

The Day After

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We have a Church Conference on March 13th. How do we envision the day after?

Consider a wedding. I encourage engaged couples to spend more energy preparing for their marriage than their wedding day. No matter how extravagant the wedding, a wedding day will always be twenty-four hours. A marriage, however, is a lifetime. One day is very, very important. Yet, so is every day after the marriage covenant is made.

Much prayer, thought, and conversation (and probably stress, too, if we're honest) have been spent preparing for our Church Conference. Rightly so, because it is a unique moment in the life of our church. I have searched our history, and I cannot find a time when we have gathered as a Church Conference in at least a generation, if not throughout our history. We have thoroughly prepared for the day. We know we should arrive early because registration closes at 6:00 PM. We've thought through as many helpful details as we can. But what about the day after? How do we want to steward the next season? Whom do we want to be on March 14th and onward?

God has a powerful and beautiful future in store for our church. God will honor our faithful discernment and willingness to be obedient to God stewarding this difficult decision. What things look like the day after, then, depends on our response to what God has already worked out for us.

Here are three thoughts that I hope you will find helpful, some my own and others quilted together from other caring friends.

1. Let's hold holy space for one another in love. This has been an intense season, and we will need to care for ourselves and one another. It will be essential to take some slow time with the Lord so the Spirit can search our hearts and speak a new word to us. Everyone will have different vantage points, feelings, and perspectives. They all matter. We must listen deeply to one another, even if we share different views. In that sacred space, the Spirit of God will do beautiful work in us.

2. I recognize that it will be hard for people if the decision doesn't go how they want. It will be painful. We need to acknowledge that. I trust that God will hold you and that we can support you in your pain and disappointment. I know first-hand that our church is a safe, healing place to carry our hurt. If you felt like you belonged at FUMC in the past, you should continue to feel that way in the future. Regardless of the outcome of the decision, we will continue to be the same church, though, for some, it might not feel that way.

3. If the decision goes how you want, I imagine you will feel relief. Please remember that some people you love and care for might not feel the same way. Regardless of the outcome,

many in our church family will be sad. Let's hold holy space, love those who are hurting, and do everything possible to foster healing and unity.

4. Let's keep our eyes on Jesus Christ and God's call upon our church. Throughout this season, we have kept our focus, drawing close to the Lord even in this challenging discussion. One way or another, our Church Conference will offer us some clarity which will enable us to renew our focus on Christ and His mission. I encourage all of us to set aside some time to pray for God to work in us to forge a clear, beautiful path for the next era of our lives together.

So, what about the day after? We will still be us. We will have met with God, trusting that our sisters and brothers have done the same. We will have a sense of clarity. And I hope we will move forward together, stronger because we've done the hard, faithful work of discernment.

I am honored to be your pastor today. And I'm honored to be your pastor the day after.