Methodist Church, here's what we are certain of..." and then others join in to share in the certainties of the UMC.

We are certain that

... we believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

... we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ

... we believe what we say when we say the Apostle's Creed together in worship

... we believe in the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever  
... that we are world changers  
... that we are going to continue to plant churches that bear witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ  
... we are community changers through ministries like our preschools and feeding programs  
... that we are willing to do whatever it takes to introduce as many people as possible to Jesus

Our approach is based on John Wesley's quote:  
"You may not think as I think but if your heart is as my heart, then give me your hand."

Today, I want to conclude this message with reminding ourselves of who we are through the proclamation of the **Nicene Creed** found on page 880 of the UM Hymnal.

**We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
    he came down from heaven,  
    was incarnate of the Holy Spirit  
and the Virgin Mary  
    and became truly human.  
For our sake he was crucified  
under Pontius Pilate;  
    he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;**

**he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of  
the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the  
Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and  
the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the  
prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic\* and  
apostolic church.  
We acknowledge one baptism  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the  
dead,  
and the life of the world to come.  
**AMEN****