



Dear North Georgia United Methodists,

As we begin a new Conference year, there is an unusual situation involving a local church that has drawn rare public attention.

As Bishop of the North Georgia Conference, I have shared that I believe our collective call is to love Christ's church and all of God's people. In carrying out that call we also have to acknowledge our respective roles and responsibilities as part of the church body. All United Methodists and its local churches share a single polity as set forth in our Book of Discipline.

Rev. Dr. Steven Usry is the newly appointed pastor-in-charge of Mt. Bethel UMC in Marietta. In an unprecedented move, Mt. Bethel's leaders stated this week that they would accept this appointment "under protest" and have imposed limits on the role and compensation of the pastor-in-charge. Dr. Usry has been told that there is not an office available for him at this time and that he will report to a supervisor who is not a clergy member of The United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Church does not handle decisions, staff structure, nor compensation in this manner.

The pastor of a local church orders the life of the local church, is the administrative officer of the church, and is responsible for organizational faithfulness. The pastor-in-charge is a vital part of all personnel decisions and must have authority to direct staff. The pulpit of a United Methodist Church is entrusted to the pastor-in-charge. For these reasons, the pastor-in-charge must be ordained or licensed clergy of The United Methodist Church.

I am deeply concerned about the decisions being made by a small group of leaders at Mt. Bethel. These decisions appear to be in violation of the Book of Discipline. I am also troubled that these decisions by a small group of leaders may not reflect the will of the Mt. Bethel congregation.

I would emphasize that this crisis is unrelated to disaffiliation or theology. What has occurred is simply a rejection by the leadership at Mt. Bethel of the rules and procedures for our church as outlined in the Book of Discipline and amount to an obstruction of the appointment process and polity of The United Methodist Church. The appropriate Conference agencies are evaluating the proper response.

I give thanks for all North Georgia United Methodists in all our varied contexts and pray for each of you daily. I ask for your continued prayers for the people and ministry of the Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church.

Blessings,

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson