

Dear Friends,

You may not know that Laurel is unique. It is the church home for people whose Biblical beliefs span from traditional to progressive; from very conservative to very liberal.

You may not know this because for years we have gathered as a congregation, without labels, to love God, share with others, and to serve both. We sit together in the pews each Sunday and share Communion each month. Side-by-side we complete mission projects and teach our children. We comfort each other in pain and celebrate with each other in joy.

You may not know that the recent UMC vote\* has generated dividing lines among us — faithful people who have differing understandings of the Bible.

We know that people on both sides think that Laurel is not responding suitably to the UMC vote. Those with traditional beliefs feel blamed; those with progressive beliefs wonder where the rainbow flags are.

Are you hurting?  
Do you have questions?  
*You're invited to talk,  
pray, listen with us*  
9:15-10:45 am  
Sunday, March 31  
Room 201

### Who We Are

The global United Methodist Church is facing a situation that could splinter our denomination, which makes us sad and frustrated. UMC congregations across the country are very publicly positioning themselves in support of or in opposition to the vote and we wonder why Laurel is not speaking up.

It's because Laurel does not overwhelmingly represent one or the other belief. We are a congregation of people who each understands the Bible differently because of various traditions and experiences. We appreciate and value our diversity; we see it as one of Laurel's strengths. It is Reverend Kent Lolling's and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee's (SPRC) desire to preserve such diversity.

We are the same in our love of the Lord, our desire to follow Jesus, and our hope to make a difference in our world.

### Our Response

As Pastor Kent Lolling preached on Sunday, March 3, Laurel's response to the UMC vote is to love and heal. His sermon is posted on our website, [www.laurelumchurch.org](http://www.laurelumchurch.org).

Informational Meeting:  
*The UMC Denominational Vote  
and What it Means to Laurel*  
6:00 pm, Tuesday, April 30

Pastor Lolling and the SPRC will host an informational session following the UMC Judicial Council meeting on April 23-25. (see below)

### Your Response

You may be reading this and thinking, that's not enough; that the UMC or Laurel may not be the best fit for you anymore. If this is tugging at your heart, we ask you to do the following before making a permanent decision.

- First, pray. Pray for God to guide your decision and to steer you away from deciding based on the public debate.
- Second, wait. The UMC vote is not final. Wait while the UMC Judicial Council processes the vote and its implications. Until January 1, 2020 our church rules are unchanged.
- Third, open your heart to one another. We are still and always will be fellow Christians. We are the same people we were before this wound was opened.
- Finally, continue to love each other and value the rich diversity in our church.

Blessings,

The Rev. Dr. Kent J. Lolling, Directing Pastor

The members of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, Joanna Ray and Linc Cochran, co-chairs

\*The UMC Book of Discipline is the denomination's rule book (available in our church library). It currently contains language that does not allow "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" clergy and officiating at or hosting same-sex marriage ceremonies. At a meeting of the General Conference in St. Louis in February, UMC Delegates from around the world gathered to vote on various plans to change the language in the next edition of the Book of Discipline. They voted by a narrow margin on the Traditional Plan, which retains that language and adds stricter enforcement for violations of church law. Details of the vote are published at [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org). Look for the article, "Ask UMC: What Happened at General Conference?"

## **AT-A-GLANCE**

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### **What has not changed. At Laurel, we continue to**

- appreciate our diversity and feel it is a strength;
- respond to the call to love one another;
- honor our commitment to hospitality and welcoming to all people;
- care for and utilize the gifts of each member and guest regardless theological beliefs, or any other aspect that makes them who they are; and
- support our church leadership's desire to not push any group out of the church.

### **What might change for the denomination**

- Although the Traditional Plan was approved by the General Conference, the delegates in St. Louis required the UMC Judicial Council, the denomination's top court, to decide on the constitutionality of the Traditional Plan. It will meet April 23-25 in Evanston, IL. Any piece of legislation that the Judicial Council declares unconstitutional would not be included in the 2019 Book of Discipline.
- The long-term future of the Traditional Plan could change following the next quadrennial General Conference in 2020. New delegates for the 2020 General Conference may change the dynamic and possibly the outcome of similar resolutions.

### **Where can I gain more information?**

- The UMC's website. [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org)
- The Illinois Great Rivers Conference website and Bishop Frank Beard's Post-GC2019 briefing. [www.igrc.org](http://www.igrc.org)
- **SAVE THE DATE** — A Laurel informational meeting will be at 6:00 pm, Tuesday, April 30 at the church. We have invited our District Superintendent Sylvester Wheatherall to join us.
- **This Sunday, March 31**, three Laurel members will be in Room 201 to answer your questions, listen to your frustrations, pray with you, love you.
  - Joanna Ray, co-chair, Staff-Parish Relations
  - Ruth White, chair, Council on Administration
  - Dana Saal, alternate delegate to the IGRC Annual Conference; GC2019 volunteer

For more details:

[www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) > Who We Are > [Organization](#)