

# WV Conference Delegation Listening Sessions For the Special Session of the General Conference February 2019

## Overview

The 2016 General Conference directed the Council of Bishops to offer a way forward that would maintain the unity of the church while articulating a path allowing for contextual application. The Commission on the Way Forward was named by the Council of Bishops as a means to guide our work. The Commission has 32 members from all parts of the globe. It is 1/3 laity, 1/3 clergy, and 1/3 bishops. It represents United Methodist Christians from a variety of theological perspectives. They spent much time in prayer, study of scripture, and conversation. The Commission was asked to “design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and that balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible” (Commission’s Report to Gen. Conf., p. 6). There are three plans and supporting materials that are being sent to the delegates of the special session. The initial report from the Commission is 93 pages long. There will be up to 61 more petitions that may be submitted to delegates in November. The process for considering the plans has not yet been announced. SPECIAL NOTE: *The Central Conferences (Annual Conferences outside of the US) have always had the right to adapt the Discipline to their context and they have consistently exercised their rights. The US Annual Conferences do not have the same right. Consequently, the three plans will only be applied to the US church.*

## The One Church Plan

Scriptural basis: John 17:20-26 (“that all of them may be one”); 1 Cor. 12:26 (“if one member (of Christ’s body) suffers, all suffer together with it”); Romans 14:19 (“Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding”); Acts 5:38 (“if the plan...is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them, in that case you may even be found fighting against God!”)

- “The plan provides a generous unity that gives conferences, churches, and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context without disbanding the connectional nature of the UMC. In the plan, no annual conferences, bishops, congregations, or pastors are compelled to act contrary to their convictions” (Report, p. 11).
- “The plan removes the language from The Book of Discipline used in the US that restricts pastors and churches from conducting same-sex weddings and annual conferences from ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexual persons. It adds language that intentionally protects the religious freedom of pastors and churches who choose not to perform or host same-sex weddings and Boards of Ordained Ministry and bishops who choose not to credential or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals” (p. 11)
- Under this plan, each annual conference’s clergy executive session would be able to decide whether to ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals as clergy. Each pastor would be able to decide whether to perform same-sex weddings or unions (as is true with all weddings). Each local church would be able to decide whether to allow same-sex weddings in its sanctuary.
- Local churches are not required to vote (p.15) nor are Annual Conferences (p. 16)
- Covenants are created with Bishop and Cabinet concerning and honoring local churches and clergy convictions concerning stances on weddings and pastoral appointments (pp. 15-16)
- Each Annual Conference pays the expenses for their own Bishop and office (p. 12)
- General Agencies continue
- This plan is the least disruptive to the pension plan (p. 12)

*Please note: This summary has not been updated in relation to recent Judicial Council decisions.*

### **The Connectional Conference Plan**

Scriptural basis: Isaiah 43:19 (“Look! I’m doing a new thing…”); Matthew 9:16-17 (“...people pour new wine into new wineskins so that both are kept safe.”); I Cor. 12:12 and Chapter 27 (“You are the body of Christ and parts of each other”); Matthew 9:37-38 (“The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for the harvest.”)

- The 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 (p. 26)
- The plan eliminates the 5 US Jurisdictions and creates three connectional conferences in the US (of which Central Conferences can choose to join or they may keep their separate identity). The three connectional conferences would organize around theology (progressive, unity, and traditional) and perspective on LGBTQ ministry. (p. 26)
- Each of the five jurisdictional conferences in the U.S. would decide which connectional conference to join. Any annual conference which did not wish to join the connectional conference chosen by its jurisdictional conference could vote to join a different one. A local church not wishing to be part of the connectional conference chosen by its annual conference could transfer to another annual conference which is joining the connectional which it prefers.
- Each of the three connectional conferences will create its own Book of Discipline which would begin with the General Book of Discipline (shared globally), including Articles of Religion Confessions of Faith, and the General Rules. The Connectional Conferences would create their own structures including electing and assigning bishops. (p. 26)
- General Agencies continuing: Wespeth (pension), Publishing House, GCFA (finance), Archives & History, and parts of Global Ministries (p. 26)
- This model would require amendments to the denomination’s constitution.

**The Traditional Plan** (sketched by the Commission as “A Traditionalist Plan,” but completed and adapted for legislation by a few members of the Council of Bishops).

Scriptural basis: The proposal does not include scripture references.

- This model maintains the current stance of the church regarding the definition of marriage and ministry of and with LGBTQ persons (p. 63). It would continue to affirm that all persons are of sacred worth and would continue to prohibit the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. It would continue to prohibit pastors conducting same-sex weddings, and to prohibit U.M. churches hosting same-sex weddings.
- Votes will be required by annual conferences (majority vote). Bishops and clergy must provide written statements of agreement. Local churches vote if they choose a different path from their Annual Conference.
- Local churches, clergy, bishops and Annual Conferences who refuse to support the Book of Discipline will be requested to leave The United Methodist Church and join a self-governing church. They may leave with their property. Their pension will be frozen at the point of departure.
- “It is appropriate for there to be two different Wesleyan bodies who teach differently on the question of Christian marriage between same gendered persons” (p. 64)
- If a clergy person or bishop choose to remain in the UMC and violate the Discipline, there will be new accountability measures and mandatory punishments (p. 64) to ensure that bishops, annual conferences, boards of ordained ministry, and pastors uphold the Discipline.
- General Agencies continue