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Greetings brothers and sisters in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As most of you are aware, our denomination is in a state of crisis; 6 annual conference boards of ordained ministry (including Wisconsin) and the entire western jurisdiction is in schism because they have publicly taken a stand, by adopting legislation, defying our United Methodist Book of Discipline. There has been a specially called General Conference to happen February 2019 to address this schism and decide on a way forward as a denomination. One of the options being put forward is what has been called the "one church" or the "local church option." The following is written by Dr. Ben Witterington, professor of New Testament at Asbury Seminary. These are his words, but express what I believe, in a much better way than I could convey.

-Rev. Wiley Gladney

"Annual conferences are just around the corner all over the U.S. and there will be petitions submitted to annual conferences suggesting something along the lines of a local church option when it comes to defining what counts as Christian marriage, what counts as proper sexual morality, what counts as moral fitness for ordination. It is no use denying our beloved and belabored United Methodist Church is in a crisis, but local church options, whether proposed by a majority of the Council of Bishops or by others, are not viable solutions to our problems. Why not?

First of all, because they are profoundly un-Methodist. Methodists do not decide major issues of doctrine or polity at the local church level, nor even at the annual conference level. They are quite rightly decided at the General Conference level, which is the only body that can speak for the whole church on such matters. This is why we have *The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline* that includes the doctrines and sanctioned practices in it. This has been the Methodist way for basically our entire existence. Ours is not a Baptist or Congregational church polity, nor should it become one. If it did that we would lose the genius that is Methodist connectionalism. So, "No!" The local church should not suddenly become the arbiters of truth as to what counts as holy matrimony, what counts as being morally fit for ordination, what counts as appropriate Christian sexual behavior. No, no, and no. The local option is a ploy of desperation that denudes us of our Methodism; it should be soundly rejected.

Secondly, for the entire existence of the Christian church, including the UM Church, Christian marriage has been rightly and biblically defined as when God joins together one man and one woman – period! This is exactly what Jesus himself directly says in Mark 10 and Mt. 19, and the only second option he gives in Mt. 19 is to be celibate for the sake of the kingdom. He even uses the dramatic term being a eunuch for the Kingdom. To change our view of what counts as Christian marriage is to *dis*-fellowship ourselves from the larger body of Christ — the Catholics, the Orthodox, most Baptists and Congregationalists, and so on. We should not go there if we care at all about ecumenism. Modern cultural trends that have affected and infected some of the Protestant mainline denominations here, and

in a few places abroad, should not be allowed to overturn 2,000 years of what the church has said about proper Christian marriage.

Thirdly, it was Chaucer who said about priests ‘if gold rusts, what then will iron do’? He was saying that clergy should be absolutely above reproach morally speaking because otherwise they will set a horrible example for congregations and mislead them. When a church is divided about appropriate sexual behavior, for example, the clergy above all, should be those who err on the side of caution, on the side of Christian tradition, on the side of what the Scripture actually says — which is that same sex sexual activity (whether involving men or women) is a sin. And of course if that activity is a sin, then so-called ‘gay’ marriage is a non-starter. St. Paul was right in insisting that what we cannot do in good faith and in good conscience, we should not do at all, for it will be a sin for us. In other words, if one has any doubts about the ethics of these local option proposals, in whatever form they take, then one should vote against them as good Methodists. I speak to those who are wavering in one direction or another.

I remember a day long ago when I was watching the Watergate hearings and my own Senator, Sam Ervin was sick and tired of what he was hearing from John Dean. He finally shook his finger at Mr. Dean and quoted Galatians, “Mr. Dean, ‘God is not mocked, whatsoever you sow, that you shall also reap.’ Tell the truth!” Well, God is watching, and we should have been watching what happened to the Episcopal Church and other mainline Protestant denominations who have already gone the way United Methodists are now contemplating going. If you will know the tree by the fruit it bears — the fruit that such moves have borne is just bad fruit — membership decline, laws suits over property and more rancor because now the fight takes place in local churches. United Methodists can avoid kicking the can into every local church sanctuary and to make each one, or each annual conference decide these matters. We should take this opportunity to just say, “No!””

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