

A PASTORAL LETTER

Dear Cumming First United Methodist Church,

As your pastor, I acknowledge yesterday's ruling of the United States Supreme Court overturning the Roe v. Wade decision of 1973 stirs within each of us deep emotions. Based on our life's experience we will approach this subject from various perspectives just as we do many other subjects of our day. As followers of Jesus, the Christ, our mission is that of Jesus - to bring healing and wholeness to all - to love and respect all. Some will find this decision healing and life-affirming to the unborn. Others will find it harmful and damaging to women, couples, families, and especially the poor who have, who are and/or who will be wrestling with complex decisions around reproduction and reproductive care. Though we will not all agree, I remind all of us of "a still more excellent way" (I Corinthians 12:31) - the way of Christian love.

Without love, we cannot be Christian regardless of whatever else we may sense we know, understand, and possess. I remind us all that I Corinthians 13 teaches us about what love is and is not - "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way . . ." As we reflect upon our own emotions over this ruling and what its implications are, let us remember to be Christian in our attitudes. There are those among us who have had an abortion. There are those among us who have wrestled or are wrestling deeply about an abortion. There are those among us who feel abortion should not be an option. We are not called to agree. We are called to love - be patient, kind, and respectful. Be careful that you are not boastful, judgmental, arrogant, rude, or insisting your understanding is the only right understanding or the only Christian understanding. We are all Christians loved by God and who love God, even in our disagreement. Let us exemplify love at work in every way that we communicate including in person, social media, and other modes. Let us love, being mindful that our neighbor may not agree with us and may have had a quite different experience than us. Let us love as we earnestly seek to know our neighbor and to understand their experience and perspective.

I desire to be your pastor - whoever you are - whatever your perspective and experience. Yes, I have my personal beliefs, opinions, thoughts, and perspectives; yet I have not been called to be pastor to only those with whom I agree, but to all. It is not easy to be pastor to all, but it is necessary to do my best with God's help. To that end, I pray you know I will always strive.

I also want you to know that all the clergy of Cumming First UMC are here to listen, talk and walk with you along this journey whatever your experience or perspective. Let us all work together to ensure Cumming First UMC is a welcoming, accepting, safe, and confidential people full of compassion who seek not so much to agree as to love all even through our disagreements that in all things the God who is love may be glorified.

With love and peace in Christ,

The Reverend Dr. Matthew D. Stewart Senior Pastor