



## A Way Forward Toolkit

### A Defining Moment for The United Methodist Church Globally

Who will the UMC be?

In what form of faith community?

With what unity?

Seeking to do ministry with whom?

### What is happening?

The United Methodist Church is examining how to address the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) persons in The Church and options that help maintain and strengthen the unity of The Church.

- What do we mean by 'The United Methodist Church'?
  - <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are>
- What does it mean to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning?
  - The terms, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning are defined in this glossary from the Human Rights Campaign, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>.

### Why is The United Methodist Church discussing LGBTQ inclusion?

There has been increasing debate over LGBTQ inclusion within The Church's highest governing body, the General Conference. Some United Methodist churches have expressed intentions to leave, or have left, the United Methodist Church as a result of uncertainty around the issue of LGBTQ inclusion in The Church.

- What is the governance structure of The United Methodist Church?
  - <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/constitutional-structure>
  - <https://vimeo.com/269652732>

### How is The United Methodist Church examining/discussing this issue?

The United Methodist Church has commissioned a small group of United Methodists—called the Commission on a Way Forward—representing clergy and laity across four continents, to conduct a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph of *The Book of Discipline* concerning LGBTQ inclusion in The Church and explore options that help to maintain and strengthen the unity of The Church.

- What is the Commission on a Way Forward?
  - <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-about-us>
  - <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-5-things-you-need-to-know>
- What is *The Book of Discipline*?

A fundamental book outlining the law, doctrine, administration, organizational work and procedures of The United Methodist Church. Each General Conference amends *The Book of Discipline*, and the actions of the General Conference are reflected in the quadrennial revision. Often referred to as *The Discipline*. (Source: *Sharing God's Gifts Glossary of United Methodist Terms*)

- What specifically does *The Book of Discipline* say about LGBTQ inclusion in The Church?
  - <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/homosexuality-full-book-of-discipline-statements>
- Who are the members of the Commission on a Way Forward?
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Jorge Acevedo USA, Florida, elder, male</li> <li>○ Brian Adkins USA, California, elder, male</li> <li>○ Jacques Umembudi Akasa Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, laity, male</li> <li>○ Tom Berlin USA, Virginia, elder, male</li> <li>○ Matt Berryman USA, Illinois, laity, male</li> <li>○ Helen Cunanan Philippines, elder, female</li> <li>○ David Field Europe, Switzerland, laity, male</li> <li>○ Ciriaco Francisco Philippines, bishop, male</li> <li>○ Grant Hagiya USA, California, bishop, male</li> <li>○ Aka Dago-Akribi Hortense Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, laity, female</li> <li>○ Scott Johnson USA, New York, laity, male</li> <li>○ Jessica LaGrone USA, Kentucky, elder, female</li> <li>○ Thomas Lambrecht USA, Texas, elder, male</li> <li>○ MyungRae Kim Lee USA, New York, laity, female</li> <li>○ Julie Hager Love USA, Kentucky, deacon, female</li> <li>○ Mazvita Machinga Africa, Zimbabwe, laity, female</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Patricia Miller USA, Indiana, laity, female</li> <li>○ Mande Guy Muyombo Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, elder, male</li> <li>○ Eben Nhiwatiwa Africa, Zimbabwe, bishop, male</li> <li>○ Dave Nuckols USA, Minnesota, laity, male</li> <li>○ Casey Langley Orr USA, Texas, deacon, female</li> <li>○ Gregory Palmer USA, Ohio, bishop, male</li> <li>○ Donna Pritchard USA, Oregon, elder, female</li> <li>○ Tom Salsgiver USA, Pennsylvania, elder, male</li> <li>○ Robert Schnase USA, Texas, bishop, male</li> <li>○ Jasmine Rose Smothers USA, Georgia, elder, female</li> <li>○ Leah Taylor USA, Texas, laity, female</li> <li>○ Debra Wallace-Padgett USA, Alabama, bishop, female</li> <li>○ Rosemarie Wenner Europe, Germany, bishop, female</li> <li>○ Alice Williams USA, Florida, laity, female</li> <li>○ John Wesley Yohanna Africa, Nigeria, bishop, male</li> <li>○ Alfiado S. Zunguza Africa, Mozambique, elder, male</li> </ul>
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### How did The United Methodist Church get to this point?

In 1972, the General Conference added language to *The Book of Discipline*, the book of law for United Methodists, stating that “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” As a result, our Discipline forbids our clergy presiding at same-sex unions and bars practicing gay and lesbian people from being ordained to the clergy in the United Methodist Church. These rules/provisions are the sticking point for The Church today, and have been at each quadrennial (every four years) gathering of the General Conference since 1972.

When the General Conference met in 2016, the delegates reached an impasse around LGBTQ issues, and they took the unprecedented step of asking the Council of Bishops, a body comprised of United Methodists Bishops from each jurisdiction, to help them (at General Conference, bishops preside but do not legislate). This impasse was very serious, and the denomination nearly split over this issue. The result of this request was that the Council of Bishops formed the Commission on a Way Forward.

- How can *The Book of Discipline* be changed?
  - *The Book of Discipline* can be changed only by the General Conference.
- What is the Council of Bishops?
  - <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/council-of-bishops>

### **What options is the Commission on a Way Forward exploring?**

The Commission on a Way Forward released a report reflecting its work over 18 months. The report from this Commission on a Way Forward comes from people with a diversity of beliefs on this particular matter and is not the product of debate and parliamentary procedure. It is a product of conversation, study, prayer, listening, transparency, and trust. During the 18 months of conversation, some were angered and upset but never left the table or stopped contributing.

The report from the Commission on a Way Forward outlines three possible plans for the United Methodist Church:

#### **One Church Plan**

- Recognizes the diverse theological and scriptural understandings of our global church
- Provides generous unity for conferences, churches, and pastors
- Removes the restrictive language from our current Book of Discipline
- Maintains the current structure of the denomination
- Does not require any annual conference, bishop, congregation, or pastor to act contrary to their convictions
- Allows congregations and pastors greater freedom to reach new people
- Allows an annual conference to adopt a policy regarding what standards to apply to candidates for ministry regarding human sexuality
- Allows a church-wide vote (church conference) to decide whether same-sex weddings may be performed on church property
- Deletes from the chargeable offenses against clergy being a self-avowed practicing homosexual or performing a same-sex wedding

#### **Connectional Conference Plan**

- Creates three values-based connectional conferences: accountability, contextualization, and justice
  - Accountability—no one can
  - Contextualization—all can, no one must; some will, some won't
  - Justice—all shall
- Allows for a Book of Discipline within each connectional conference
- Current central conferences have the choice of becoming their own connectional conference
- Council of Bishops is focused on shared learning and ecumenical relationships
- Episcopal oversight, accountability, elections, assignments, and funding occur within the College of Bishops of each connectional conference
- Jurisdictional Conferences choose their connectional conference
- Local churches who desire to join a branch that is different from their annual conference could vote to join another annual conference

#### **Traditional Church Plan**

- Strengthens the current language of the Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality for greater clarity
- Streamlines the process to enforce penalties for violations of the Book of Discipline related to marriage and ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexual persons
- Maintains the current structure of The Church
- Continues the current relationships between The Church and all general agencies and commissions

- This plan would strictly prohibit same-sex weddings by United Methodist clergy, as well as the ordination of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” persons.
- Provides means for annual conferences, bishops, clergy, and congregations unwilling to live within the requirements of the Discipline to withdraw from The United Methodist Church.

### **Of the three plans, is one favored?**

The Council of Bishops, comprising representatives from around the world, has voted by an overwhelming majority to share the work done by the Commission on a Way Forward on the three plans and to recommend the One Church Plan.

The recommendation adopted by the Council of Bishops reflects the wide diversity of theological perspectives and the global nature of The United Methodist Church as the best way forward for our future as a denomination.

- Read the Report of the Commission on a Way Forward
  - <http://bit.ly/way-forward-report>

### **Are there any other plans being put forward?**

Other plans introduced as petitions, which have yet to be endorsed by the Council of Bishops:

- The Simple Plan – endorsed by the Reconciling Ministries Network  
<https://rmnetwork.org/reconciling-ministries-network-the-simple-plan/>
- A Plan of Dissolution – put forth by the Wesleyan Covenant Association  
<https://wesleyancovenant.org/petitions>

### **When will The United Methodist Church make a decision?**

The Council of Bishops has called a Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church to be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. This, again, is the governing body for the worldwide United Methodist Church; clergy and laypeople from all over the world will attend as delegates. The purpose of this special session will be to receive and act on the report from the Commission on a Way Forward based on the recommendations of the Council of Bishops.

- Read about the 2019 General Conference
  - <http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session>

### **What does The United Methodist Church need to do between now and the Special Session of the General Conference in February 2019?**

The Judicial Council, the denomination's supreme court, will meet in October of 2018 to rule on whether the One Church, Connectional Conference, and Traditional plans are in violation of the Discipline, and whether they are properly before the General Conference.

- What is the Judicial Council?
  - <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/judicial-council>
- What powers does the Judicial Council have?
  - <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/jurisdiction-and-powers>

The Council of Bishops will meet November 4-9. This is the only published meeting of a body of The United Methodist Church between September 2018 and February 2019.

## **What if The United Methodist Church cannot come to a decision at the Special Session of the General Conference in February 2019?**

In the event there is no decision made at the Special Session of the General Conference in February 2019, The Church will continue with the current *Book of Discipline*.

### **What should I do?**

If you feel moved to do so, you can contact any of the Virginia delegates to the Special Session of the General Conference.

- Roster of Delegates: <http://www.vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/2019GC/RosterofDelegates.pdf>

Every United Methodist is being invited to:

- Engage in a weekly Wesleyan 24-hour fast from Thursday after dinner to Friday mid-afternoon. That fast does not have to be from food but could be from social media, emails or another daily activity.
- Pause and pray for our church's mission and way forward daily for four minutes from 2:23 through 2:26 AM or PM or at another time. This is because the Special Session of General Conference will be held February 23 through February 26.
- Pray using a weekly calendar from Praying Our Way Forward: <https://umcprays.org/>

### **In all this, REMEMBER:**

- Teach, model, and lead open, honest conversations filled with dignity and respect.
- Help individuals and groups understand that people who love Jesus can amicably disagree over how to interpret and apply Biblical teaching.
- Our language and actions are of extreme importance as we live out our General Rule of Discipleship: do no harm; do good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible to everyone; and attend to the ordinances of God.

## **How can I quickly share information about the Commission on a Way Forward, the Special Session of the General Conference, and other relevant information?**

Resources to learn more:

- [www.vaumc.org/wayforward](http://www.vaumc.org/wayforward)
- [www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward](http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward)

In addition, this document contains a convenient summary of relevant information.

- <http://bit.ly/conference-handout>

### **Reference**

UMC Polity: <https://www.facebook.com/vaumconf/videos/10155813110348533/>

LGBTQ Glossary: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

Commission on a Way Forward: <https://www.vaumc.org/WayForward>

2019 Special General Conference Timeline:

<http://www.vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/WayForward/Timelineto2019SpecialGeneralConference.pdf>