



My living room all decorated and ready for Christmas!

“All I want for Christmas is you.” ~ Mariah Carey

This year I did not get what I wanted for Christmas. I’ve been asking God for it. I’ve waited for it. I’ve prayed and fasted about it and I thought this past last year was finally going to be the year God would bring me a romantic partner for keeps.

It’s not like I haven’t done my part. I have searched high and low, opened my heart several times, read lots of books, and worked hard to prepare myself for a serious committed relationship. When I turned 40 last fall, I decided it was time to give up hope of finding a spouse and instead focus my energy on a plan “B”. However, in the spring, I felt something encouraging me not to give up hope – to allow myself to hope once again.

I remembered that 40 is an important number in the Bible and like the Israelites had to wait 40 years before entering the Promised Land, maybe I just had to wait until I was 40 to meet my mate. I even connected with two very promising prospects through a dating website designed for

Christians in ministry and I was filled with hope as the fall and winter seasons approached. However, Christmas 2019 has come and gone without any of my romantic hopes being realized.

Was I wrong to hope? Should I continue to hope? Can I find contentment in a plan “B”?

In a similar way, members of the United Methodist Church have been longing for an end to the conflict over matters of human sexuality in the church. They have waited decades for it. They have prayed and fasted about it. And many have done their part to look for solutions. Many people approached the 2019 Special General Conference full of hope that a solution would be found that would allow the church to end the struggle while preserving its unity. But the conference came and went without the hopes for unity being realized.

Were we wrong to hope to stay united? Should we continue to hope? Can we find unity through a plan “B”?

Perhaps you have heard the news of a new plan being proposed for the UMC called “Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation.” It outlines a way to end the turmoil by separating the church into two or more new denominations. The plan looks promising and has the support of leaders from traditionalist, centrist, and progressive groups. *So, will the protocol pass in the May 2020 General Conference and finally bring an end to the conflict?* No one knows.



I’ve been asking myself what we should do when we face longstanding disappointments and uncertainties about the future and I remember hearing once that *when you don’t know what to do, go back to your last instructions*. The last instructions Jesus gave before He ascended into heaven was to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). So, separation or not, single or not, this is what I intend to be found doing after the upcoming 2020 General Conference and beyond. I really hope it will be here in North Macedonia with some form of the church I have come to know and love these last three and a half years. My desire is that we can all find love, joy, peace, and positive hope for the future even if it is full of plans “B”s, “C”s and “D”s. In the end, a Christmas without getting what I really wanted was still worth celebrating.

In Him,

Jennifer Moore

A Fall Blessing

This fall, I had the honor of representing North Macedonia at the *In Mission Together* Summit in Louisville, Kentucky. Following the summit, I took the opportunity to visit Centenary UMC, the church my family and I attended when I was child. I received such a warm welcome and made fast friends with the lady who hosted me for a few days. My host was kind enough to drive me by my old childhood home, which was a meaningful treat for me. However, nothing could have prepared me for the experience of walking into the chapel at Centenary which was constructed of wood from the original church and still housed the old pews. The fragrance of the room overwhelmed me, and I was instantly flooded with a sense that I knew the place. I cannot accurately describe the mixture of nostalgia, surprise, and emotional warmth I felt; it was like being reconnected to senses and emotions from a distant younger self.

I am very thankful for the hospitality of the Centenary church and the powerful reminder that no matter what happens with the UMC, the wonderful memories and experiences we have gained from the church will always be with us.

They are a part of us. The church is us.

