

A Way Forward for Grace I: Legislation and Constitutional Issues

The One Church Plan

The One Church Plan would have the denomination recognize that marriage is between two adults, not explicitly between one man and one woman. It would allow pastors to decide whether or not to preside at same-sex weddings, and it would give local churches the right to decide whether or not same-sex weddings could take place in their sanctuaries. Finally, it would allow annual conferences to decide whether or not to ordain self-avowed, practicing homosexuals.

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

Changes to the adaptable paragraphs in The Book of Discipline apply only to the Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States. Central conferences, through the work of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, will have the authority to retain the present language regarding chargeable offenses of clergy and questions of ordination related to homosexuality found in The Book of Discipline (2016) or adopt wording in these paragraphs that best serves their missional contexts.

The Connectional Conference Plan

The Connectional Conference Plan would create three branches of the church, referred to as Connectional Conferences. While the three branches would share responsibility and receive support from a number of general church boards and agencies and operate under a unified Council of Bishops, each branch would have a significant degree of autonomy when it comes to sexual ethics, teachings on marriage, and ordination standards.

The Connectional Conference Plan reflects a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services. This plan creates three values-based connectional conferences that have distinctive definitions of accountability, contextualization and justice. Current central conferences have the choice of becoming their own connectional conference (up to five additional connectional conferences) or joining one of the three values-based connectional conferences. A redefined Council of Bishops focuses on ecumenical relationships and shared learning. Episcopal oversight, accountability, elections, assignments and funding occur within the College of Bishops of each connectional conference.

The Traditionalist Plan (as presented to the November Council of Bishops Meeting):

Important Note:

The request to include a full Traditionalist Model was received by the Commission on a Way Forward just prior to its last meeting, which began on May 14, 2018. Members of the Commission on a Way Forward registered concern that the time available did not allow for the full conciliar process utilized for the other two plans offered by the Commission on a Way Forward. The One Church Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan both received intensive and comprehensive participation from the Commission and the Council of Bishops over an extended period of time. While there was some support within both the Commission and the Council of Bishops for a Traditionalist Model, the support was modest enough in both groups to discontinue the Commission's earlier work on this model. In order to serve the May, 2018 request from the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward resubmits the sketch sent to the Council of Bishops in November, 2017 as our work on the Traditionalist Model along with the history of this work and its implications for various bodies in The United Methodist Church.

The Traditionalist Plan would reaffirm The United Methodist Church's present teachings on human sexuality and call for enhanced accountability standards for clergy, bishops, and annual conferences. United Methodist clergy would not be allowed to preside at same-sex weddings, and same-sex weddings would not be allowed on United Methodist property. Self-avowed, practicing homosexuals would not be eligible for ordination in The United Methodist Church.

Disciplinary Language and Implications:

- Broaden the definition of self-avowed practicing homosexual to include persons living in a same-sex marriage or civil union or persons who publicly state that they are practicing homosexuals.
- Mandate that any just resolution shall include a commitment not to repeat the offense.
- Require every annual conference to certify that they will uphold, enforce, and maintain the Discipline's standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination.
- Annual conferences that did not so certify would be encouraged to form something similar to an "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church." As of 2021, annual conferences who could not so certify could no longer use the United Methodist name and logo, and they could no longer receive any funds from The United Methodist Church.
- Require bishops (active and retired) to certify that they will uphold, enforce, and maintain the Discipline's standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination. Active bishops who did not so certify would not be eligible to receive compensation for expenses as of 2021, and would be encouraged to join the

“autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church” formed by the above annual conferences.

- Local churches that disagreed with their annual conference's decision to not enforce the Discipline's standards could vote to remain with the UMC.
- Local churches that disagreed with their annual conference's decision to enforce the Discipline's standards could vote to withdraw from the UMC and unite with the “autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church.”
- Clergy who could not maintain the Discipline's standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination would be encouraged to join the “autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church.”

The Simple Plan (offered by the United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus)

All of the Commission's proposed church models include aspects that can be used to discriminate against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) persons. Additionally, there are some in the United Methodist Church who would propose a “traditionalist” model that would seek to remove queer clergy, our queer lay siblings, and our supporters from the denomination.

Our proposal requires neither constitutional amendments nor hundreds of pages of technical translations. *The UMQCC proposes simply to remove the language from the Book of Discipline that excludes LGBTQIA+ people from full participation in the church.*

The UMC can choose to remove the restrictive language from our Book of Discipline without forcing the hand of those who are still wrestling with the idea of the full inclusion of LGBTQAI+ persons in the church. Removing the Disciplinary language that prohibits LGBTQIA+ inclusion does not require any United Methodist clergy to perform a same-gender wedding. Individual congregations would be allowed to continue in their own discernment.

Let us be diligent and faithful in practicing the first of John Wesley's General Rules—“Do no harm.” For us, this means simply asking the UMC to no longer endorse the discrimination LGBTQAI+ people have faced. We know that even if our proposal goes forward, the discrimination will continue, but this is a first step.

Perhaps most importantly, removing the discriminatory language in the Book of Discipline opens opportunities for new members, service, relationship, and congregations. Where we are now restricted, we will be freed to include previously excluded LGBTQIA+ persons.

**Members of the Commission on a Way Forward to hold up in prayer
are:**

Jorge Acevedo USA, Florida, elder, male

Brian Adkins USA, California, elder, male

Jacques Umembudi Akasa Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, laity, male

Tom Berlin USA, Virginia, elder, male

Matt Berryman USA, Illinois, laity, male

Helen Cunanan Philippines, elder, female

David Field Europe, Switzerland, laity, male

Ciriaco Francisco Philippines, bishop, male

Grant Hagiya USA, California, bishop, male

Aka Dago-Akribi Hortense Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, laity, female

Scott Johnson USA, New York, laity, male

Jessica LaGrone USA, Kentucky, elder, female

Thomas Lambrecht USA, Texas, elder, male

MyungRae Kim Lee USA, New York, laity, female

Julie Hager Love USA, Kentucky, deacon, female

Mazvita Machinga Africa, Zimbabwe, laity, female

Patricia Miller USA, Indiana, laity, female

Mande Guy Muyombo Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, elder, male

Eben Nhiwatiwa Africa, Zimbabwe, bishop, male

Dave Nuckols USA, Minnesota, laity, male

Casey Langley Orr USA, Texas, deacon, female

Gregory Palmer USA, Ohio, bishop, male

Donna Pritchard USA, Oregon, elder, female

Tom Salsgiver USA, Pennsylvania, elder, male

Robert Schnase USA, Texas, bishop, male

Jasmine Rose Smothers USA, Georgia, elder, female

Leah Taylor USA, Texas, laity, female

Debra Wallace-Padgett USA, Alabama, bishop, female

Rosemarie Wenner Europe, Germany, bishop, female

Alice Williams USA, Florida, laity, female

John Wesley Yohanna Africa, Nigeria, bishop, male

Alfiado S. Zunguza Africa, Mozambique, elder, male

Problems with the One Church Plan--Ted A. Campbell

- The One Church Plan does not Provide for Lay Assent to Ordination of Gay and Lesbian People in an Annual Conference.
- The One Church Plan Allows No Way Out for Congregations Alienated from their Annual Conferences by Clergy-Session Decisions to Ordain or Not to Ordain Gay and Lesbian People.

Constitutional Issues with the One Church Plan--Ted A. Campbell

A newly published and critically documented article by William B. Lawrence and Sally Curtis Askew in *Methodist Review* raises a wide range of constitutional issues facing the United Methodist Church in relation to the General Conference of 2019 and the process by which the Council of Bishops and the Commission on a Way Forward are currently preparing for the specially-called 2019 General Conference.

The authors of the article have long experience in the denomination's Judicial Council, and the article makes for tough reading for those not familiar with its processes. Cynthia B. Astle has summarized some of the major findings of the article in a short piece in *UM Insight*. A central concern is that although the General Conference of 2016 properly called for the General Conference of 2019 and properly authorized the Council of Bishops to name members of the Commission on a Way Forward, the Bishops' decision to bring to the 2019 General Conference only legislation that they have selected from the work of the Commission may violate the separation of legislative functions laid out in the *Book of Discipline*.

Conservative United Methodists have also called into question the role that the Council of Bishops has taken in favoring the "One Church" model among the options offered by the Commission on a Way Forward.

I have written in a previous post that separations in the UMC might have some surprising outcomes: for example, people who hold traditionalist views on sexuality issues who nevertheless elect to remain in a more progressive dividing group, or vice versa. But now it's becoming apparent that challenges to church law could also be a consequence of actions in 2019 unless participants exercise extraordinary care to follow denominational law in mandating changes.

I commented to a friend recently that the worst-case scenario for the 2019 General Conference might be a scenario in which no group or no plan secures the necessary 433 votes for a simple majority. Constitutional challenges would also prolong our highly dysfunctional condition of disunity. *Christ, have mercy on us.*

Documents:

[Report by the Commission on A Way Forward](#)

Cynthia Astle (St Stephen, Mesquite)--summary of Constitutional Crisis

Ted A. Campbell--*Problems with the One Church Plan*

William Lawrence and Sally Curtis AsKew--*Constitutional Methodism in Crisis*

Ted A. Campbell--*Understanding the Present UMC Crisis*