Dear Central Friends,

One of the ways that one person knows that another person loves them is when they listen. Listening is one of the most important actions of any relationship. Listening demonstrates love and concern; it helps us know that we are valued and that we have worth. When we listen to each other we are living into our call to be like Christ and embodying the presence of the Holy Spirit.

With the theological framework of listening shaping who we are as Central, we are going to embark on a season of listening. Beginning in August we are going to begin hosting up to two listening sessions a week for our church.

Why listening sessions?

As you know the past year has been a difficult year in the United Methodist Church. It has been marked by a divisive General Conference, political caucusing, and infighting within the denomination as we attempt to find a way forward. Most recently in February the General Conference voted to support the Traditional Plan; a plan that “increased hurt and disappointment” of many LGBTQ+ persons, church members, potential members, and clergy within the United Methodist Church. In response to General Conference Bishops Bard and Jones have written that General Conference “responses reveal in stark terms the depth of division which exists within our denomination.”

Many members of Central have asked, “what are we going to do?” We have taken out ads in the Citizen Times, the Mountain Xpress, and put up billboards around Asheville to let people know that Central is a church for Everyone Without Exception. However, folks have still asked, “what are we going to do?” Until now our response has been that we need to gather more information. United Methodists have been working all over the country to discern a way forward, and our leaders wanted to make sure we had as much information as possible before we acted out of haste or without proper information, prayer, and discernment.

So now we are going to do something. We are going to listen; listening to each other closely to discern Central’s way forward. Where is God calling us during this time of unrest in the United Methodist Church? How do we respond faithfully to God’s call upon our lives at this moment in time? Is it possible for Central to live under the Traditional Plan and faithfully respond to God’s call?

Listening sessions will be in homes and at Central. The groups will be comprised of 10-15 people with a maximum of 25 people in each group. We hope to create space where everyone’s voice can be heard.

Central Church, thank you for being who you are and faithfully sharing the Gospel of Christ in the world. Thank you for loving well and for being a place where everyone is welcome without exception. May God bless our time of discernment for a way forward.

Grace and Peace,

Rob and Luke