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A little after 6 p.m. on August 1, 2007, I was making dinner and listening to the radio. I was the bishop in Minnesota at the time. What I heard on the news was that the I-35 bridge over the Mississippi River had collapsed. I rushed to turn on the TV and there I saw frightening scenes of cars, and even a bus of children, precariously hanging on what was left of the bridge. Some cars had careened into the river.

I quickly began to make calls to see what kind of response the Minnesota Annual Conference could make to the community. I was initially told that this tragedy wouldn't have a news cycle longer than the weekend. But news outlets from around the world came and stayed and stayed. Many of them stayed for weeks until they found the last of the 13 people killed.

The bridge collapse rocked our world in Minnesota but it also unnerved others around the world. Tornadoes and other natural disasters occur and many more people are killed, but this disaster was particularly disturbing because a bridge is not supposed to collapse. As Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar said after the tragedy, "A bridge in America just shouldn't fall down."

Senator Klobuchar's words have come back to me over and over again since the close of the Special Session of the General Conference. If the outcome had been firm support of "traditional" marriage, I would have understood; many people want traditional marriage upheld. I may have another opinion but I truly understand that perspective.

But for me—and I suspect I'm not alone even with some who affirm traditional marriage—it was more than affirming traditional marriage. It was how punitive and inflexible the church became in enforcing a no-tolerance approach to same-gender marriage in clergy, or clergy performing weddings of same-gender couples (which is the law of the land—it's not an outrageous interjection into our religious communities and practices).

Church isn't supposed to be that punitive and inflexible. Consequences result when people hurt others, such as sexual misconduct or abuse. But even in those cases, no bishop is punished if they don't adjudicate a clergyperson who has committed egregious acts toward their parishioners. There are no chargeable offenses that carry mandated penalties in the Book of Discipline (BOD) which the Traditional Plan would create. [L] [SEP]

Church isn't supposed to be a place where people wonder if they, or their sons and daughters and friends, will be welcome. Church isn't supposed to be a place where God-given gifts are categorically denied and rejected.

Church isn't supposed to be a place where we have to agree with each other and if we don't we denigrate one another. That's not church! That's not Methodism! John Wesley said:

Only see that your heart be right toward God, and you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ; that you love your neighbor, and walk as your master walked; I desire no more. I am sick of

opinions, I am weary to bear them. My Soul hates this frothy food. Give me solid and substantial religion. Give me a humble, gentle lover of God and humanity; a person of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy...Let my soul be with these Christians wheresoever they are, and whatever opinion they are of.

I believe in a church that helps us all grow in our love for God and our neighbor and then helps us trust in where that love will lead us. For John Wesley, "growing in perfection" had nothing to do with being flawless, and totally without sin, but being made whole in our love for God and neighbor.

I believe in a church that welcomes all people. I believe in a church that cares for all people. I believe in a church that encourages all people to fully offer themselves in service to each other and to their communities in whatever form of ministry that might be, including, if duly qualified, being ordained.

As I walk through the wreckage of the church in these last few weeks, just as I once walked by the collapsed bridge, I have seen here in Northern Illinois, and also in other parts of our church, people who are hurting, grieving and angry. And it makes me weep.

Churches, like bridges, aren't supposed to collapse so I don't, or won't, stay in my tears. I will continue to live into the church that I joined, love, and desire to be God's people on earth as we will be in heaven.

I pray you'll join me.

~Bishop Sally Dyck