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Why I am United Methodist

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My faith in Jesus Christ and my commitment to the Christian church have always been tied to human relationships. Throughout my life the church has been a community that opened doors to new relationships that stretched me, and broadened my appreciation for the wideness of God's mercy. An African American family in our church. . . in the 60s. A Filipino military family about the same time. A gay young man in a neighboring church when I was a teenager. Radical anti-war protestors. Military chaplains. An interracial community of South African Christians during apartheid. Feminist Christians. Process Theologians. A Russian Orthodox monk. A secret Iraqi Christian. The Dalai Lama. Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Maoris. People who loved me. People who hated me. People who hurt me by their love. People who taught me by their hate. My whole life of faith has been one of being led through a door to a new experience, and then discovering the way God would have me re-order my life and my faith to respond with love to the new experience.

This is God's constant work of redemption in my life. Every stuck place is an opportunity for God to do a mighty work of redemption – again. Out of a grave where hope had been buried, God raised up our living hope in Jesus Christ. Many things separate us from God's promises: sin, familiarity, ignorance, bigotry, fear. God gently leads us out of bondage into freedom.

Why am I a United Methodist? This is the Church that taught me that God creates order out of chaos, possibility out of disappointment, life out of death, not once for all, but over and over again, in creation, in our lives, and in the life of the church. This is the church that taught me that tension – even suffering – can be creative, that all growth involves loss, and that the only way forward is along the way of uncertainty. This is the church that empowers me to believe and to preach that God's power lies not so much in keeping everything under control, as in deftly guiding and guarding us along a way that is at times out of control and treacherous.

I just returned from General Conference in Pittsburgh. It was a tough two weeks. There are deep theological and ethical divides within our church. People on all sides are weary of the battle. Some ask, "Is it time for an amicable separation?"

Disagreements within the church do not discourage me. I do not believe that we have the power to create a divide that God cannot heal. God continues to lead people through open doors. Birth is always painful. I believe that even now the Holy Spirit is at work among us, tearing down the walls that divide us, opening new lines of understanding, leading us into a time of new community. Why would we walk away from each other now? I am too curious to see how God will lead us forward. I can't leave. My faith is too strong.