

Concerning the United Methodist Denomination and the Commission on A Way Forward

Cashiers United Methodist Church has a long history of making faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and being in ministry to all the world. United Methodists are spread throughout the world and are connected by missions, traditions, Wesleyan Theology, and covenant. However, over the past several years, our covenant has become severely fractured over significant and irreconcilable disagreements over human sexuality, marriage, and ordination of clergy.

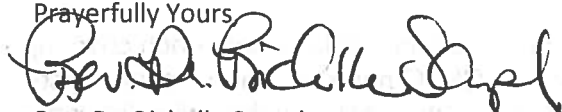
According to the United Methodist 2016 *Book of Discipline*, we officially believe that Scripture teaches that all people are of sacred worth and are welcomed in our church; sexuality is a gift from God to be practiced exclusively between a man and a woman within the bounds of a monogamous marriage. Officially, we as a denomination stand and have always stood in agreement with this historic stance. However, many within our denomination now disagree, and some have gone as far as to engage in actions that have brought us into a covenantal crisis.

As the debate around human sexuality rages, the American branch of the United Methodist Church continues a decline that has been going on for decades. Clearly, our denomination needs to recover our missional focus, rethink our organizational structures, and move past our present impasse and into ministry vitality once again.

In February of 2019, General Conference delegates from all over the world will gather in St. Louis, Missouri, to attend a specially called conference to deal specifically with the issues surrounding human sexuality. Obviously, this event will become a national news story. Decisions made at this assembly may well initiate a significant reorganization and even upheaval of our present denomination. I, as your pastor and spiritual leader, will continue to follow these developments closely. The church staff and I remain committed to lead CUMC through these troubled denominational waters. Let us all be in constant and earnest prayer over this matter, as well as do our own biblical research into this matter.

This denominational storm has been brewing since the early 1970's. It is soon going to be upon us with the epicenter stationed in St. Louis. In the Name of Jesus, let us speak peace to this storm and pray for our denominational leadership and the conference delegates. Let us also commit to keep our collective energy as the Body of Christ, to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and to be focused on connecting people to the saving grace of Jesus, our Lord.

Prayerfully Yours



Rev. Dr. Richelle Sampl
Pastor, Cashiers United Methodist Church

The Three Plans

The Traditionalist Plan

This plan affirms current church restrictions related to LGBTQ individuals and adds more accountability for enforcement of those restrictions.

The Book of Discipline, the church's policy book, says the practice of homosexuality "is incompatible with Christian teaching" and lists officiating at a same-gender union or being a "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy member as chargeable offenses under church law.

Accountability is the theme of this plan with the setting of minimum penalties and quicker expulsion after conviction of violations. Those who disagree with the disciplinary mandates, as a group of people, as a conference, as a local church or whoever, would be offered the opportunity to set up self-governing or "autonomous, affiliated or concordant" churches or conferences.

The One Church Plan

The One Church plan gives churches room to maximize the presence of United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible.

This plan would remove the Book of Discipline's restrictive language and allow more freedom for United Methodists to set policies around LGBTQ inclusion, according to their own contexts.

Conferences individually could choose whether to ordain openly gay clergy, and local congregations could decide whether to allow same-gender weddings.

The plan also would specifically protect the rights of United Methodists whose conscience will not allow them to perform same-gender weddings or ordain LGBTQ people.

The Connectional Conference Plan

This plan is grounded in a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops, while also creating different branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice.

The five U.S. jurisdictions would be replaced by three connectional conferences, each covering the whole country, based on theology and perspective on LGBTQ ministry. Annual conferences would decide which connectional conference to affiliate with; only local churches who choose a branch other than the one chosen by their annual conference would vote to join another conference.

Under the denominational roof, there would be a branch that wants to maintain the current Book of Discipline's language, a branch that favors a more local approach and a branch that wants full inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in all parts of their fellowship.

Central Conferences could choose one of these three branches or become their own branches under this plan.

Overview of Proposals for General Conference

Points included in this document are provided as a summary of the recommendations to the special 2019 General Conference. For more information, please read the entire report from the Commission on a Way Forward.

	One Church Plan	Connectional Conference Plan	Traditional Plan
Local Churches	<p>Summary: This plan, preferred by a majority of the Council of Bishops, would remove restrictive language from the Book of Discipline that prohibits same-gender weddings in UMC properties and ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals." It would add language to protect churches and pastors who choose not to allow same-gender marriages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Most likely would make no changes in practice at the local level. <input type="checkbox"/> May rewrite wedding policies to explicitly allow or forbid same-gender weddings. <input type="checkbox"/> Will covenant with bishop on whether congregation will accept LGBTQ pastor. 	<p>Summary: This plan would replace the current jurisdictional conferences with three connectional conferences based on affinity: Progressive, Traditional and Unity. All three would use a general Book of Discipline (Articles of Religion, General Rules, Confessions of Faith) with the ability to adapt other portions to their context for ministry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Can choose affiliation. <input type="checkbox"/> Still will set wedding policies with churches in the "unity" connectional conferences able to set parameters for building use and/or wedding policies in either direction. 	<p>Summary: This plan, developed more fully toward the end of the Commission on a Way Forward process, broadens the definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual"; puts penalties in place for disobedience to the Discipline; and requires bishops, pastors and annual conferences to certify adherence to the Discipline.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> No vote unless the church disagrees with annual conference's decision to stay or leave the UMC. <input type="checkbox"/> Churches can leave if they disagree with annual conference's decision to adhere to Discipline.
Clergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Can exercise individual conscience. <input type="checkbox"/> Bishop & cabinet would take theological convictions into account for appointments. <input type="checkbox"/> Ends potential for church trials. <input type="checkbox"/> LGBTQ candidates can be ordained and appointed to local churches that approve and can request transfer of candidacy if conference Board of Ordained Ministry or clergy session chooses not to ordain LGBTQ persons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Will choose a connectional conference. <input type="checkbox"/> Transfers subject to approval by Board of Ordained Ministry. <input type="checkbox"/> Ordination would be recognized across all three connectional conferences. <input type="checkbox"/> Security of appointment determined by connectional conferences, with emphasis on protecting women and minorities. <input type="checkbox"/> Deacons and full-time local licensed pastors may see fewer opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Must maintain Discipline or leave for "autonomous, affiliated or concordat church." <input type="checkbox"/> Just resolutions from complaints must include commitment not to repeat offense. <input type="checkbox"/> First offense results in one-year unpaid suspension. <input type="checkbox"/> Second offenses result in surrendering credentials.
Annual Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> No vote is needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Boards of Ordained Ministry and/or clergy session can discern whether to ordain LGBTQ persons. <input type="checkbox"/> General Conference can craft a way for churches to exit with grace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Jurisdictional and central conferences will vote to join a connectional conference on simple majority vote. <input type="checkbox"/> Annual conferences who want to join a different connectional conference than their jurisdiction chooses may do so on a simple majority vote. <input type="checkbox"/> Annual conferences could revoke every four years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Must certify that it will uphold the Discipline. <input type="checkbox"/> Annual conferences that won't certify are urged to form "autonomous, affiliated or concordat" church, and churches that leave can't use United Methodist name or logo past 2020.

Overview continued from other side	One Church Plan	Connectional Conference Plan	Traditional Plan
Council of Bishops	<input type="checkbox"/> Council continues as one body providing spiritual leadership. <input type="checkbox"/> Assignments will reflect convictions of bishops and annual conferences. <input type="checkbox"/> Bishops will be protected if their consciences will not allow him or her to ordain LGBTQ persons.	<input type="checkbox"/> Funded by U.S.-based conn. conf. at comparable levels, with shared funding, as needed, for bishops outside the U.S. <input type="checkbox"/> Oversight and accountability falls to bishops of each connectional conference. <input type="checkbox"/> Each bishop, active and retired, chooses a connectional conference <input type="checkbox"/> All episcopal elections would take place by 2022.	<input type="checkbox"/> Active and retired bishops must certify they will adhere to Discipline. <input type="checkbox"/> Bishops who will not certify adherence no longer receive compensation of expenses as of 2021 and will be encouraged to leave for "autonomous, affiliated or concordat" church.
General Agencies	<input type="checkbox"/> Continue to operate as they do now. <input type="checkbox"/> If funding declines, boards and agencies would need to consider a strategic restructuring. Sustainability issues, however, are separate from the Commission on a Way Forward's task.	<input type="checkbox"/> Jointly funded boards include Wespath, GCEA, UMCOR, Archives, parts of GBGM and the Publishing House. <input type="checkbox"/> Task force would evaluate each general agency and propose new model for UMC by 2025. <input type="checkbox"/> Program agencies would only serve conn. conf. that desire participation. <input type="checkbox"/> Justice ministries structures would be determined by connectional conference, with expected emphasis on sexism and racism.	<input type="checkbox"/> All general boards and agencies continue. <input type="checkbox"/> Each agency can contract with churches that leave the UMC.
Related Institutions	<input type="checkbox"/> Likely no changes. <input type="checkbox"/> Commission conversations with members of these organizations; indicate this plan makes it more likely for most institutions to maintain their affiliation.	<input type="checkbox"/> Properties owned by annual and jurisdictional conferences follow them to their new connectional conference. <input type="checkbox"/> Institutions can choose to relate to one or more Cs, as their bylaws allow.	<input type="checkbox"/> No changes unless they choose to do so within the bounds of their own bylaws.
Finance & Pensions	Two petitions are recommended for any of the three plans: <input type="checkbox"/> Any church that leaves would have to pay their proportionate liability of unfunded pensions for their annual conference. <input type="checkbox"/> Clergy would be removed from benefit and annuity risk pools and have accrued benefits transferred to an individual investment account.	<input type="checkbox"/> Same two petitions as One Church Plan. <input type="checkbox"/> Legal fees to navigate legacy connections. <input type="checkbox"/> Wespath stays intact and extends to connectional conferences. <input type="checkbox"/> Medical and pension liabilities remain the obligation of the annual conference. <input type="checkbox"/> Wespath will reassign pension liabilities for churches that opt to go to another connectional conference. <input type="checkbox"/> Annual conferences manage budgets to care for boundary reconfiguration costs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Same two petitions as the One Church Plan.
Episcopal Fund	<input type="checkbox"/> Salaries and benefits would be paid by each episcopal area in the United States. <input type="checkbox"/> Other expenses would be shared via apportionments. <input type="checkbox"/> No changes to central conference funding.	<input type="checkbox"/> Salaries and benefits would be paid by each U.S.-based connectional conferences. <input type="checkbox"/> No changes to central conference funding.	<input type="checkbox"/> No changes to central conference funding.

Gracious Exit Plan

None

None

Yes

Important Terms to Know

The Book of Discipline

A 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. We are currently under *The 2016 Book of Discipline*.

The Annual Conference

The regional, organizational unit of The United Methodist Church, as well as the yearly meeting of that unit, both presided over by a bishop. The business session is composed of equal numbers of clergy and laity, with at least one layperson from each pastoral charge. We are a part of the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference.

The General Conference

The highest legislative body in The United Methodist Church. The voting membership consists of an equal number of clergy and lay delegates elected by the annual conferences. General Conference convenes every four years to determine the denomination's future direction. It is the only body that can speak for the denomination.

The 2019 Called General Conference

The 2016 General Conference made plans for a called General Conference to be held in 2019. Its only purpose is to address our denomination's ongoing struggles around the topic of human sexuality. The called General Conference is scheduled for February 23-26 in St. Louis, MO.

The Delegation

The delegation consists of the voting delegates to General Conference. Every four years, each annual conference elects an equal number of lay and clergy delegates to attend General Conference. At annual conference 2015, the Alabama-West Florida Conference elected five lay persons and five clergypersons (plus alternates) to attend the 2016 General Conference. These delegates were affirmed at the 2017 session of annual conference as the voting delegates to the called General Conference. A list of our delegates can be found at www.awfumc.org/delegation.

The Commission on A Way Forward

The Commission on a Way Forward was proposed by the Council of Bishops and approved by the 2016 General Conference to do a complete examination of all topics concerning human sexuality in the church. Its 32 members were named by the Council of Bishops, including 8 bishops, 11 laypersons, and 13 clergypersons. The Commission has prepared and will present the three proposed plans to the 2019 called General Conference.

The Constitution

This is the fundamental constituting and legal document of The United Methodist Church. It establishes the basic outline for the organization of the denomination as well as establishing the office and role of the bishop. The Constitution can only be amended by 2/3 approval of The General Conference AND 2/3 approval of the aggregate vote of all annual conferences.

The Judicial Council

Nine persons, both lay and clergy, elected by General Conference who rule on questions of constitutionality in church law and practice.

A Way Forward for The United Methodist Church - Resources for Further Study:

- Commission on a Way Forward Report to 2019 Special Session of the General Conference (In English, French, Portuguese & Swahili): <http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session>
- UMNS Article: Court Docket details proposed plans for UMC: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/court-docket-details-proposed-plans-for-umc>
- Commission on a Way Forward Resources on www.wnccumc.org: (Link at top left of homepage) <https://www.wnccumc.org/commissiononawayforwardresources>
Includes Health Conversations resources, and links to UMC.org resources, and COWF videos and resources
- Video: Remarks on "A Commission on a Way Forward" - Bishop Ken Carter | Western North Carolina Annual Conference 2018 - <https://www.wnccumc.org/bishopcarterremarks>
- Videos from Commission on a Way Forward: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-releases-final-videos-for-2019-general-conference>
- News updates from Commission on a Way Forward: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-news-and-updates>
- Ongoing news updates from The United Methodist Church: www.umc.org
- TED Talk Video: The Danger of a Single Story - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story
- TED Talk Video: 10 Ways to have a Better Conversation – Celeste Headlee: https://www.ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation
- Praying Our Way Forward: A Prayer Community for The United Methodist Church: www.umcprays.org
- Decision 2019: One with Christ, One with Each Other, One in Ministry to all the World (August / September / October 2018 Special Issue of Circuit Rider: https://www.ministrymatters.com/circuit_rider/139/decision-2019-one-with-christ-one-with-each-other-one-in-ministry-to-all-the-world-augsepoct-2018
- Videos from the West Virginia Conference: <https://www.wvumc.org/bishop-sandra-steiner-ball/a-way-forward/>
- Other videos from various annual conference presentations that are available online
- Point of View (POV) resources from the Florida Conference (resources on Empathy)

What You Can Do:

- **Be in Prayer.** Pray for The United Methodist Church, the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward, the Commission on General Conference, the work of the General Conference, laity and clergy delegates to General Conference, and the many others providing resourcing & assistance for this work. Pray for our global connection, local congregations, and our clergy & laity members around the world. Join in Praying our Way Forward with other United Methodists around the world using the prayer resources at www.umcprays.org. Be in Prayer.
- **Be informed.** Follow the news & information coming out as we move toward General Conference. Use the resources above and others that will be shared over the next seven months. Be informed.
- **Join in Holy Conversation.** Be a part of conversations in your district, and in your congregation. Use the Healthy Conversations resources available on our conference website. Intentionally find ways to be in holy conversation, listening and sharing in love, with persons with whom you may not agree. Join in Holy Conversation.

Ephesians 4:1-6: *I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Western North Carolina Conference General Conference 2019 Delegation:

Laity: Jennifer Davis, Jennifer Burton, Lynne Gilbert, Coley Hooker, Jr., Amy Johnson, Shannon Sherfey, Sandy Hieronymus, Henry Dozier, Jr., Robert Upchurch, Tonya Lanier

Clergy: Kim Ingram, Amy Coles, David Christy, Ashley Crowder Stanley, In-Yong Lee, James Howell, Jeremy Troxler, Sam Moore, John Boggs, Jeff Patterson