

TO: MEMBERS AND CONGREGATION OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, CLARKSDALE, MISS. 38614

Knowing that one day I will have to stand before my Lord and give an account of my thoughts and deeds, I feel led by His Spirit to make the following statement. I make it for two reasons: (1) That I might clear my own conscience in relation to God and my Christ and (2) that as your minister I owe you the service of relating to you my honest feeling without any misconception or misrepresentation of facts or words.

The situation which now faces each of us concerning our public schools and the education of our children is by no means a small matter. Regardless of past actions, accusations, or errors, we are faced with the NOW. Yesterday is gone. We have only today and tomorrow to live with and what we do and how we act in the next few days and months will determine without question the future of education and, more specifically, public education.

After consultation with church leaders, both on the conference and local level, after many personal sessions with members of this Congregation as well as in the community, and after much prayer, individually and with my family, I would like to relate to you the following affirmation:

1. I am totally committed to public education and will with my family support fully the school administration, obeying the law handed down, and aiding not only with presence but with deed, if called upon to help make and build a good sound quality educational system which at the present may seem to be most difficult. I believe in the ability of our educators to take this situation and redeem it but I also believe that if they are deserted, their task will be made even more difficult. Believing this, I will support them every way possible including keeping my children in the public school system.

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(2) I must also state that I am opposed to the use of church facilities for private schools when the motivation and purpose of such schools are in direct conflict with the teachings of this church and more especially the Gospel of Christ. However, although I am opposed and do have the power granted to me by the Discipline to veto any such action, I will not use a mere legal authority to impose upon you my will or beliefs. If I cannot through the Gospel and Christian love convince you that it is better not to use the church facilities for a school, I certainly will not resort to law.

Each member of this Church will have to search his and her heart and make his own decision. You cannot make my decision and I cannot make yours. I simply ask that you search long and pray deeply before you act, for you too will have to account, as I, for the decision made.

I would make one final appeal. Every individual is entitled to the basic freedom of his decision. If that decision is contrary to yours or mine then that decision should be respected. We have no right as an adult or a child to deride or ridicule, make fun of, or intimidate another because he or she may choose to support either public or private education. Respecting another's decision and still loving that individual is Christian and the beginning of reconciliation. May God give us grace to climb, with dignity, the mountain that is before us.

In Christian love,

Charles C. Wiggers  
Minister