



September 24, 2024

Dear St. Luke's family,

In Ephesians 4, Paul writes, *"I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: ⁴there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."*

In May of this year, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church changed its position on same-sex marriage, thereby allowing all United Methodist pastors to officiate same-sex weddings should they individually so choose and allowing them on the property of United Methodist Churches. However, the General Conference also allowed for individual churches to set their own policies regarding weddings on their own campuses. The UMC Discipline stipulates that the Charge Conference is to direct the Board of Trustees regarding building policies for the church. The St. Luke's Charge Conference met on Monday, September 23, to deliberate whether to direct our Board of Trustees to prohibit same-sex weddings on St. Luke's campuses. By a vote of 18 to 4 (church pastors and staff not voting), the following motion was approved:

The convened Charge Conference hereby directs the Board of Trustees to take no action to prohibit same-sex marriages on St. Luke's property; as a result, St. Luke's shall abide by the recent determination by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church to allow same-sex marriages on church property; it being understood that each member of the St. Luke's clergy may determine, in his or her sole discretion, whether to participate in any particular proposed marriage ceremony on St. Luke's property.

This decision was made following a process in which the congregation was invited to respond to a questionnaire regarding their perspectives on this matter. 563 responses were received, many with heartfelt thoughts and expressions that clearly came from deep convictions and prayerful consideration. Every response to the questionnaire was provided to every member of the Charge Conference. The breakdown of responses to the question, "What best describes your feelings regarding the decision St. Luke's is facing related to same-sex weddings in church facilities?" was as follows:

- It would be difficult for me to remain a member of a church that allowed same-sex weddings in church facilities. 18.6%

- I would not support same-sex weddings in church facilities, but could remain a member of a church that does. 15.3%
- I believe a church should allow same-sex weddings in church facilities, but could remain a member of a church that prohibits them. 42.3%
- It would be difficult for me to remain a member of a church that prohibited same-sex weddings in church facilities. 23.8%

The Charge Conference is grateful to all those who responded to our survey. Your input was important, as it pointed to the basic character of our church – one that seeks to be welcoming and open to all. That sentiment was clear among people with all perspectives on same-sex marriage. At the same time, it also demonstrated that we do not all agree, that we are a church with a variety of understandings and convictions about what Scripture teaches regarding same-sex marriage, as well as about many other difficult issues in our world. Similarly, members of our Charge Conference were not all in agreement on these issues, and their viewpoints were shared openly and received with mutual respect.

While we recognize that this decision may be very difficult for some in our congregation, it is the fervent hope of all who participated in this Charge Conference that St. Luke's move forward with unity, even with divergent perspectives, as a witness to the world that we can differ on some things, and still be joined by our love and devotion to Jesus Christ and the movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. For those who find this decision troubling, we encourage you to reach out to a trusted pastor or staff member for conversation.

St. Luke's pastors remain committed to take the responsibility of consecrating marriage vows very seriously, requiring pre-marital counseling, calling people to Christian marriage, and providing tools to establish a new family in Christ. Our pastors will continue to challenge couples to mirror the relationship of Christ and the Church as a binding covenant, with mutual submission and faithfulness to one another, and to call that new family into Christian community for support and for accountability.

St. Luke's character will not fundamentally change. Our children and student ministries will continue with the same teachings as before. Our Bible studies will remain focused on understanding the meaning of Scripture and applying it to our daily lives. Our outreach will continue to focus on solving the concrete challenges that face our neighbors in our city. Most importantly, the character of St. Luke's will remain the same: a welcoming breath of fresh air in the midst of a tumultuous world.

We covet the prayers of our whole congregation as we move forward. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to reach out to any of the members of the Charge Conference listed, discuss with one of St. Luke's pastors or staff, or direct them to Churchcouncil@stlukesmethodist.org.

St. Luke's Charge Conference

Church Council

Lance Schuler (Chair)

David Ahlquist *(Advancement)

Ken Blanchard, (Secretary)
Chris Coffman
Scott Disch
Cindy Donaldson
Carter Dugan *
Linda Goehrs
Kari Greenwalt
Kelly Beth Hapgood (Chair Elect)
Jan Johnson (Finance)
Cindy Koester (Lay Leadership)
Robbie McDonough
Carl Mueller
Doug Pitts
Kristin Reynolds (Staff-Parish Relations Committee)
Katie Scallan
Carol Wood (Trustees)

Participating Retired Clergy connected to St. Luke's Charge Conference

Ann Arnett
George Atkinson
John Riley
Kelton Ro-Trock
John Settlemyre
Lynn Settlemyre

Church Council Staff Representatives (without vote)

Tom Pace, Senior Pastor
Jennifer Gould, Executive Director
Katie Montgomery Mears, Executive Pastor
Colin Bagby, Lead Pastor, *branches*
Julie Ellerbrock, Campus Director, Gethsemane
Stacey Brewer, Director of Finance

*participated in deliberations but were unable to be present for vote due to scheduling conflict.