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[05/03/2019]

## UPDATE ON TRAVIS PARK'S RESPONSE TO GC2019

As you may already know, Velia Suarez recently stepped down as chair of the Travis Park Church (TPC) Council due to family issues. While she didn't feel she could commit the time necessary to serve as chair, Velia remains committed to the life of TPC and is still active on the Council. Brock was elected to fill this position at the Council's strategic planning session held on April 20. The purpose of this joint letter is to let you know where we are as a church in light of the recent action by the UMC General Conference and the associated rulings of the United Methodist Church (UMC) Judicial Council, particularly as they relate to the exclusion of our LGBTQIA+ siblings in the life of the global UMC. This letter is in lieu of an all-church meeting that was originally set for this coming Sunday. More on this later.

At our all-church meeting on March 17, the Council heard from many TPC members sharing the pain of the decisions of the global church. Some of those we heard from urged TPC's immediate disaffiliation with the global UMC. Others want to take a slower approach, but we believe that we all share an agreement that we cannot be a part of a UMC where LGBTQ members of the family are treated like second-class citizens. It is also clear that we cannot wait in the hope that the General Conference will come to a different legislative conclusion. While the Council feels that a required congregational vote to disaffiliate is premature without a better understanding of the ramifications of such a vote, the Council shared at that meeting our bold response to the global UMC's decisions. We have rebranded our church as Travis Park Church, removing "United Methodist" from our name as a symbolic statement of dissent from the global UMC. We stopped paying all our apportionments to the UMC – those costs that fund worthwhile causes, but also support the operations of the global church which continues to prohibit full inclusion of our LGBTQIA+ siblings in the church. Perhaps most importantly, we have committed to allowing and, in the case of our TPC clergy, performing same-sex weddings for prepared couples in our sanctuary. Toward this end, the Council recently authorized amendments to TPC's wedding policy and also adopted a statement of support for TPC clergy who will be at risk of punitive actions under the UMC's Traditional Plan until such time as we are able to navigate out of the UMC as it currently exists.

Following the March 17 meeting, many TPC members and friends have been active in discerning how best to proceed should the congregation vote to separate from the global UMC. No doubt you have seen regular reports from the "Reaching Out" group who have met regularly since March researching what other churches and annual conferences are doing in response to General Conference 2019, and how best to distance ourselves from the global UMC. We are in uncharted waters with regard to potential disaffiliation from the UMC and/or AFFILIATION with another denomination. We believe that moving forward with like-minded congregations seems prudent.

Several movements seem to be evolving, and TPC is involved in learning more about these movements. This process will take some time, even as churches across our conference and across the US are rapidly joining together in acts of resistance like ours. Last week, in response to the UMC Judicial Council's upholding much of the Traditional Plan as constitutional under UMC law, a strongly worded letter of dissent circulated amongst UMC clergy in Texas was signed by about 200 active and retired pastors, including all three of our appointed clergy as well as several others closely affiliated with TPC. We've added a link to this letter at the bottom of this document. Nationally, a meeting of centrist and progressive leaders is being held in Kansas City on May 20-22. This meeting will consist of 10 invited representatives (clergy and laity) from each annual conference in the country. The weekend prior to that meeting, progressive LGBTQIA+ and people of color will meet in Minneapolis to discuss the future of the UMC. Kathleen Laborde, Alex Cato, and Brock will attend this meeting in hopes of making connections with other like-minded people and congregations.

The TPC Building Committee has temporarily shifted its focus from redeveloping the TPC property to developing strategies for how best to separate from the Rio Texas Annual Conference with our building. We had a good meeting in April and have another meeting scheduled for next week. We are researching TPC's various deeds to determine whether they include the "trust clause" of the UMC, which essentially states that ownership of TPC property would revert to the Annual Conference if we ceased to be an active UMC congregation. The Building Committee consists of thoughtful members and includes several member attorneys. While our first meeting included discussion about how successful other churches have been in challenging the trust clause in court, our main focus is to determine if and how best to approach the Rio Texas Annual Conference to achieve an amicable separation and retain ownership of our property.

It is important to understand that the data we are gathering is intended to inform what will be the most important decision the entire TPC congregation has ever made. There were some of us in the TPC congregation who were ready (and expected) to vote to disaffiliate with the UMC at the March 17 meeting. Other members are less certain of how we should proceed as a congregation. Since the February UMC General Conference decision, the TPC Council has been working to facilitate a measured, deliberate, and strategic approach to address the concerns of the congregation, while moving with as much speed as we can. We expect there will need to be a congregational vote by the end of 2019 to determine where we want to head as a congregation. Last Friday's Judicial Council ruling ([www.umc.org/decisions/79923](http://www.umc.org/decisions/79923)) outlines a process and timeline for disaffiliation that we did not have before April 26. In the meantime, we continue to work on various fronts to get a complete picture of our options to best inform our decision.

Please know that the Council understands that many of our TPC siblings are hurting from the decisions of the UMC General Conference and we, too, want to distance ourselves from those decisions. Travis Park Church has been at the forefront of other Methodist churches in defining ourselves as a congregation fully committed to LGBTQIA+ inclusion. At our strategic planning session on April 20, we identified "Discerning (TPC's) Path Forward" as one of our goals for this year. The Council and others are working extremely diligently on what's next for TPC. We are not aware of anyone within TPC who is trying to "mend fences" with the global UMC or who thinks we can continue to wait for a legislative reversal of the Traditional Plan. We must continue to work toward full inclusion of all, and that will mean the hard work of building something new.

Following the March 17 all church meeting, we said we would have another follow up meeting on May 5. While the Council and many other TPC members have been active in various activities related to the General Conference decisions (described above), we don't feel that there is enough new news to discuss. However, we do plan to hold another all church meeting following our worship service on Sunday, June 2. At this meeting, we will report on where we are with our internal working groups, what we've learned from the Kansas City and Minneapolis gatherings this month, and will discuss TPC's goals for the Rio Texas Annual Conference meeting in Corpus Christi, June 5 to 8.

The last few months have been difficult for our congregation. The TPC Council has had many conversations about how best to care for each other and for ourselves. We feel this is also important for the congregation as a whole. It's important to remember why we chose TPC and to love and care for each other, even if we disagree with the decisions of the UMC General Conference or with the decisions made by our fellow members. We are stronger together and we need everyone who loves TPC to work together to craft the future of our congregation. If you have questions about where we are headed as a congregation, please ask one of us. You may also email your questions/comments to [churchcouncil@travispark.org](mailto:churchcouncil@travispark.org).

Grace and peace,

Brock Curry, Chair  
Travis Park Church Council

Eric Vogt  
Senior Pastor