

The Way Forward for The United Methodist Church Information (Background & Updates)

The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline, Paragraph 161g:

“The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Ordained Ministry – Paragraph 304.3

“The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.”

Marriage – Paragraph 161c

“We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.”

Unauthorized Conduct – Paragraph 341.6

“Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”

Chargeable Offenses – Paragraph 2702.1 (a) (b)

“A clergy member...may be tried when charged with one or more of the following offenses (a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage, (b) practices declared by the United Methodist church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies...”

Since 1972...

These paragraphs have been debated and voted again and again

At every General Conference since these paragraphs have been challenged but in general they have stayed the same with the exception of some additions about “God’s grace is available for all” “we implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbians and gay members and friends.”

General Conference, Portland, Oregon, May 10-20, 2016

Authorized (by 23 votes) the Council of Bishops to create a Special Commission on A Way Forward”

- All legislation regarding homosexuality was suspended.
- A commission of 32 people was created to study the issue in depth and bring to the bishops a plan.
- The commission consisted of a wide variety of diversity: ethnically, gender, orientation, theological, lay and clergy.
- The 2012 Discipline would stay in place while the commission did its work.

Vision of the Commission

- To design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of the UM witness in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible and balances an approach to different theological understanding of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible.

- ...This unity will not be grounded in our conceptions of human sexuality but in our affirmation of the Triune God who calls us to be a grace-filled and holy people in the Wesleyan tradition.”

Process

- Undergirded with an intentional and global prayer effort.
- Study of the scriptures.
- Presentations by theologians, historians, financial leaders, other denominations.
- Hearing from agencies, boards, churches.
- Much conversation and sharing of hearts and perspectives.

Meetings

- The Commission met 9 times in person.
- The Commission lived together with a “Covenant of Accountability” mandating respect, prayer, study, hospitality, and confidentiality.
- The Commission identified behaviors that needed to be avoided (harmful speech, interrupting others, blaming, distracting, politicizing).

The Commission presented three alternative “sketches” to the bishops in November 2017. They became “models” in early 2018 and have since been finalized as plans:

Traditional Plan

- Affirms the current Book of Discipline language about homosexuality, prohibiting ordination and same-gender marriages or unions of homosexual persons.
- Places a high value on accountability and enforcement.

One Church Plan

- Removes all of the restrictive language in the Book of Discipline about homosexuality, ordination and same-gender marriages/unions.
- Has a high value on contextualization.
- Protects the rights of those whose conscience will not allow them to perform same gender weddings or ordain LGBTQ persons.

Connectional Conference Plan

- Has one “core” that includes shared doctrine and services.
- Creates different “branches” that have clearly defined values.
- These values include: accountability, contextualization and justice.

What the models/plans have in common:

- Each represents values that are within the Council of Bishops and the UMC.
- Each includes a gracious way to exit from the denomination for those who feel called do so.
- Each includes Biblical theology and mission.

Council of Bishops

The Council of Bishops is not planning on schism and believes that unity is our best witness. Conferences are encouraged to study the book *Anatomy of Peace*, by the Arbing Institute, and have conversations locally.

The values of our global church are reflected in all three plans. But the

majority of the Council of Bishops recommends the One Church Plan as the best way forward for The United Methodist Church.

- It allows for contextualization of language about human sexuality in support of our common mission.
- It allows for central conferences, especially those in Africa, to retain their traditional language and values.
- It best fulfills the vision of a global and multicultural Church in order to maximize our mission and achieve as much unity as possible.
- It keeps the constitution and the structure and agencies intact.
- It does not force anyone to act outside of their conscience.
- It received the overwhelming majority in the COB's support.
- It has the most space, clarity, grace, context and simplicity.
- It takes out the language from the Discipline about homosexuality and same-gender weddings. Instead, it allows churches and pastors to decide about hosting and conducting weddings; and it allows conferences and their boards of ordained ministry to decide about ordination and commissioning of LGBT clergy.

Special General Conference

- There will be 864 delegates – (½ lay and ½ clergy) from the entire denomination
- 42% of the voting delegates are from countries other than the US
- 30% of the delegates are from the continent of Africa
- The majority of the US delegates are from the southeast and south central jurisdictions.
- Eastern PA has 8 delegates, Pen-Del has 4 delegates.
- Local conversations are encouraged.

Timeline

- Bishop Peggy Johnson will update Way Forward developments, review the three study commission plans and invite questions and comments at four district town hall meetings in the fall.
- Sept. 22 – the NEJ delegations will meet for instructions and conversation.
- At its regular October meeting, the Judicial Council will review the 2019 Special GC documents and rule on the constitutionality of the three submitted plans.
- General Conference will be held in St. Louis, Mo., February 23-26, 2019. The result of its vote on the way forward goes into effect immediately.

What to do In the meantime:

- Be an un-anxious presence, holding fast to “the peace that surpasses understanding.”
- Have conversations, prayer meetings, Bible study. (Resources are on conference websites.)
- Join our special prayer emphasis: Pray every day from 2:23 pm to 2:26 pm (and a.m. if you are up late). These are the dates of the General Conference in February.
- Engage in the Wesley Fast (from sundown on Thursday until 3 PM Friday)
- Have an attitude of “Convicted Humility”

Convicted Humility is an attitude which combines honesty about the differing convictions which divide us with humility about the ways in which each of our views may stand in need of correction. It also involves humble repentance for all the ways in which we have spoken and acted as those seeking to win a fight rather than those called to discern the shape for faithfulness together. In that

spirit, we wish to lift up our sacred core commitments which define the Wesleyan movement and ground our search for wisdom and holiness.

--Information provided by Bishop Peggy A. Johnson, Philadelphia Episcopal Area

Questions for Table-Talk Conversations

- What are the most important values and convictions in seeking a way forward?
- What resources help us to tell the narratives of unity in seeking a way forward?
- What are the core convictions of our faith as United Methodists?

Pray for our General Conference Delegates and for the Unity of the UMC

Pen-Del Conference Delegates to the 2019 Special General Conference

Clergy Delegates

Rev. Derrick Porter
Rev. Megan Shitama Weston

Lay Delegates

Kevin Goodwin
William Westbrook

Alternates

Rev. Rob Townsend (clergy)
Sam Mitchell (lay)

Suggested Prayers

Based on Philippians 1:9-11. Pray individually or adapt for collective prayer.

Magnificent God, in the name of Jesus, I ask that Your love grow more and more in my heart through the blessing and counsel of the Holy Spirit. May your Spirit strengthen me in the knowledge of You and of the things You have called me to do.

Help me to know the right things to do and how to do them with excellence, and to remain sincere, genuine, and real in all my encounters with others while remaining free from blame and the appearance of evil. May I overflow in the fruits of Your love, which I have because of Jesus Christ. Please cause me and my actions to be a constant glory and praise to You under all circumstances and in all things. AMEN.

(Excerpted from: *Discover the Power in the Prayers of Paul* by David Bordon with Rick Killian; Harrison House Publishers, copyright 2005 Tulsa, OK)

Prayer for the Delegates:

Gracious God,

You have called us, O God, to do the work of your church as careful and efficient stewards. To this end, we bond together our congregations and govern them through the work of Conferences in which we consult and consider together pressing matters before the church.

Give wisdom and vision to those who serve us as our delegates to the Special General Conference. Let not the weariness of their duties distract them nor the emotion of the issues they face prejudice them in the decisions they must make. Enable them to seek first your kingdom and its righteousness. So instruct each delegate that they may wisely conduct the business before them.

Give all delegates a love for your whole church—a desire not only to serve you as we now can, but also a determination to bring unity so that the world may more readily receive the Gospel and find in our manner of living the way of peace. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

From *This Day: A Wesleyan Way of Prayer* by Laurence Hull Stookey

Prayers provided by the [Rev. Jean Howe](#), Pastor of Grace UMC and Pastor of Adult Ministries at West Lawn UMC.

Updated: August 15, 2018