

From Rev. Jim Welch's speaking at the August 28th Congregational Gathering

While not exhaustive, the following are basic to my reasoning for departing the UMC: Throughout this, it is important for me to distinguish between the denomination and our local church. These do not imply that I have lost trust in Kingwood UMC.

1. The lack of spiritual vitality in the denomination. Too often the UMC is not centered on God nor rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Rather than living by the power of the Holy Spirit, too often it has been driven by the cultural concerns of the moment. My sense is that we have long since wandered off our appointed mission.
2. Our mission of proclaiming the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ, has been mostly reduced to social, political, and humanitarian activities. We have forgotten the imperative of calling people to individual conversion to Christ and failed miserably at the planting of new congregations throughout the world.
3. A radical agenda has found its way into the life of the larger church. The stated purpose is to make the church more inclusive, a purpose the church ought to embrace. However, in practice, the drive for inclusivity too often is translated into a radical theological and political agenda that ends up excluding those who hold to the classic trinitarian faith. Quoting William Abraham: "The result is considerable alienation and frustration among those who sense that this constitutive component of Christian identity is deeply compromised. Furthermore, this agenda can create an atmosphere where the bonds of fellowship in Christ are broken by a division in the church into a host of rival parties and caucuses. In addition, it fosters a climate of intimidation, silence, fear and indoctrination...". My service in the larger church confirms all that Abraham mentioned here!
4. In my experiences as a Superintendent and participant in Methodist groups beyond the local church, I was often dismayed by the general moral and doctrinal hollowness in the church's preaching and teaching. Too often the distinctive content of the faith was too easily accommodated to the current psychological, sociological, or cultural whim.
5. I have been and continue to be aghast at the leadership of the church. Either through lack of knowledge, fortitude, skill, or will, we can't seem to bring about renewal in the church. Those who have the qualities necessary don't seem to know how to overcome the inertia of the institution. Often, the successful renewal movements, such as the Walk to Emmaus, face obstacles because of the perceived threat to leadership authority.
6. Local churches, as a rule, are deeply dissatisfied with the central agencies of the church. Pastors and lay leaders experience a deep lack of accountability among these agencies (with some exceptions). They sense that the agencies are sovereign unto themselves, able to pull whatever political strings relevant to advance agendas deeply opposed by laity.
7. Along with countless lay leaders with whom I've worked there is ongoing concern with how apportioned funds are used. The felt resentment creates a deep mistrust that has only grown over the years.
8. There is, of course, the climactic concern over the propriety of forms of sexual behavior. It is a grievous error to see this as an isolated issue. For me, there is a deep concern about the mistaken understandings of the nature of authority, as well as simple disobedience to the norms of Christian identity.
9. At the risk of repeating myself, let me state clearly that the most important issues for me revolve around my concerns for what I call the "says who?" statements and arguments. I will continue to rely on the authority of Scripture honored in the tradition of the church. It is to these truths that we as pastors and churches should be held accountable.