

First United

Methodist Church of Lancaster

29 East Walnut Street
Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17602
www.engagegodfirst.org

November 13, 2019

Dear Bishop Johnson:

Thank you for your pastoral letter of November 9. I appreciate the spirit in which it was issued, and your desire – which I share – to avoid any more pain and harm caused by public disputes and expensive church trials.

I have heard your appeal and want you to know that I do not intend to file complaints come January 1, in response to any acts of defiance to our disciplinary standards on marriage which may occur thereafter. I will also encourage others within my sphere of influence to refrain from filing such complaints. I desire to pursue ministry in peace, and to await a possible resolution of our current impasse during and after the Minneapolis General Conference.

I do, however, have two questions and a request.

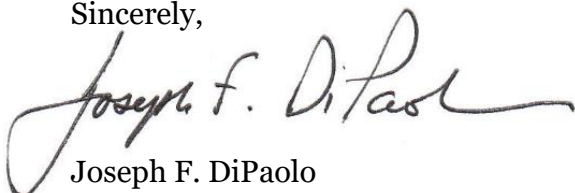
My first question grows out of your declaration that you will not refer to trial any complaints connected to our division over sexuality and marriage. Will that refusal to refer to trial also apply to dissent based on conscientious objections to either the content or implementation of other sections of the *Discipline*? If not, why not?

My second question is has to do with your assertion that trials over sexuality bring more harm than good in our current climate. I do not disagree and understand your appeal to those of us who adhere to historic Biblical teaching. However, I must ask why you make no mention of the harm done by those who engage in conduct which defies the doctrines and discipline of the Church, and breaks vows of ordination made before God and fellow clergy and laity? Such acts are perceived by many of us as nothing less than expressions of contempt and disdain, and as fatally undermining to the bonds of respect, collegiality and trust which we pledged to one another in ordination.

I therefore respectfully request that you issue a similar appeal to our progressive clergy that they refrain from conducting same-sex ceremonies, or other acts of defiance to church discipline, at least until the 2020 General Conference has met. It is my hope that delegates will have the wisdom to weigh the various plans which have been proposed, and provide a peaceful way to move into new futures, which can be marked by blessing and ongoing cooperation in separate structures, rather than continued conflict within one.

Thank you for your pastoral heart, and for considering my questions and my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Joseph F. DiPaolo