**Speaking to Youth after General Conference 2019**

**Information about General Conference 2019 which may be helpful for students:**

* The General Conference is a gathering of 864 delegates from around the world to decide on the beliefs and organization of the United Methodist Church.
* From February 24-26 they gathered in St. Louis to discuss 3 plans which could provide a way forward regarding the denomination’s Book of Discipline with regards to LGBTQI people.
* The Traditional Plan was approved by a vote of 53% to 47%, which shows that United Methodists are not of one mind regarding human sexuality.
* The Traditional Plan affirms the present policies in The Book of Discipline which does not allow same gender weddings and the ordination of gays and lesbians.
* The legislation that was passed was sent to the Judicial Council, the “supreme court” of The United Methodist Church where it is anticipated that much of the Traditional Plan will be ruled unconstitutional for a third time.

**Biblical Reflection and Discussion:**

As a group, read 1 Corinthians 13 together. You might break into small groups to discuss:

* Did anything surprise you in the passage?
* In our church, what are the ways we show love to one another? Visitors? Our community?
* Have you ever felt bullied or excluded? What did you do? Did anyone help?
* What can our church do to love and care for all people?

**A few ways to affirm all students:**

* The decision of General Conference does not change our love and care for our students, their friends, or anyone else in our community.
* Leaders and/or the pastor are available to speak to students and leaders who are concerned, upset, hurt, or just need someone to listen.

**A few tips for the leader:**

* ***Maintain a non-anxious presence.*** *Many people are hurt and upset. Many people in our churches have different beliefs. Take a deep breath and create an atmosphere of respect and care.*
* ***Ask questions and listen.*** *Don’t lecture your students. Ask open-ended questions, listen to their thoughts and experiences, and allow them space to process.*
* ***We all process differently.*** *Some of your students and leaders will want to process out loud. Others will need a little bit of quiet time. You know your group and support* *them with the environment they need.*
* ***Ongoing support.*** *Teenagers struggling with their sexuality or gender experience a higher than average amount of bullying, which can lead to the increased reports of depression, self-harm, and suicide (both considered and completed). Please always offer to listen, speak with them, and know resources available, including the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)* [*https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org*](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)