



**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SEATTLE AREA**

Pacific Northwest Conference / Alaska Conference
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*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

John 13:34-35

I greet you in the very name of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

Difficult letters, like difficult conversations are never easy. However, God never promised us easy, and there are times when we must take up the cross and walk in faith. I write today not representing the United Methodist Church, for only General Conference can do that. So, even though I write this letter as your Bishop, I hope it will also be received as your friend in Christ.

With the signing by Governor Gregoire of a bill legalizing same-sex marriage in Washington as of June 7th, the state joins six others in recognizing this union. Personally, I celebrate the signing of this law which legalizes same-sex marriage for our state. It is an historic moment for the people of this geographic region, and it marks a secular turning point in the liberation of those who have too long been oppressed in our current times. I celebrate with those who will be free to enjoy equal health and security benefits through the state institution of marriage.

I also personally grieve over our United Methodist Church polity that will not recognize same-sex marriage. I believe that it is wrong, and we should work for a more inclusive and humane response. The reason for this stance is that I believe that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God's divine love for the entire creation, and no one should be shut out from God's embracing Grace. God's Grace is so pure and encompassing that anything that attempts to limit or control this love must be transformed.

In all humility, I realize that this represents my faith, and even though I must live by what I believe, I am fully aware that equally devout United Methodists have different views. To force my faith onto someone who has a different or opposing view is also to limit God's divine love. I believe the loving example we must set is to come together for dialogue in mutual respect. Respectful dialogue means that we listen to one another honestly and openly. Dialogue does not mean that each side tries to win the other over with an opposing point of view, but pauses to hear the honest thoughts and feelings of the other side.

I deeply respect those who have different views on this issue, and even though I share my faith perspective here, I do not presume that this must be their truth as well. I believe that all human nature is flawed, and that God holds the only "Truth" with a capital "T". We humans can only approximate the truth, and no person has a monopoly on it.

Our Pacific Northwest Annual Conference has been deeply divided by this very issue in the past. People have been hurt, self-righteousness has abounded, and lives have been damaged. This is not an embodiment of God's divine Grace, and I pray that we can respond differently in the future. If we are to truly live by God's love, then we need to treat each other with the respect of any creature made by God's hand. All of us have the dignity and self-worth of a child of God.

I am not asking for a tepid and false peacefulness. We will disagree and not see eye-to-eye. I am not looking for an all-encompassing harmony in our present reality, but these great issues that divide us will not go away, and I call on all of us to enter into a civil dialogue that speaks of mutual respect. When such social issues threaten to pull us apart as the Body of Christ, I invite every United Methodist into the art of Holy Conferencing. Our times call upon us to model the love of Jesus Christ through our love for one another.

Even though we will disagree, I believe in my very bones that God is at work in the world, and in our lives. We have been shown a glimpse of God's spiritual vision: where the wolf and lamb lie together, where water springs from the desert, and where weapons of war will be turned into instruments of life-giving peace.

I hold that vision before you on this day, and I also hold all of you in my prayers. As we continue as the "people of the way" let Christ be our guide and salvation, and let love rule our hearts and minds.

Be the Hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Grant Hagiya".

Bishop Grant Hagiya