

## **Alligators, Serpents, Pitbulls & Doves** **Moving beyond the conflict of AC**

There was no “afterglow” for attendees of this year’s Annual Conference. Most of us left Erie with a sour taste and many questions. Certainly a few of the decisions of our bishop rattled us. The political machinations of those on the left were, as always, disappointing. And I dare say that even some of the actions of fellow traditionalists may have snagged your hair a bit.

But for those of us in the WCA, I think it is helpful to remember a saying from the 80’s that enjoyed fleeting popularity: “When you are up to your ears in alligators, remember the goal is to drain the swamp.” In other words, no matter how you judge any of the “mistakes by the lake,” let us remember our direction and goal. We want to glorify God by having the freedom to make disciples within a structure that affirms the authority of scripture on all matters—Christological, social or sexual.

Upon returning, the lay rep and I met with our church’s leadership to describe what had transpired. I began with the admonition of Jesus as he warned his followers of persecution: “Be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.” He went on to model this for them and for us. His actions were well-timed. Sometimes he avoided conflict. But other times, especially his final week, he met all challengers head on.

But innocence was evident as well. In the end, his enemies had to trump up charges to bring about the penalty of death.

Serpents are not like angry, chained pitbulls. They largely go unnoticed until ready to either strike or flee. Likewise for us, now is a time for wise and prayerful action, not rash attacks and protests.

Evidence of innocence is critical as well. As Peter wrote, “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good” (1 Pt. 4:19 NIV). Yes, we should all be willing to suffer any losses for Jesus. But let’s be certain the suffering is God’s will, and not due to rash actions of the flesh.

Emotions are running high. No question about it. But this is when we most need to lean into Jesus and exhibit his self-control.

And let’s lean into each other! The WPA chapter of the WCA is available to guide churches through the process of disaffiliation. We don’t need to go it alone. Pain, conflict and sorrow can distort our perceptions. We need each other in these difficult days. Don’t be shy about offering help to a neighboring church, and certainly don’t be afraid to ask WCA leadership for wisdom.

Anger and angst abound. I attended a WCA gathering in May at Cabot UMC. Members of one local church filled a pew. Knowing the cost of disaffiliation might very well snuff out the life of their congregation, there were tears flowing out of much pain. In righteous anger, their pastor asked, “Why do we have to leave? We weren’t the ones who changed our theology. Why don’t they leave?!”

Many of us have asked these and myriad other questions. But we must “commit ourselves to our faithful Creator and continue to do good.”

With lurching alligators snapping at our ears, let us remember the goal. No, we aren’t draining a swamp. But we are looking to glorify God by being a part of a denomination that’s committed to winning a lost world for Jesus Christ.

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