

WOULD YOU LIKE THE MIDDLE SEAT?

By: Carolyn P. Elias

Has an airline agent ever asked you that question, "Would you like the middle seat?" If he/she did would you laugh or be irritated? Most people prefer either the aisle seat, with its easy access, or the window seat, with its view. But to be squeezed into the middle seat with neither mobility nor vision is uncomfortable, uninteresting and undesirable.

Do you drive or walk down the middle of the road? Not if you're sane! That's a dangerous zone -- the middle.

Even being the middle child seems to bring its challenges.

Yet the "middle of the road" is proudly touted in the UMC as the place to be. (Did that provoke the monicker "mealy-mouth Methodists"?)

Of course we should be loving and come together at the Common Table, at times agreeing to disagree in tolerance over non-essentials of the faith. But let us be men and women of conviction like the saints before us: Paul who "knew" whom he believed; Daniel who "would not" bow down; Joshua who challenged Israel to "choose." Then there were Niemoller and Bonhoeffer who took their stand against Nazi Germany with the Confessing Movement. The Apostle Paul and Bonnhoeffer paid with their lives for standing firm. Jesus Himself was no milque-toast when He cleansed the Temple, called the apostate religious leaders "vipers" and said lukewarm Christians made Him sick.

Our founder, John Wesley, stated "A man of a truly catholic spirit ... is as fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine...he does not limp between two opinions, nor vainly try to blend them into one."

The Gospel calls us to choose, to stand and to endure.

I have a friend who likes to say, "There's nothing in the middle of the road but a yellow stripe and dead skunks." And, by the way, grey is not my favorite color.