



Love IS Making Room

RECLAIMING THE WELCOMING TABLE

The Gospel Call to Be One

In John 17:22, Jesus spends his last moments with his disciples gathered around a table praying for their unity:

“The glory you [the Father] have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

His final word to them is that the world will come to know God’s love through their uniting love for one another.

Jesus’ call is to bring others to God’s table, where they will be exposed to the healing love and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The love found at the table will equip them to love one another, and compel them to invite, without exception, every single human being to the table. Jesus’s harshest words were for those who put a stumbling block between anyone and God, those who inserted their own piety as a barrier to those wanting to be at Christ’s table.



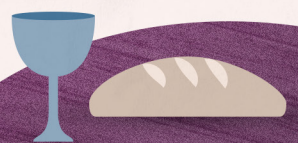
A Call, As One People, to Move Outward in Love

John Wesley and the early Methodists started a movement to reform a Church that had forgotten its basic mission of welcoming to the table those who felt far away from God. John's brother Charles summed up the Church's reason for being:

"Come sinners to the gospel feast, let every soul be Jesus' guest, you need not one be left behind, for Christ hath bid all humankind."

The movement flourished as the early Methodists welcomed many hungry for love and acceptance to the table. They were transformed by God's love and grew in love for one another.

As the Methodists opened themselves fully to the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, they discerned that the spirit often moved in new and surprising ways. Though they grappled with movements of the Spirit that seemed to counter Scripture, over the years, they came to see the calling of God upon individuals who had previously been disqualified from the table and certainly disqualified from ordination: namely, divorced people and women.



Our Call Today

Today the Church is in a similar period of discernment and disagreement regarding marriage and ordination of LGBTQ people. Unfortunately, we have now reached a point where our disagreement is compromising our witness, our oneness is threatened, and our LGBTQ siblings are being harmed. This cannot continue.

John Wesley lived at a time in which the Church had been at war for a hundred years over various matters. That's why his movement was missional and reforming, not doctrinal. **His call was to be one in mission.**

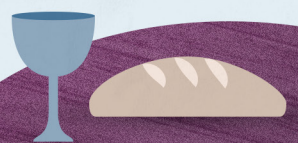


A Healthy Path Forward

After much prayerful discernment, we believe there is a healthy path forward, and it is simply to focus on “**the welcoming table.**” If we are to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, then we must do what Jesus did. We must embrace all our siblings and hold tightly to our “welcoming table of love,” where it is understood and accepted that **all people are equally valued in the sight of God**, and discrimination toward any minority group is not the Gospel portrayed in the life and teaching of Jesus the Christ.

We believe that harmful language about LGBTQ people and restrictions on marriage and ordination should be removed from the *Book of Discipline*. Clergy have always had discretion about which couples they will agree to marry, and no clergy will be asked to do anything against their conscience. And Clergy Executive Sessions of the Annual Conferences have always followed the guidance of the Boards of Ordained Ministry and the Holy Spirit to discern who to ordain.

The Cabinet will continue to discern appointments in which clergy and churches are a good fit for each other, and in which churches will welcome their pastors and follow their leadership.



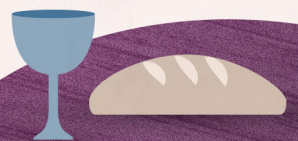
A Table for All

Christ's prayer for our unity and command to gather all to the table, to make space for one another, appreciate one another, and look for Christ in each other, prohibit us from creating individual tables only for those who think, act, look, and perceive the world like we do. We cannot be a Republican church or a Democratic church. We cannot be a traditional church or a progressive church or a centrist church. We cannot be a gay or straight church. Our churches must be more than silos of competing perspectives that argue with each other while neglecting our central purpose. This is the way of the world.

Instead, **we must be one people, centered in Christ and united in the essentials.** It is hard work. It is sacred work. It is the ministry of reconciliation that Christ gave to each of us. Our best witness is to love each other as Christ loves us, to show the world the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to bind us together despite our differences. This is living out the gospel.

The late Rachel Held Evans summed it all up nicely:

"But the gospel doesn't need a coalition devoted to keeping the wrong people out. It needs a family of sinners, saved by grace, committed to tearing down the walls, throwing open the doors, and shouting, 'Welcome! There's bread and wine. Come eat with us and talk.' This isn't a kingdom for the worthy; it's a kingdom for the hungry."



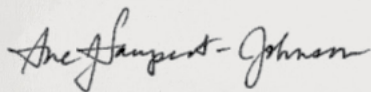
A Welcoming Table for a Critical Time

Our connection has become stronger during this pandemic, and it is obvious that we need all hands on deck in these trying times to minister and evangelize in Christ's name. Folks are sick and grieving. Many face economic challenges and job loss. Inequalities of race and discrimination have been laid open for all to see. And forces of division and hostility threaten to tear us apart. Has there ever been a better time to bear witness to the reconciling power of God by drawing closer together and truly becoming one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world?

An Invitation

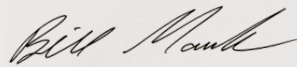
Come join us at the table, and in the joyous, holy work of inviting others to the table, where we will all be empowered to be like Christ and truly love one another. Future generations are crying out for this table of unity, and Christ demands it.

You are invited to prayerfully consider this healthy path forward for the sake of being Jesus Christ to a hurting and broken world. **If the world ever needed a solid, positive, genuine, joyful, welcoming, and life-giving witness of God's love and grace ... it is now.**



Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson

Resident Bishop
North Georgia Conference



Bill Martin

Lay Leader
North Georgia Conference

The Appointive Cabinet

North Georgia Conference

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