



From Pastor Mike

In 1972 at the very first General Conference of the newly formed United Methodist Church, language was added to the 1972 Book of Discipline (BOD), stating, "homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth." In other words, all individuals are of worth to God. The originally proposed statement ended there; however, it struggled to pass.

Don Hand, a lay delegate from Southwest Texas suggested that the period be turned into a comma followed by the phrase "though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian doctrine." A friendly amendment changed the word "doctrine" to "teaching" and the "incompatibility clause" was born.

This clause has driven the human sexuality debate in the UMC for 50 years.

After the 2022 General Conference was postponed in March, the Wesleyan Covenant Association announced that the Global Methodist Church (GMC) would launch on May 1, 2022.

Shortly after the GMC made its announcement, then-Bishop Sharma Lewis shared the process for churches considering disaffiliating from the denomination over matters related to human sexuality. Paragraph 2553 (§ 2553) of the 2019 BOD was adopted during the 2019 Special General Conference to govern this process in anticipation of disagreements among congregations and Annual Conferences. The Virginia Conference Board of Trustees and the Cabinet recommended that the Virginia Conference follow those guidelines laid out in § 2553.

This disaffiliation protocol (§ 2553) will end on December 31, 2023, which seems to be a major factor for churches considering disaffiliation at this time. I cannot predict what will happen when GC 2024 meets April 23 – May 3, 2024, in Charlotte, NC, but I believe another disaffiliation protocol will be part of the 2024 Book of Discipline to avoid any prolonged future legal battles with churches that want to leave the denomination.

Our church leaders met in early September to discuss New Hope UMC's response to the latest developments. After some discussion, we invited our District Superintendent, Victor Gomez, for an informational meeting. On Tuesday, October 11, a church-wide meeting with our DS was held and about 65 people were in attendance. Later, it was decided that our 30 days of prayerful discernment would be held in January 2023.

Our Lay Leader, Jenn Strother, has put together a prayer schedule with a prayer square for each to have during this time of prayer. Please pick up a copy at church and use it to guide your discernment process. When the 30 days are over, then we will take a straw poll to determine if a called Church Conference is in order. Disaffiliation requires a two-thirds (66.67%) vote of professing members present at a church conference for it to pass.

Whatever happens, I will remain an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church. I have no desire to disaffiliate from the UMC. This has been my church home all my life and will continue to be until I draw my last breath. It is not a perfect church, but I believe it is the best place for me to serve God, love my neighbor, and live out my calling.

My own personal views about same-sex relationships were shaped by how I would react if one of my daughters told me she was gay. Without question, I would love them and support them just as I believe God does.

I arrived at this view after serving as a pastor at my first appointment over 20 years ago. A young man in the community had committed suicide and I was asked to conduct his funeral. When I met with the family, his sister pulled me aside to let me know her brother came out to his parents. His mom and dad rejected him, and the young man was given a month to get out of their home unless he agreed to conversion therapy. A day before he was to be thrown out, he took his own life.

My stance was further reinforced about 15 years ago during another debate about homosexuality during Annual Conference in Roanoke, VA. A father spoke from the floor about his 18-year-old adopted son who came out to his family. The father's reaction was to disown his son and force him out on the streets. It made me angry that a parent could do that to their child. I often wonder whatever happened to that young man who is probably in his early 30s right now if he is still alive.

Imagine being rejected by your own mother and father because of whom you love.

I refuse to place heavy burdens on people who are struggling to find their way in the world. I will not withhold grace from those who love Christ and believe that God created them to be who they are. I will minister to all who desire to be a disciple of Jesus Christ regardless of their sexual orientation. I trust each person – gay or straight – to prayerfully work on their relationship with Christ.

It is not my place to judge. It is my place to love God, love my neighbor, and love myself. Therefore the “incompatibility clause” bothers me. If “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” aren't we all “incompatible?” If so, then I believe it is an injustice to single out an entire group of people as incompatible with Christian teaching.

I know it is more complicated than that, but I hope we can have a conversation about human sexuality that is loving and full of grace.

Despite my personal concerns about the “incompatibility clause,” I vowed to uphold the Book of Discipline when I was licensed to preach in 1999 and when I was ordained in 2003. I have kept my vows and will continue to follow the Book of Discipline.

Nothing has really changed since the 2019 Book of Discipline was adopted. When General Conference met in 2019, the delegates left believing they would meet again in 2020 and address all the loose ends. That never happened due to the three COVID-era postponements. Why not wait for the outcome of GC 2024 before making any decisions about New Hope UMC's future?

As you begin your discernment process, my counsel to everyone is to pray, read the Bible, gather information, pray some more, and assume the best intentions of everyone engaged in this process.

Our mission as this Body of Christ we call New Hope United Methodist Church remains “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” We still live under the same Book of Discipline. We still have a shared ministry, and much work remains.

Let us not lose sight of our purpose to spread the Good News to all people and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ, *Pastor Mike*



Upcoming Events at New Hope UMC

January 2023

Tuesday, January 3rd at 6:30pm

Staff Parish Relations
Committee Meets

Thursday, January 12th at 6:30pm

Trustees Meeting

Thursday, January 19th at 6:30pm

United Methodist Men

Thursday, January 26th at 6:30pm

Church Council Meeting

Every Saturday at 8:00am

Sweet Hour of Prayer

Christmastime at New Hope UMC



An Invitation to Private Holy Conversation with the Pastor

As we enter a time of prayerful discernment regarding the future of New Hope UMC, there is a lot of information out there about disaffiliation and it can be confusing. Should New Hope remain a United Methodist Church? Or should New Hope disaffiliate over disagreements about human sexuality?

What do you need to know?
What do you need to say?

I am committing to meet personally with anyone who would like to enter a time of holy conversation over the future of New Hope UMC this month. This is your opportunity to ask questions and share your thoughts in a more intimate and confidential environment. No crowded rooms. Just you and your family. No agenda, just a time to talk and pray for those who find that helpful.

If you would like me to come to your home or meet at a neutral setting for this conversation, then send a text message (757-653-8537) or an email (michaelreaves@vaumc.org). In the text or email, give me three days and times you are available, then I will schedule and confirm our time together.

I will gladly meet with anyone, but you must request a meeting.



The minutes for our January Church Council Meeting will be published in February's Hilltopper

Collections for January

We need your help!



WHAT: Donations of to-go breakfast items, such as pop tarts, granola bars and breakfast bars, peanut butter and disinfecting wipes and sprays.

WHEN: The entire month of January!

WHERE: Place donations in the marked tubs in the Narthex.

WHO: Helping people in our local communities, through local agencies, such as: the Verona Food Pantry, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, the Valley Mission, and Open Doors Shelter in Harrisonburg.

WHY: To help others in need in New Hope, and the surrounding areas.

QUESTIONS: Contact Cheryl and Nathan Kutz.



RealLifeHeavenlyHands@gmail.com (202) 495-1346



12-29-2014

MY NEW YEARS RESOLUTION THIS YEAR IS TO DO THE THINGS I SHOULD HAVE BEEN DOING LAST YEAR

[A New Hope](#)

The word "now" comes from a Latin phrase, novus homo, which means "a new man" or "man newly ennobled."

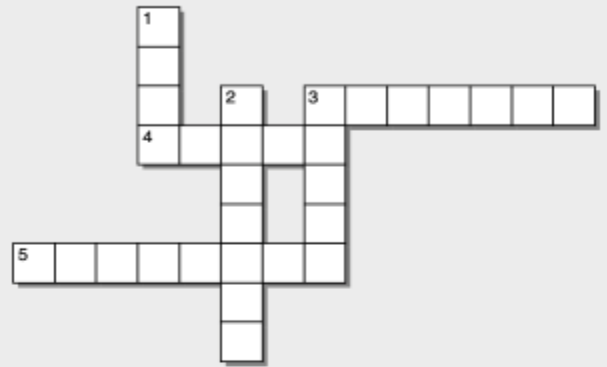
There is a powerful lesson in that. Each moment is a change we have to start over. To become a new person, to become a better person.

"Now" is an important concept in the Bible. Now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2) Now is the time to encourage (Hebrews 3:13). Now is the time to do what is right (James 4:15-17). Now is the time to repent (Acts 17:30).

A new you starts with an action, but it must be done now! Tomorrow isn't here. Yesterday is already gone. Now is the time. There is no time like the present because we exist nowhere other than now.

Do you want a new start? Do it now!

⚔ CrossWORD



Exodus 34

Across

3. "Before all your people I will do ___..."
4. What the tablets were made of.
5. God forgives this.

Down

1. They were not to make any molded ___.
2. Moses rose early in the ___.
3. "...keeping ___ for thousands..."

Reflections

Reflection...a word that some people thrive off of to make better choices or changes and keep going while others dread it because that word makes them feel hurt, frustration, dread, sorrow, loss, disappointment or disapproval. Reflection is a word used often at this time of year...the ending of 12 months and the starting of 12 more. Reflection is the serious thought or consideration according to definition. What do you see when you reflect back on 2022?

2022 was a whirlwind year for my family and me. It flew by so quickly that I can't believe it's almost 2023 already. My kids were very active and kept Nathan and I running with soccer, band, karate, plays, practices, the list goes on and on. Some days I didn't know if we were coming or going. Don't get me wrong I love that my kids enjoy so many activities, but it sure does exhaust you. I had a tough pregnancy that put my body through the wringer and ended in an emergency c section due to extremely high blood pressure and the recovery from that was not as easy as I thought it would be. I felt frustrated with myself for not bouncing back as quickly as I thought I should or would. I even struggled with bouts of depression. I started my second year at JMU and really started to understand how much my students relied on me for positive feedback and constructive criticism. There were times I had to be brutally honest and it made some of them question if this was the right profession for them. No one wants to hear about all the hours in the evenings and on weekends that teachers work preparing and creating. I watched my husband who was questioning God's existence when we first met start his own YouTube channel that is bringing others to God. He is a literal fisher of men. I also watched him go through one of the hardest losses of his life and stood by him every step of the way. 2022 brought us highs and lows like most years do.

As I reflect on 2022 like most of us do at the end of a year I could sit here and dwell on all the lows that we faced this year. But I choose not to do that...instead I celebrate the positives. I refuse to let the lows outweigh the highs. I will however take all the obstacles we have faced and challenge myself to do better in the coming year. A better form of myself as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend, professor, etc. I will also praise God for everything... the good, the bad, the ups, the downs because each and every one of them teaches us something new and leads us to where we are supposed to be on God's path.

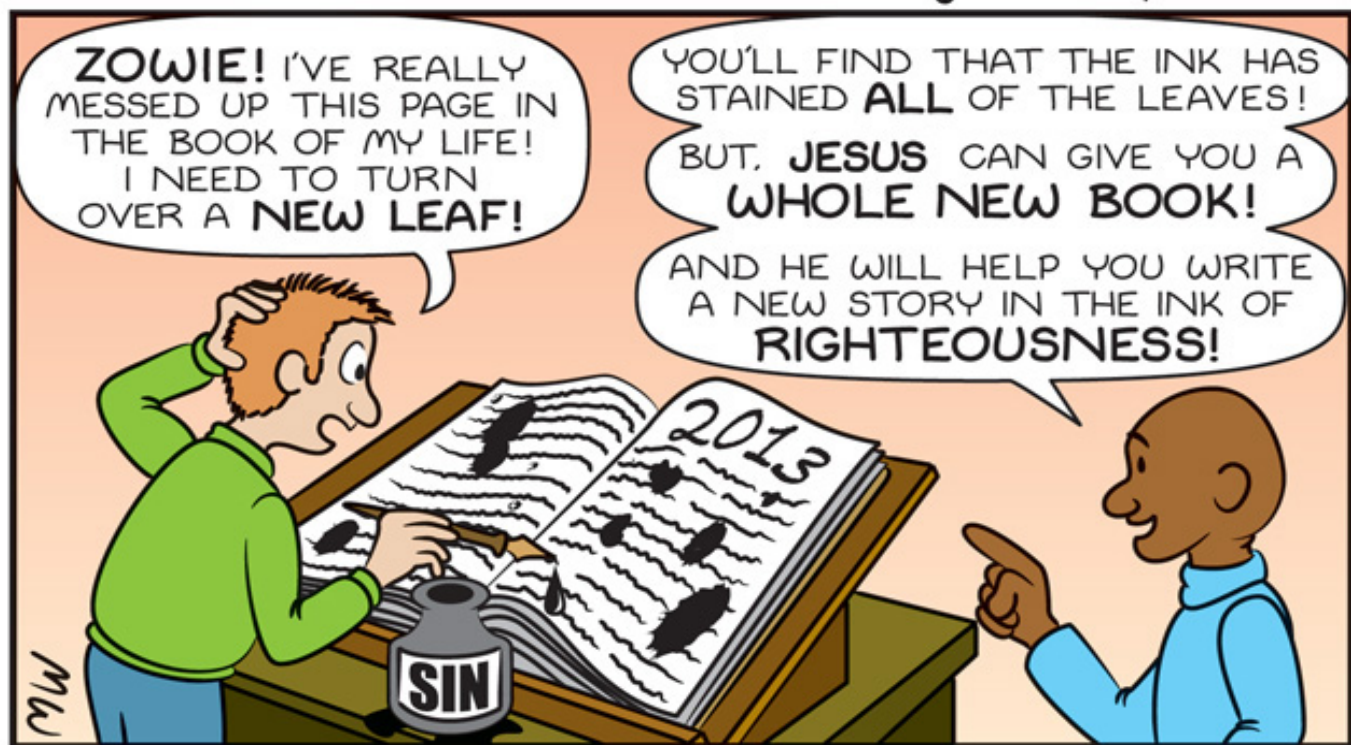
The great thing about reflecting is that it typically means a new beginning to something. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 KJV, it says, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." I truly believe everything happens for a reason and in God's time. His timing is always perfect. We face everything when he wants us to face it and he wants us to lean on him to get through the tough times. He also wants us to praise the happy times. But remember it is all based on his timeline, his beginnings, his new year.

So look back on this past year...accept the changes, be proud of overcoming obstacles, be thankful for the triumphs and joys, and look forward to a year of new beginnings ahead of you. A new beginning where with God at the center of it anything is possible.

Thank you and we pray that all of you are blessed, Cheryl & Nathan Kutz

A NEW LEAF?

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

— ROMANS 6:4 NIV

If you would like to add an article or announcement to the Hilltopper, please contact us! Call/Text: (540) 280-1860 or NewHopeUMC.Virginia@gmail.com

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