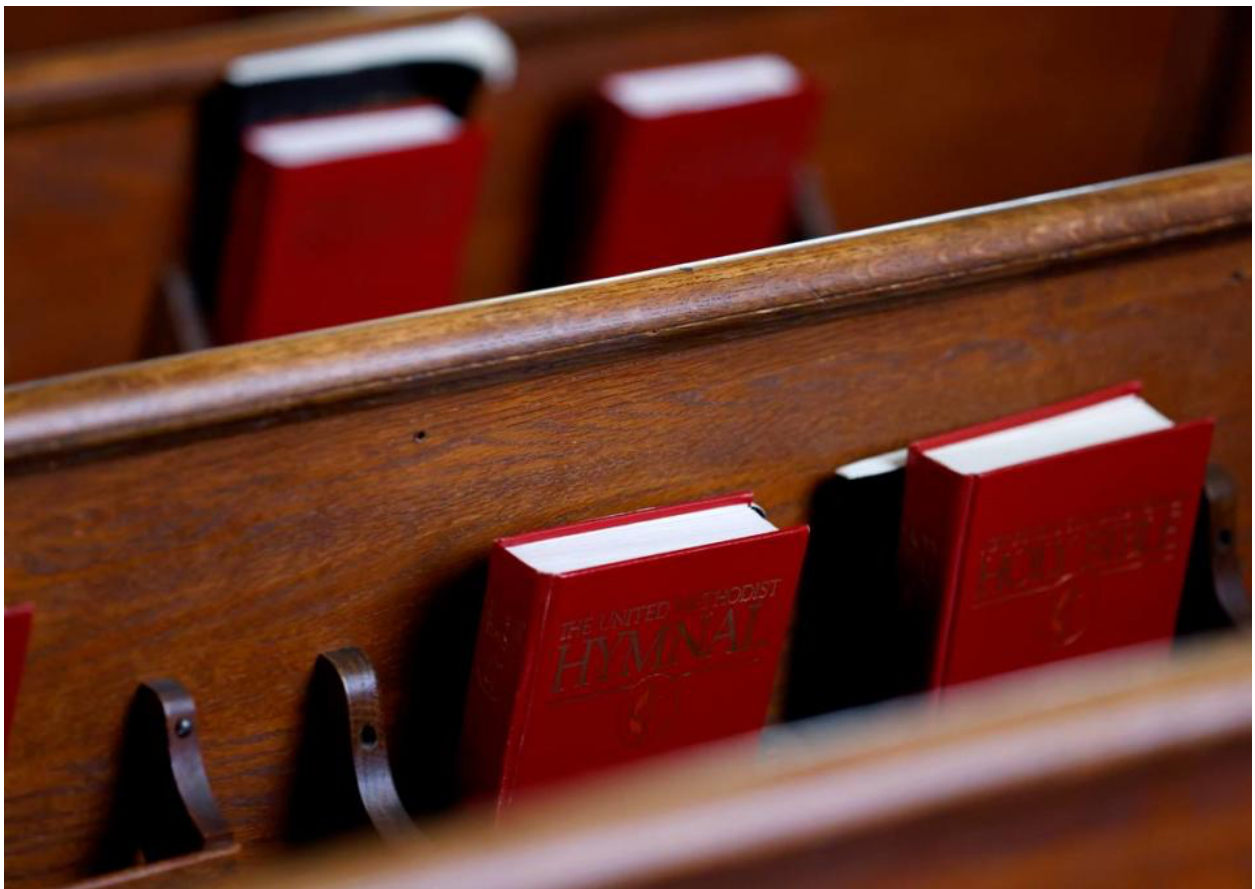


As a pastor, I'm awed by what I saw when the Methodist church split in NC



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Staff

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NC Methodist church split

On Nov. 19, the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church met to determine if 249 N.C. churches could leave the denomination in [a split](#) over same-sex marriage and ordination of gay and lesbian clergy. I'm pastor of two of those churches.

[Bishop Leonard Fairley](#) addressed the more than 1,200 people present, urging us to respect each other as both viewpoints continue to work side-by-side to serve God and spread the gospel.

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"Friends, this is a burden that breaks my heart to bear," he said. "But if bearing it means making space for God's new things to be birthed, then bear it I must."

He reminded everyone that "Jesus Christ is still the Lord of the Church" and "this is God's story to write, and not ours.

"I pray we do not depart from each other in bitterness or in despair. ...I pray we stop demonizing and spreading vicious rumors about each other, as a means to win people over to our side when the side we should be winning people to is Christ."

The vote was overwhelmingly in support of allowing churches to disaffiliate. There was silence.

What I found most amazing in all of this is that a group of 1,200 people faced what is one of the most difficult

decisions such a body can face — the breakup of the body — with grace and forbearance for one another. No one was threatened, no harsh words exchanged.

Without bitter debate, the people called Methodist in North Carolina acknowledged their deep theological divide and made way for God to work in the lives of those on both sides.

This decision allows N.C. Methodists to end decades of wasteful, debilitating and distracting debate on which viewpoint is right. It allows each side to concentrate on following their deep theological convictions to honor God in the way they best know how. Both sides departed respectfully and lovingly. We will pray for the welfare of each other because that is what people of God do.

Bryan Lassiter, Newport