

Section 1: Church Messiness is not new!

Let's talk about the state of the church. Have you noticed it's a little messy? Now just because it is messy that doesn't mean that good ministry isn't happening in our local congregations! But, there is messiness. There is messiness within the denomination, messiness within our world, and in our nation over many different subjects.

We are not all of the same mind or the same opinion. Our debate over our annual conference resolutions this year has proven that. In fact, God has created each one of us as unique individuals with a variety of gifts. We are not the same. We have different gifts and different ways of thinking. God created us, not as puppets, but as people who can develop relationships with one another and with Christ. Building relationships, and even more so, maintaining, keeping, and growing relationships is messy work.

It is not new to the church or to the life of faith for things to be messy. James chapter 4 verse one says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (NIV) We are not the first faithful people to disagree. Clearly, in biblical history, there have been other conversations and messiness, and sometimes the stuff with which we are wrestling impacts the stuff with which others are wrestling.

Matthew chapter 5 verse 9 says, "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (NIV) A beloved professor challenged me to be curious about what I read in the Bible. He challenged me to ask the question, why? What is going on here? Why has this statement or story or piece of history or wisdom been recorded and shared? What matter is being addressed? What might be the reason or context behind what is being stated? So, why would you need peacemakers? Because there is messiness! The Bible acknowledges that messiness is present in life therefore we need peacemakers. Each person has been uniquely created by God. There are going to be different opinions, different situations, different contexts, different understandings, different interpretations, on many things. We need peacemakers.

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball 2022 State of the Church Address
West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church

Proverbs 10:12, “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.” (NRSV) When we express ourselves and our different opinions, we must be careful that we are not stirring up hate, recognizing that love is stronger, and love has the power to get us through any strife.

If you've been in a relationship with someone, you know that that love gets messy and sometimes you don't always say things in the right ways. Sometimes you say the absolute wrong things and sometimes you have to agree to disagree. People do not always agree on things; however, God has created us to live in community and we need, are called to live and/or work together.

Love covers all offenses. It leaves the door open for continued relationships and continued courageous conversations. And, let me just remind you of what you already know. There is a passage in first Corinthians that calls us to live in a more excellent way, and this passage shouldn't just be read at weddings. (I Corinthians 13) There is a more excellent way to live and the more excellent way, in fact, was put forth because of the messiness in the church. It's not unusual for messiness to happen. When messiness does happen, we should remember to “strive for the greater gifts” and to live the “still more excellent way.” (I Corinthians 12:31)

Reflection Questions:

1. In the midst of the messiness, what good ministry and mission can you identify that continues to happen in your local congregation and community? How can you build from or expand this good stuff?
2. In the midst of messiness, we need peacemakers? Who are the peacemakers and who are the bridge builders in your congregation? What can your congregation do to intentionally help persons in your church and in your community to have courageous and healthy conversations in an atmosphere where we have differing opinions on a number of different topics?
3. Do a Bible study on I Corinthians 12 and 13 with a group in your congregation. How might you and your congregation strive for the greater gifts and live into the more excellent way of life?
4. Is God calling you to start a “Messy Church?” One of the many new things God is up to these days is something called the Messy Church Movement. If you are feeling a nudge from God's Spirit to reach people who are not currently in any church, a Messy Church may be a way to do that. Find out more at: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/what-is-messy-church>