

We Confess

NEWSLETTER OF THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT
WITHIN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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COB's Wise Decisions to Ask JC for Declaratory Decisions on Issues Critical to GC 2019

During a special called meeting held May 22 – 25, 2018, the Judicial Council ruled that petitions other than those crafted by the Commission on a Way Forward could be submitted to General Conference 2019. To be considered, petitions must be determined to be “in harmony” with the call of the special session although, at this point, it is unclear exactly who from General Conference will be making this determination and what the definition of “in harmony” will be.

Unexpectedly, Decision No. 1360 also clarified that the petitions resulting from the work of the Commission on a Way Forward are to be submitted by the Commission itself and NOT the Council of Bishops as previously understood. An amended call by the Council of Bishops for the special session of General Conference was released to ensure consistency with the Judicial Council ruling.

The Council of Bishops has since requested the Judicial Council rule on the constitutionality of each of the three plans put forth by the Commission on a Way Forward. The questions being asked regarding the One Church Plan, the Traditional Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan individually are:

1. Whether each plan is constitutional
2. If any petition included within the proposed legislation of each plan is not constitutional, would the other proposed petitions constituting that plan be enacted without violating the constitution?

This request is an effort to clarify any constitutional issues and provide the opportunity to address those issues prior to General Conference.

As part of the Judicial Council's process, The Book of Discipline requires that requests for a declaratory decision, including relevant documents, be posted on the Judicial Council website. This is particularly significant in this case because the translation of the Commission's petitions from English into French, Portuguese, and KiSwahili postponed the release of their report. Although we could have been waiting for weeks for the documents to be released, the full report was released in English by the Judicial Council, as required, as Docket No. 1018-12 for their October 2018 meeting.



What's Ahead for United Methodism?

BY DR. RILEY CASE

What's ahead for United Methodism? Many of us wish we knew. The important issue before the church has to do with human sexuality. Specifically, it has to do with whether in a changing culture the church should change its position on marriage and sexual practice. As it stands now the church teaches that Christian marriage is between a man and a woman. Some in the church want to change that to say Christian marriage is between "two adults." As it stands now the church teaches that "sexual relations are affirmed only within the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage." Some in the church say that is an unrealistic stance in our present world and want it changed.

In 1972 the newly merged United Methodist Church adopted a Social Creed which for the first time in the church's history spoke about homosexuality. It spoke in support of civil rights of persons regardless of their sexual orientation. It also spoke of the sacred worth of all persons. From the floor of the conference an amendment was added stating that the "practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

That one sentence became a bone of contention to gay advocates in the church who believed that homosexual practice was very much compatible with Christian teaching.

In 1976 there was an effort to change the church's "incompatible" language; it failed. In 1980 there was another effort to change the church's position; according to UM News Service support to change the position was backed by most of the agencies and caucuses of the church; nevertheless it failed. In 1984 and again in 1988 attempts were made to change the church's position; they failed. In 1992, after spending \$200,000 of church funds, the Committee to Study Homosexuality recommended 17-4 that the church position be changed; the

recommendation was not approved. In 1996 fifteen bishops came out in support of changing the church's position on homosexuality; nevertheless the position was not changed. In 2000 and in 2004 and in 2008 and in 2012 there were attempts to change the church's position. These efforts were accompanied by disruptions and demonstrations by protesters brought to the seat of the conference; nevertheless the church's Biblical and traditional stance was upheld. In 2016 attempts to change the church's position were accompanied by an attempt to pass a statement saying we disagree about matters of homosexual practice. Most of the petitions were not even given a recommendation for approval by legislative groups. Furthermore, it was made known that talks were taking place considering how the church could move forward with the impasse on homosexuality that is dividing the church. Amicable separation was being discussed, suggesting the church's overall witness would be strengthened if separate groups would be free to define their ministry according to conscience. At this point something approaching panic overcame many of the bishops and delegates.

The General Conference asked the Council of Bishops for leadership. After overnight discussions, Bishop Ough read the bishops' statement recommending not to vote on any of the legislation relating to human sexuality (it might be divisive) and to appoint a commission which, with bishops, might come up with a Way Forward to allow the church to resolve the matter of homosexual practice. The bishops called for a special General Conference in February, 2019, to settle the issue once and for all (although each General Conference since 1976 thought they were settling the issue once and for all).



Three Options

The General Conference meeting in February of 2019, will be offered three options submitted by the Commission on a Way Forward to help direct the church in the coming years. Other options are coming from petitions presented by individuals or groups with more ideas. The ones that are known to us at the moment will follow.

The three options offered for consideration by the Commission do give insight into possibilities for the church. Briefly summarized (each one will be dealt with more completely in other articles in the newsletter) these are as follows:

The Traditional Model.

1

Keep the same *Discipline* statements regarding human sexuality as are in the *Discipline* currently. However, since bishops, conferences, boards of ministry and churches are presently in open defiance of the *Discipline* as it now stands, close the loopholes and tighten the accountability sections of the *Discipline*.

The Connectional Conference Plan.

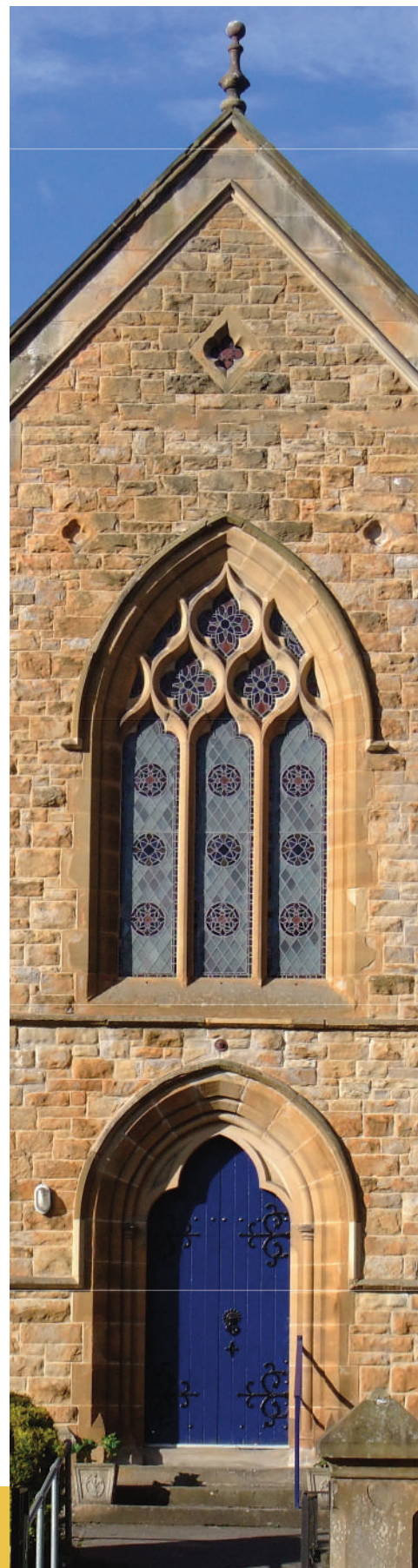
2

Divide into three separate branches of United Methodism and let each branch adopt their own *Discipline*, select their own bishops, adopt their own criteria for ordination and set its own standards for human sexuality. This option would necessitate several constitutional amendments.

The One Church Model.

3

Reverse the church's historic teaching in regard to human sexuality. Remove all references to homosexuality and to marriage as between a man and a woman. Let individuals, churches, and conferences decide for themselves what standards they wish to follow. Build in assurances that the convictions of traditionalists will be honored.



1

The Traditional Model.

For many in the church there is dismay as to why we are even having this debate. Is not the Bible clear about the place of the woman and the man in God's creation? Has not the Church always stressed the importance of sexual purity and the importance of the family? The Traditional Plan basically reaffirms what the church has always taught.

What is added would be provisions for a gracious exit for any who feel they can no longer live under the church's teaching that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching and prohibits same sex weddings and ordination of practicing homosexuals. Churches leaving would be able to keep their property.

For those who do not wish to take advantage of gracious exit and for the rest of the church, legislation would be added which would further define the term "practicing homosexual" as a person living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union. Annual conferences and bishops would be required to indicate if they would or would not enforce the *Discipline* regarding these issues.

Furthermore, bishops could not dismiss a complaint unless there are not grounds and Annual Conferences and congregations could continue in the pension program.

› An additional petition has been submitted as an amendment to the Traditional Plan to guide the implementation of gracious accountability. The petition would offer changes to the *Discipline* that would allow local churches or annual conferences to form or join self-governing churches if they do not desire to support and uphold the UMC standards for accountability. This petition requires the church to uphold Biblical standards in regard to homosexual practice and marriage. Annual conferences would be required to hold votes to determine if a conference is willing or not willing to uphold the *Discipline*. Churches or clergy whose consciences are in conflict with the annual conference decision would be encouraged to transfer to another self-governing church. The petition also offers the procedures by which this legislation can be effectively implemented by adding several enforcement procedures.

- › Another petition to amend the Traditional Plan was filed that proposes a new Global Episcopacy Committee that would replace the present Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy. The committee would help facilitate transfers of bishops across jurisdictional or central conference lines. It would administer the complaint process of complaints filed against bishops who have not upheld the *Discipline*. It would also monitor developments in the church that might call for a reorganization of jurisdictional or central conferences.
- › A petition has also been filed with the Judicial Council that the Traditional Plan as submitted by the Commission on a Way Forward is unconstitutional. The Judicial Council is expected to rule on this and the other petitions at their October 2018 meeting.

WHAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT THIS PLAN?

It is most unfortunate that restrictive accountability measures need to be added to the *Discipline*. Our present crisis is caused not by unbiblical teaching but by those who took vows that they affirmed the church's doctrine and behavioral standards and then deliberately and consciously violated those vows. For many of us this was a breach of integrity. Furthermore, persons (including bishops) have indicated they would not uphold the *Discipline*. So, the crisis. The church is already in schism – separated within the church due to conflicting beliefs. The church cannot function without commonly held values and without trust. So, the choice. Succumb to the rebellion by compromising the church's historic beliefs on one hand or uphold the church's historic standards. This action would be impossible without added accountability.

The Traditional Plan was first delineated by the Commission on the Way Forward. It is no secret that a majority of the bishops at the present so oppose the Traditional Plan that originally they rejected the Commission's recommendation to present the plan even as an option. However, the Judicial Council ruled it is the Commission who is to submit the report, not the Council of Bishops. The Commission chose to submit all three plans.

The Confessing Movement, Good News, UM Action, and Wesleyan Covenant Association are working together in support of the Traditional Plan, the two amendments to the Traditional Plan and Gracious Exit which allows churches to leave with their property.

2

The Connectional Conference Plan.

In this plan the five U.S. Jurisdictional Conferences by geography would be replaced by three Connectional Conferences, each covering the whole country, based on traditional or progressive theology. Each Connectional Conference would create its own Book of Discipline carrying Articles of Religion, Confession of Faith, the General Rules and other items agreed upon by United Methodists. Each annual conference would decide with which Connectional Conference it chooses to align. A local church could choose to be in a conference other than the conference with which their annual conference aligns and clergy could identify with a particular conference or make themselves available for more than one conference. A central conference (those outside the U.S) can exist as its own Connectional Conference or it can choose to align with a U.S. Connectional Conference. All the Connectional Conferences would continue to support ministries and mission outside the U.S.

Each Connectional Conference elects and pays for its own bishops. This does not include bishops outside the U.S. who would be supported by all U.S. annual conferences. Wespath, Publishing House, GCFA, Archives & History and parts of GBGM would continue. There would, however, be some re-alignment of other general boards and agencies, possibly operating somewhat independently and contracting on a fee-basis for services. The Judicial Council would consist of two persons elected by each Connectional

Conference and would serve as the supreme judicial body for all matters in the several Books of Discipline.

A Standing Committee on Connectional Conferences would be established by the 2020 General Conference to help the Council of Bishops facilitate cooperative ministry between the newly formed Connectional Conferences. Legislation for this would be written by a Transition Team and submitted for 2020 General Conference. This team

would consist of approximately 30 members, including a project manager and other paid staff or contracted services. This group would be responsible for overseeing and administering the transition process through General Conference 2022.

WHAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT THIS PLAN?

This plan would allow for realignment on the basis of theology and mission. For evangelicals, for example, it would be encouraging to be able to relate to like-minded churches who share common values and beliefs. Progressive churches in the evangelical conference could choose to relate to a Connectional Conference more sympathetic to their beliefs and values.

Most importantly it would offer an opportunity for the general church to restructure its boards and agencies and repurpose the seminaries. At the moment it seems that the boards and agencies and the seminaries act as if the local churches serve them instead of they serving the local church. In this plan churches would have some freedom in determining how boards and agencies can best serve them. Annual conferences might be able to have influence in how seminaries can best train for ministry. Different conferences could focus their ministry on groups they feel called to serve. If the progressive conference wants different ministries for LGBTQ persons they would be able to create those ministries. For those who believe the United Methodist Church is in a rut, this plan offers the possibility for a New Thing.

WHAT MORE CAN BE SAID ABOUT THIS PLAN?

The Commission on a Way Forward knew this plan would require at least 8 constitutional amendments and that there could be more depending on the Judicial Council ruling. If it should pass in 2019, it would require an aggregate 2/3 vote of all United Methodists and then can be considered again by the 2020 General Conference.

3

The One Church Plan.

The One Church Plan is a variation on legislation that has been rejected several times at General Conference often referred to as the local option. This plan, however, goes much further than the legislation that has failed before. The One Church Plan that will be presented to the 2019 General Conference asserts that the UMC is not of one mind on matters of homosexual practice and, therefore, proposes the following:

- › Removal of all language from the Discipline that restricts pastors and churches from conducting same-sex weddings and annual conferences from ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexual persons. Language is added to affirm that no annual conference, bishop, congregation or pastor is compelled to act contrary to their convictions.
- › Creates a moral equivalency between Christian marriage and same sex marriage, thus redefining Christian marriage.
- › Ends the threat of church trials over same-sex weddings.
- › Maintains the leadership structure of the UMC including the Council of Bishops, General Conference and annual conferences as one body and one church.

The Plan argues that this would allow the church to stay together. The church would be united by heritage and doctrine and values and by mission. Some believe sexual morality is not an important enough issue that it should keep us from being united. Specifically, the appeal is that we must do anything we can to avoid division.

WHAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT THIS PLAN?

If adopted this Plan would violate Scripture, 2,000 years of Christian tradition, and all who have sought to uphold Wesleyan standards, doctrine, values, and practices since the beginning of Methodism. It basically places United Methodism outside the Christian tradition and its teaching about marriage that has existed since New Testament days. Some would argue it would make the United Methodist Church an apostate church.

Supporters of the plan argue that churches can continue their ministry and mission without disruption and would not have to vote on anything. This is fantasy thinking. Local churches, clusters, conferences, and various ministries will face issues inevitably relating to homosexual practice and marriage and there will be more, not less disruption in the church. Conflict once associated with General Conference will be brought to the local church. Instead of keeping unity this Plan would further divide the church. Many churches even now speak of leaving the denomination. The Confessing Movement, along with other evangelical renewal groups, urge these churches to stay faithful to the denomination because our stated doctrines and values affirm historic Christian truth. United Methodism is too valuable to abandon. If the Plan is adopted it will be impossible to continue to make that argument.

What is discouraging is that a majority of the bishops, along with most of our seminaries and most of our boards and agencies, are so out of touch with the rank and file of United Methodism that they believe this Plan would be supported and that it might keep the church united. The Confessing Movement and other renewal movements make the point that evangelical United Methodism, while usually underrepresented in the councils of the church, is the perspective of choice for the majority of United Methodists.

WHAT FURTHER CAN BE SAID ABOUT THIS PLAN?

It won't pass. While it reflects the liberal bias of many bishops, many seminaries, many official institutional boards and agencies, the liberal caucuses, and the wellfunded and politically aggressive LGBTQ advocates, it is too much outside Christian tradition to be adopted.

WHAT FURTHER CAN BE SAID ABOUT THIS PLAN?

A petition being filed will argue before the church's Judicial Council that several provisions, namely the very provisions that seek to protect the consciences of those who stand for Biblical morality, are unconstitutional.

Please Pray for General Conference 2019 and thank God for what He is going to do for His Church!



You can visit umcprays.com to join with other United Methodists in praying for God's guidance as we prepare for and participate in General Conference 2019.

On the Road to

General Conference 2019:



Dates to Remember

October 23-26, 2018

Judicial Council meets in Zürich

November 2018

Council of Bishops meets at Lake Junaluska

February 19-22, 2019

Judicial Council meets in St. Louis, MO

February 23-26, 2019

Special Called General Conference
in St. Louis, MO

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within The United Methodist Church**

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Purpose Statement

Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord. The Confessing Movement exists to enable The United Methodist Church to retrieve its classical doctrinal identity, and to live it out as disciples of Jesus Christ.

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