

BISHOP SANDRA STEINER BALL'S MEETING WITH THE CLERGY OF THE WEST VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

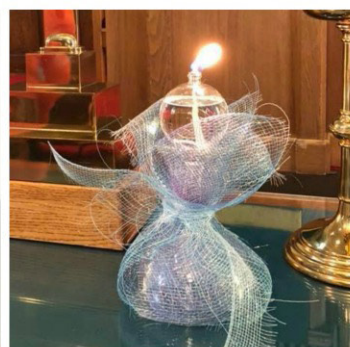
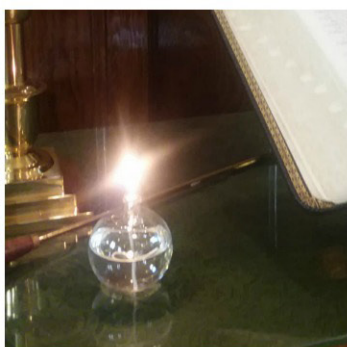
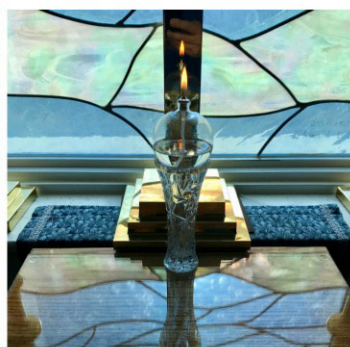
Nurturing

SEEDS



HOPE

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
John 1:5 (VOICE)*



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GATHERING LITURGY

GREETING

When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus

And when we're dying, it is in the Lord.

Both in our living and in our dying,

We belong to God, we belong to God.

HYMN 64*Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty*

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,

God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,

casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;

cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,

which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,

though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,

only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,

perfect in power, in love and purity.

4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,

God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

PRAYER 677 Listen, Lord (A Prayer)

O Lord, we come today knee-bowed and body-bent before thy throne of grace. Oh Lord, this day bow our hearts beneath our knees, and our knees in some lonesome valley. We come like empty pitchers to a full fountain, with no merits of our own. O Lord, open up a window of heaven, and lean out far over the battlements of glory, and listen this day, Amen. (prayer by James Weldon Johnson slightly adapted)

SCRIPTURE..... Psalm 62

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Let us share prayers of thanksgiving and prayers for the world, for the Church, for family and friends, the community, and The United Methodist Church.

PRAYER 595..... *Whether the Word be Preached or Read*

Whether the Word be preached or read,
no saving benefit I gain
from empty sounds or letters dead;
unprofitable all and vain,
unless by faith thy word I hear
and see its heavenly character.

Unmixed with faith, the Scripture gives
no comfort, life, or light to see,
but me in darker darkness leaves,
implunged in deeper misery,
overwhelmed with nature's sorest ills.
The Spirit saves, the letter kills.

If God enlighten through his Word,
I shall my kind Enlightener bless;
but void and naked of my Lord,
what are all verbal promises?
Nothing to me, till faith divine
inspire, inspeak, and make them mine.

Jesus, the appropriating grace
'tis thine on sinners to bestow.
Open mine eyes to see thy face,
open my heart thyself to know.
And then I through thy Word obtain
sure present, and eternal gain.

HYMN 496.....*Sweet Hour of Prayer*

1. Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
that calls me from a world of care,
and bids me at my Father's throne
make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
my soul has often found relief,
and oft escaped the tempter's snare
by thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

2. Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
the joys I feel, the bliss I share
of those whose anxious spirits burn
with strong desires for thy return!
With such I hasten to the place
where God my Savior shows his face,
and gladly take my station there,
and wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

3. Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
thy wings shall my petition bear
to him whose truth and faithfulness
engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since he bids me seek his face,
believe his word, and trust his grace,
I'll cast on him my every care,
and wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

SCRIPTURE..... John 1:1-18

HYMN 133..... *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*

1. What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
leaning on the everlasting arms;
what a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
leaning on the everlasting arms.

Refrain:

Leaning, leaning,
safe and secure from all alarms;
leaning, leaning,
leaning on the everlasting arms.

2. O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,
leaning on the everlasting arms;
O how bright the path grows from day to day,
leaning on the everlasting arms.
(Refrain)

3. What have I to dread, what have I to fear,
leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,
leaning on the everlasting arms.
(Refrain)

PRAYER (unison)

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer.



Grace and Peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Healer of our Brokenness and Hope of the World!

I give thanks to God for each of you and your ministry. I deeply appreciate each of you who has taken time to be with me today.

About three months from now, the Special Called Session of General Conference will gather in St. Louis to consider the report of the Commission on a Way Forward. The eyes of the global United Methodist community will be focused on St. Louis during February 23 to 26.

The West Virginia Conference will have 3 clergy (Mary Ellen Finegan, Sharletta Green, Ellis Conley) and 3 lay delegates (Judi Kenaston, Erin Sears, Rich Shaffer) in attendance as well as 3 alternate clergy (J.F. Lacaria, Lauren Godwin, Mark Flynn) and 3 alternate lay delegates (Connor Kenaston, Royce Lyden, Fred Kellerman).

It is critical that as pastoral leaders we lift these delegates up in prayer. I would encourage you to print their names in the prayer section of each church's bulletin so that our delegates, like all delegates, are surrounded and bathed in prayer – not just during the days of General Conference, but all the days leading up to and through the end of General Conference 2019.

Without a doubt, our beloved United Methodist Church is at a critical juncture. For many United Methodists, this is a most anxious and fearful time. For LGBTQ persons, they are wondering how and if there will be a place for them in all aspects of the ministry of the church. For those who have a conservative understanding of scripture and human sexuality, they too are wondering if there will be a place for them.

It is indeed an unnerving time in our church and this is exactly why I desired for us to spend some time together. Today I will remind you of the vision, mission, and scope of the Commission's work, review the plans included in the Commission's report, and share with you how recent Judicial Council decisions impact the report and plans. Please read the report going to General Conference for yourself. As leaders, it is our responsibility to read the whole of the report for ourselves instead of allowing another person or group to interpret or define the report for us. There is a great deal of misinformation out there about the entirety of the report and the plans therein.

Secondly, I want to share with you essential traits that I expect from you as spiritual pastoral leaders for such a critical time as this. They are:

- a non-anxious presence – If we do not embody this essential trait, we are being unfair to our congregations. Peter Steinke describes a non-anxious presence as a “steady and calm way of being that acknowledges the anxiety but does not let the anxiety drive behavioral choices.” Eugene Peterson paraphrased Matthew 16:24 in these words: Then Jesus went to work on his disciples and said, “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am.” A non-anxious presence comes from the calm assurance that Jesus is in the boat and Jesus is in the driver’s seat.
- an authentic spirituality - Authentic spirituality is the foundation of trust for spiritual pastoral leaders. Make your devotional life a priority in a more focused and disciplined way. We cannot lead well unless we are tuned in to God.
- a heart of peace - The Anatomy of Peace asks the critical question, “Is your heart a heart of peace or a heart of war?” When you enter discussions and/or disagreements, is your heart at peace? Being at peace means that you will not see the other person as an object, as an adversary, as someone to be convinced of your way. A heart of peace isn’t about changing the other person’s mind – it’s about mutual respect, convicted humility and understanding each other in the midst of disagreement.
- convicted humility - To live out of a convicted humility, is to know that life is not all about you - and to know that God is God. Humility – it’s looking at life as it really is, instead of thinking highly of ourselves while looking down on others. Humility – it’s a value to pursue, to allow to convict us, and in being convicted - to live out of because it can and will transform our lives in incredibly healthy and spiritual ways.
- resourcefulness – equip yourselves to have Christian conversations so that you can help others do the same. Not engaging in a conversation is not an option. As pastoral leaders, we are to serve our congregations by equipping them for a Christian conversation and holy conferencing.

It is an anxious time – but we know for sure that we do not worship an anxious God. God’s word is full of reminders that God is in control. We are not alone, God is with us. This is not our Church. It is God’s Church and God will care for the Church.

Most importantly, no matter what happens in February we have work to do here and now. There are souls that need the saving power of Jesus Christ, there are people to feed, and there are lives to be touched and served by God’s love in Jesus’ name. In the midst of the other things that try to distract us from our mission and ministry, now is the time for us to once again align our hearts to God’s heart, throw off fear and live in faithful trust that God will lead God’s people to God’s preferred future.

Grace and Peace,

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

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

Summary of Commission on a Way Forward Petitions

	One Church Plan	Connectional Conference Plan	Traditionalist Plan
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One Church Plan takes a relational and compatibilist approach to unity. The restrictions underlying current conflicts are deemed "non-essential matters" over which we can agree to disagree, and thus are removed from the Book of Discipline. This plan emphasizes our external mission by removing internal conflict. No change to structure of UMC. No division of the UMC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectional Conference Plan creates new structures to provide space between those who disagree about Christian ethics regarding same sex marriage and suitability for ordained ministry. Three overlapping "Connectional Conferences" defined by rules concerning same sex marriage will replace today's five Jurisdictional Conferences defined by distinct geography. These Connectional Conferences would be separate legal entities (501(c)3 organizations) but deemed part of one UMC. Each of the three new Connectional Conferences would make their own rules in this area (as well as certain other administrative areas). It is expected that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Conference similar to the new Traditionalist Plan, Unifying Conference would be similar to the new One Church Plan, and Progressive Plan would provide full affirmation of married gay Christians. Rules and trials would remain a possibility, but a sorting process would place Annual Conferences (ACs), Local Churches (LCs), Bishops and Clergy into a Connectional Conference that matches their belief and thus <u>intends to reduce the number of trials</u> vs. our current situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditionalist Plan retains, strengthens and enforces current prohibitions on same sex marriage and gay ordination. This plan both invites and forces Annual Conferences who are progressive on matters of same sex marriage to leave the UMC to create new denomination- This plan allows <u>other</u> <u>any</u> Annual Conference(s) <u>and/or</u> Local Churches to leave and create new denomination(s) for any reason. These new "Self-Governing Methodist Churches" would be eligible for concordat relationship and token representation at General Conference. The UMC would continue to proclaim that "practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." Current definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual" would be further detailed so as to tighten up enforcement. Minimum penalties established for pastors to be suspended for one year on first violation and expulsion for a second violation. Accountability for bishops would move from regional Jurisdictional College of Bishops to new global structures to enforce uniformity. Annual Conference (by vote). Bishops and members of Boards of Ordained Ministry would all certify that they support and enforce these rules relating to same sex marriage and gay ordination. Increased influence of complainants & ability for church to appeal decisions. Taken together, these rules will increase the number of trials. Annual Conference (by vote). Bishops and members of Boards of Ordained Ministry will be required to certify that they support and enforce these rules relating to same sex marriage and gay ordination. Annual Conference must certify that Bishop and Boards of Ordained Ministry are following through. Bishops who dissent or who fail to lead their Annual Conference (AC) to follow through may be reported for disciplinary proceedings. General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) to track and enforce this requirement on Annual Conferences including withholding funds and barring use of UMC name and cross-and-flame logo. Clergy settling charges via just resolution must promise not to reoffend. No change regarding to same sex marriage or ordination is forced on a Central Conference by this legislation. Structure remains the same. Annual Conferences, Bishops and Boards of Ordained Ministry have the same obligation to certify as described above for Jurisdictional Conferences. This legislation creates new options for individual Annual Conference(s) or even Local Churches to opt out of choice made by UMC Central Conference.
Rules regarding ministry with and by married gay persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removes language stating that "practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." While this statement is removed, it is not replaced with any specific affirmation. Neutralizes language in Social Principles concerning civil marriage such that the UMC globally neither prohibits nor affirms same sex marriage. Removes prohibitions against ceremonies celebrating civil unions or same sex marriage. Removes prohibition against gay ordination. Rules may be set by Boards of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session suitable to each Annual Conference. Our standard of Christian sexual ethics calling for "celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage" will be applied equally to gay and straight clergy. Intends no more trials. Where legal civilly, UMC pastors would be allowed but not forced to celebrate civil unions or to conduct same sex wedding services. Annual Conference processes and bishops may ordain qualified gay candidates, but no one is forced to do so. Annual Conferences (ACs, equal lay and clergy voices) may make an advisory statement to inform any such new policies. Adds new provisions to protect freedom of conscience for United Methodists and to bar interference by bishops and district superintendents in the decisions of clergy and local congregations. Provides that same sex weddings will not be celebrated in church buildings unless the local congregation has voted for it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is expected that freedom of conscience (specific to same sex marriage and gay ordination) would apply primarily to the Unifying Conference. In other words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Connectional Conference would strictly enforce rules against same sex marriage and gay ordination (similar to the new Traditionalist Plan), Unifying Connectional Conference would operate very similar to the new One Church Model with explicit guarantees for freedom of conscience. Progressive Connectional Conference would expect that all annual conferences would willingly ordain qualified gay candidates, that all pastors would be expected to conduct gay weddings for qualified couples (i.e., on same basis as straight weddings), and that all local churches would willing host gay weddings (i.e., on same basis as straight weddings). Central Conferences will have to vote and they may either (a) convert to a geographic Connectional Conference (new name, but all current rules in effect) or (b) join one of the ideologically-defined Connectional Conferences (Traditional, Unifying or Progressive) arising from the US context. This legislation does create new options for individual Annual Conferences or even Local Churches to opt out of the choice made by their Central Conference. 	
Impact on Central Conferences outside of USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change regarding same sex marriage or ordination is forced on a Central Conference by this legislation. No change in practice is expected in Africa, Philippines or Eastern Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Conferences will have to vote and they may either (a) convert to a geographic Connectional Conference (new name, but all current rules in effect) or (b) join one of the ideologically-defined Connectional Conferences (Traditional, Unifying or Progressive) arising from the US context. This legislation does create new options for individual Annual Conferences or even Local Churches to opt out of the choice made by their Central Conference. 	
Impact on Annual Conferences (AC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change to structure. Boards of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session of each Annual Conference would have option but no requirement to address standards for ordained ministry of qualified married gay candidates. Re-votes by Clergy Session no sooner than 30 months after last such vote. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This plan envisions three annual conferences – one per connectional conference – overlaying all US geography. Borders would be re-mapped for full coverage.. Annual Conferences would have the option of agreeing or disagreeing with the alignment of their former Jurisdictional Conference with a specific new Connectional Conference. It is anticipated that most annual conferences would opt to join the Unifying Conference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change to structure; however, it is anticipated that some 10 or more Annual Conferences would either opt out or be forced out of the UMC. It is further anticipated that each Annual Conference would need to agree with some number of Local Churches opting out the AC's alignment – some churches would opt to go back to the UMC and others would opt to leave altogether to join a new Self-Governing Methodist Church.

Petitions & Judicial Council deletes summarized by a COWF member

Impact on Local Churches (LC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local church is not required to vote. If a local church wanted to host gay weddings, its church conference would need to take action before the first ceremony. Local leaders have maximum flexibility to discern need and timing for such action. Local Church Staff Parish Relations Committee may communicate their congregation's preferences for appointments. Specific mechanism to replace irreconcilable pastor mismatch. No change to the UMC's current of connectional ministry via general boards and agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Church will be given formal voting process by which they may dissent from their Annual Conference's chosen alignment and then chose a different Connectional Conference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Churches may acquiesce to their Annual Conference's decision to remain or leave the UMC, and they may majority-vote to remain UMC if their AC leaves. Any group of 50 or more Local Churches may form a new Self-Governing Methodist Church and remain quasi-connected via agency partnerships and concordat representation at General Conference. Any local church could exit to join a new Self-Governing Methodist Church. No change to the UMC's current of connectional ministry via general boards and agencies. <p><i>[Note: Loss of Annual Conferences and Local Churches would reduce connectional giving substantially and thus sharply decrease connectional ministries provided through our General Agencies. However, it is difficult to predict how this loss which is a feature of the Traditionalist Plan would compare to whatever loss may be an unintended by-product of the other two plans or how it would compare to a negative reaction if no changes are made at GC2019. Whatever loss there may be in terms of general agency outputs will be even greater assuming that connectional support for the Episcopal Fund remains constant.]</i></p>
Impact on General Agencies		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This plan assumes the various Connectional Conferences have different levels of support – and in some cases no support – for specific general agencies. When these conferences are formed, they will discern which agencies to support. This will mean different levels of general church appointments for each connectional conference. This plan is written so that certain agencies will be supported equally by all the US-based connectional conferences: Wespeth, GCFA, Archives and History, UMCOM and some to-be-determined parts of General Board of Global Missions. This plan assumes that certain agencies and funds may not be supported by all Connectional Conferences' appointment giving: General Board of Church & Society, Discipleship Ministries, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Ministerial Education Fund, Black College Fund, and Africa University Fund. This plan eliminates GOCR and GCSRW. However, these would be continued through 2025 to assist the three Connectional Conferences in creating some other approach to fulfilling the UMC's historic commitment to racial and gender equity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bishops will be required to certify they support and will uphold the current restrictive language and prohibitions in the Book of Discipline. Bishops will lose some flexibility they currently have in settling disputes within their episcopal area via the Just Resolution process. Accountability of bishops will be partially globalized instead of the currently-all regionalized process. Bishops may be forced into early retirement or placed in involuntary leave. Clergy persons will be required to uphold the current restrictive language and prohibitions in the Book of Discipline, and they will face more certain disciplinary actions if they are unwilling to do so. More trials. Clergy of a departing Annual Conference may transfer back into UMC.
Impact on Bishops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change forced on bishops. Their conscience rights are protected. It could be awkward for a bishop assigned to an Annual Conference that doesn't share the opinion of the assigned annual conference, so this will be a factor in episcopal assignments. An extra bishop will be provided for the ordination service if needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bishops will need to select which Connectional Conference to join. There could be mismatch between number of episcopal areas in a Connectional Conference and the number of bishops choosing to affiliate with it. There could be ideological mismatch between some individual bishops and their currently assigned episcopal area. Primary accountability of bishops will be lodged in ideologically-defined Connectional Conferences' Colleges of Bishops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bishops will be required to certify they support and will uphold the current restrictive language and prohibitions in the Book of Discipline. Bishops will lose some flexibility they currently have in settling disputes within their episcopal area via the Just Resolution process. Accountability of bishops will be partially globalized instead of the currently-all regionalized process. Bishops may be forced into early retirement or placed in involuntary leave. Clergy persons will be required to uphold the current restrictive language and prohibitions in the Book of Discipline, and they will face more certain disciplinary actions if they are unwilling to do so. More trials. Clergy of a departing Annual Conference may transfer back into UMC.
Impact on Clergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change in practices forced on clergy. Their conscience rights are protected. Clergy may transfer to different annual conference. Specific mechanism to leave irreconcilable church mismatch. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clergy will need to select which Connectional Conference to join. There could be mismatch between number of local charges in a Connectional Conference and the number of clergy choosing to affiliate with it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bishops will be required to certify they support and will uphold the current restrictive language and prohibitions in the Book of Discipline. Bishops will lose some flexibility they currently have in settling disputes within their episcopal area via the Just Resolution process. Accountability of bishops will be partially globalized instead of the currently-all regionalized process. Bishops may be forced into early retirement or placed in involuntary leave. Clergy persons will be required to uphold the current restrictive language and prohibitions in the Book of Discipline, and they will face more certain disciplinary actions if they are unwilling to do so. More trials. Clergy of a departing Annual Conference may transfer back into UMC.
Decisioning Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GC2019 majority vote to remove restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GC2019 two-thirds vote to modify UMC conferencing structure (General Conf) AC2019 two-thirds vote to modify UMC conferencing structure (Annual Conf) JC2020 majority vote to align with one of three new conferences (Jurist Conf) AC2020 majority vote to align with same or different conference LC2020 majority vote to align with same or different conference (Local Chrch Conf) CC2022 votes on new adaptable Books of Discipline (Connectional Conf) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GC2019 majority vote to add these additional rules AC2019 majority votes to certify, upholding all rules related to homosexuality JC2020 votes to remap territory to cover departing annual conferences Possible AC2019 votes to leave UMC Possible Local Church (LC) votes in 2019 or 2020 to leave UMC
Beginning of new era	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final decision Feb 2019 Effective date for new rules Jan 2021 (after cooling off period). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final decision for change by March 2020 Realignment decisions 2021-2022 Organizing new Connectional Conferences Fall 2022 New cycle for quadrennial General Conferences 2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final decision Feb 2019 Effective date Feb 2019, and GCFA enforcement begins Jan 2021 Enforcement towards uniformity 2021-2023 First General Conference with new concordat reps 2024

Petitions & Judicial Council deletes summarized by a COWF member

Circle of Trust® Touchstones

developed by Parker J. Palmer and the Center for Courage & Renewal
www.couragerenewal.org

Give and receive welcome.

People learn best in hospitable spaces.
In this circle we support each other's learning
by giving and receiving hospitality.

Be present as fully as possible.

Be here with your doubts, fears and failings
as well as your convictions, joys and successes,
your listening as well as your speaking.

What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.

This is not a "share or die" event!
Do whatever your soul calls for, and know
that you do it with our support. Your soul
knows your needs better than we do.

Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.

Our views of reality may differ, but speaking
one's truth in a Circle of Trust does not mean
interpreting, correcting or debating what
others say. Speak from your center to the
center of the circle, using "I" statements,
trusting people to do their own
sifting and winnowing.

No fixing, saving, advising or correcting.

This is one of the hardest guidelines for
those of us who like to "help." But it is
vital to welcoming the soul, to making
space for the inner teacher.

Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions...

instead of counsel or corrections. With such questions,
we help "hear each other into deeper speech."

When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.

If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, "I wonder what brought her to this belief?" "I wonder what he's feeling right now?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.

Trust and learn from the silence.

Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.

Observe deep confidentiality.

A Circle of Trust depends on knowing that whatever we say will remain with the people to whom we choose to say it — whether in small groups or in the large circle — and will never be passed on to others without our explicit permission.

Attend to your own inner teacher.

We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions and silence in a Circle of Trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.

Know that it's possible...

to leave the circle with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

Facilitators of Courage & Renewal programs use these Touchstones to define clear boundaries in a Circle of Trust, the kinds of boundaries that create safe space for the soul. While these Touchstones define how we relate in a retreat, they can be adapted to support workplaces, schools, communities, and other groups—any place where we want to honor the integrity of the individual and build relational trust.

Resources:

Facilitating Healthy Conversations:

1. *The Anatomy of Peace*, resolving the heart of conflict by Arbinger Institute. Arbingerinstitute.com offers training resources and a study guide for *The Anatomy of Peace*.
2. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/courageous-conversation-about-the-way-forward> - Discipleship Ministries has put out resources for having conversations about the plans and work of the Commission on the way forward – complete with meeting outlines including power point and suggestions for how to help conversations go well.
3. *Crucial Conversations* – tools for talking when stakes are high. By Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillian, Al Switzler.
4. *Leading through Conflict* – how Leaders transform differences into opportunities. -Mark Gerzon
5. *Circle of Trust Touchstones* by Parker J. Palmer and the Center for Courage & Renewal www.couragerenewal.org
6. *Grounded in God – Listening Hearts discernment for Group deliberations* by Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie A. Hull, R. Taylor McLean - additionally, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* is also part of the *Listening Hearts* series.

Information regarding Commission's work and report

1. <http://www.susumc.org/index.php/component/content/article/2-uncategorised/2480-a-holy-christian-conversation> The Susquehanna Conference has the best compilation of resources I have come across. Their website links to the full report of the Commission and Commission videos and well as many other resources for information and to help guide conversation.
2. UMC Commission on a way forward – facebook page. This page has a number of videos done by commission members which are very helpful to understanding the process and reflections of Commission members. Very helpful: Gil Rendle's video – A parable for today. This video is a great way to begin a conversation on the Commission's work.
3. *Be Strong and of Good Courage* – a Call to quiet Courage in an Anxious Time by Gil Rendle
4. *Knowing How to Read the Signs: A Non-theological Description of the Work of the Commission on a Way Forward* by Gil Rendle December 2016
5. <https://umcprays.org/> - praying our way forward has been a part of this process.
6. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/courageous-conversation-about-the-way-forward> - Discipleship Ministries has put out resources for having conversations about the plans and work of the Commission on the way forward – complete with meeting outlines including power point.
7. www.umnews.org/en/category/general-church videos on upcoming GC can be found here.

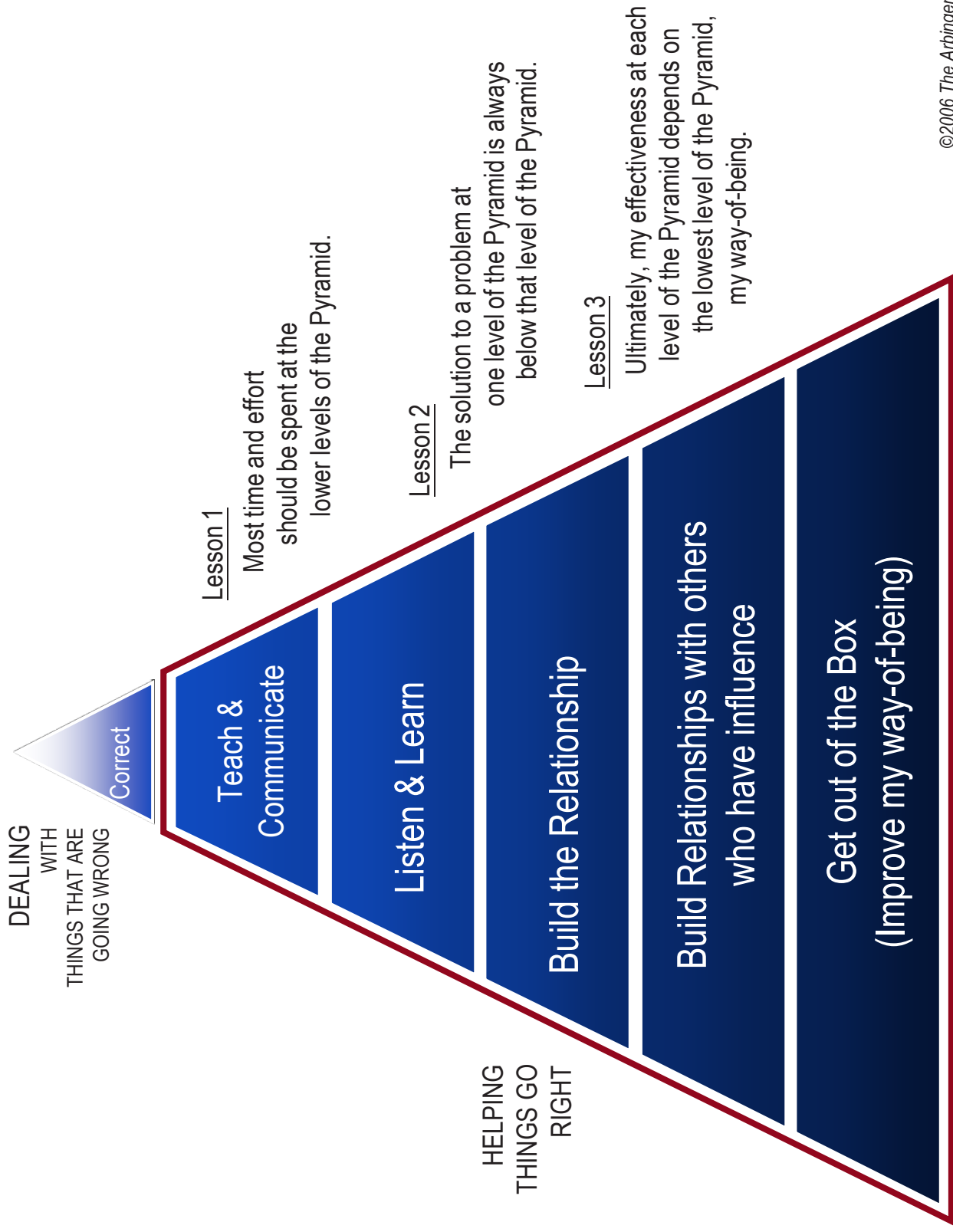
Conversation Resources

1. *Unity of the Church and Human Sexuality* – Toward a faithful United Methodist Witness published by Higher Education and Ministry
2. *United Methodists Divided* by Dale McConkey – includes a discussion of report plans.
3. *Finding our Way – Love and Law in The United Methodist Church* edited by Rueben P. Job and Neil Alexander
4. *Generous Spaciousness* – responding to Gay Christians in the Church by Wendy Vanderwal-Gritter
5. *Torn – rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.- Christian debate* by Justin Lee
6. *Bible Gender Sexuality – reframing the Church's debate on Same-Sex Relationships* by James V. Brownson
7. *Embracing the Wideness* by Kenneth H. Carter Jr.

Principles for Bible Study (from Disciple Bible Study)

1. The Word of God is Jesus Christ, and the words of the Bible tell us about that Word. Therefore, when we study the words of the Bible we always look behind, in, and through those words for God's Word – Jesus Christ.
2. No Christian has a monopoly on understanding either God's Word or the words of the Scripture. This includes biblical scholars and the most unlearned Christian. All of us must listen to one another as we seek to understand the richness of God's gifts.
3. We must assume everyone has Christian integrity and not accuse one another of being unchristian, no matter how unusual are the opinions.
4. We must further assume that we will arrive at different understandings of portion of Scripture and that that will not disturb God as much as it will some of us.
5. Few of us will know Hebrew or Greek, and we therefore need to use a variety of English versions to try to understand the text.
6. While we accept our differences, we do not feel that those differences are unimportant, or that they should be ignored or treated as if they did not matter.
7. Different biblical understandings can remain among us, but we can still be warm Christian friends. In facts, as we grow to better understand our differences, we can grow in our appreciation of one another.

ARBINGER Pyramid of Influence™



Walking Through the Levels of the Influence Pyramid

To work with the pyramid in the situation that you are considering, begin at the bottom level of the pyramid. This process takes time and care.

- Level 1: At the bottom of the pyramid: Be out-of-the-box; have a heart at peace. Establish yourself here. As you move up the pyramid, whenever your heart begins to slip from peace, return here and revitalize your heart at peace. See others as people that matter.
- Level 2: Going up the pyramid who are the people who can have a positive influence on this situation and help you to help things go right?
 - Who can help you understand the situation? Listen. Learn.
 - What information that you studied can help? Refresh your understandings.
- Level 3: Name the person or people you are trying to help – also think about people directly affected by this person's change.
 - For the person you are helping, how committed are you to bring out their best?
 - Do you know what burdens they carry? What keeps them up at night?
 - Who are the people that make up the constellation of their life? Are you at peace with each of them? Or is there judgment?
 - Establish yourself with a heart at peace with each person.
 - How would you build relationship and trust with each person? – How would you be trustworthy?
 - What are the out-of-the-box places for the person you are helping? – If you are going to help them shift, do you know these places? Consider how you could enliven these places, so their heart opens to see.
- Level 4: Listening and learning: are you listening to who they are – not to judge, not to fix, but to listen to what they say, to hear what matters to them, to be curious.
 - Until safety is built, you haven't earned the right to move up the pyramid.
 - How does the person think? What are their worries about this situation?
 - How might they see the situation? What thoughts lead them to approach this situation in this way? Be curious and understand their perspective – not to collude or fix, but to hear.
 - Building the first 4 levels of the pyramid is crucial; take the time needed. It is only when we have done the work on these first levels that we have the right to move to level five.
- Level 5: Teach and Communicate
 - This level is not about fixing, but about helping them for their sake.
 - Can you inspire their learning? Their responses? Their heart at peace?
 - How can you share what have you learned - your story?
- Level 6: If correction is necessary, it now becomes helping things go right from an out-of-the-box place.
 - All judgment and fixing has fallen away.
 - Even hard things can be said out-of-the-box. How can you be firm and invite their heart at peace and their growth?



Commission on a Way Forward

Council of Bishops



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Mission

The Commission will bring together persons deeply committed to the future(s) of The United Methodist Church, with an openness to developing new relationships with each other and exploring the potential future(s) of our denomination in light of General Conference and subsequent annual, jurisdictional and central conference actions. We have a profound hope and confidence in the Triune God, and yet we acknowledge that we do this work in a climate of skepticism and distrust, from a human point of view. We are a connection, and we admit that our communion is strained; yet much transformative mission across our world is the fruit of our collaboration. The matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation that surfaces different ways of interpreting Scripture and theological tradition. The work is meant to inform deliberation across the whole church and to help the Council of Bishops in their service to the next General Conference in finding a way forward.

Vision

The Commission will 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. This unity will not be grounded in our conceptions of human sexuality, but in our affirmation of the Triune God who calls us to be a grace-filled and holy people in the Wesleyan tradition.

Scope

We should be open to new ways of embodying unity that move us beyond where we are in the present impasse and cycle of action and reaction around ministry and human sexuality. Therefore, we should consider new ways of being in relationship across cultures and jurisdictions, in understandings of episcopacy, in contextual definitions of autonomy for annual conferences, and in the design and purpose of the apportionment. In reflection on the two matters of unity and human sexuality, we will fulfill our directive by considering “new forms and structures” of relationship and through the “complete examination and possible revision” of relevant paragraphs in the Book of Discipline. We will give consideration to greater freedom and flexibility to a future United Methodist Church that will redefine our present connectionality, which is showing signs of brokenness. If we ignore this work, fracturing will occur in more haphazard and even self-interested ways across the church. If we do this work only to address our preferences and self-interest, we will fail to place our complete trust in God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. If we do this work with complete surrender to God’s unlimited imagination and kingdom purposes, we will be blessed beyond our limited human imagination. God remains God; God is with us; God will never let us go. To God be the glory!

[illegible]



*Our mission: To discover, develop, and deploy
passionate spiritual leaders who make disciples
of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*

*Our vision: To be a Christ-led, spiritual breath
of fresh air that changes the world.*