

The Commission on a Way Forward

Frequently Asked Questions

What is “The Commission on a Way Forward” - what is its mission/vision/scope, what models are they considering and when will their recommendations be published?

The Commission on a Way Forward is a 32-member commission authorized by the General Conference of Bishops to consider “new forms and structures” of relationship and through the “complete examination and possible revision” of relevant paragraphs in the Book of Discipline pertaining to human sexuality. The commission’s mission is to develop and submit a final recommendation to the Bishops in May 2018. The Bishops will receive the report, make changes and then by July 2018 present a report with legislative proposals to the 2019 special General Conference scheduled for February 2019.

Mission: “Exploring the potential future(s) of our denomination in light of General Conference and subsequent annual jurisdictional, and central conference actions”

Vision: “Maximize 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”

Scope: “Be open to new ways to embodying unity that moves us beyond where we are in the present impasse and cycle of action and reaction around ministry and human sexuality . . . give consideration to greater freedom and flexibility to a future United Methodist Church that will redefine our present connectionality.”

The Commission is meeting behind closed doors. Even though the Commission’s preliminary report remains under wraps, three models are under consideration:

The traditional model: Affirms the current language about homosexuality in the Book of Discipline and seeks to strengthen enforcement for violation of church law. The Book of Discipline, says the practice of Homosexuality “is incompatible with Christian Teaching; and lists officiating at the same-gender union being a “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy member as chargeable offenses under current law.

The one-church model: Allows different United Methodists in different places to make different decisions regarding ministry with or by LGBTQ persons rather than maintaining a single standard that operates everywhere throughout the worldwide church. This plan would remove restrictive language from the Book of Discipline and give conferences, churches and pastors the flexibility to “uniquely reach their missional context in relation to human sexuality without changing the connective nature of The United Methodist Church.” This plan would also protect the rights of United Methodists whose theological convictions will not allow them to perform same-sex weddings or ordain LGBTQ people.

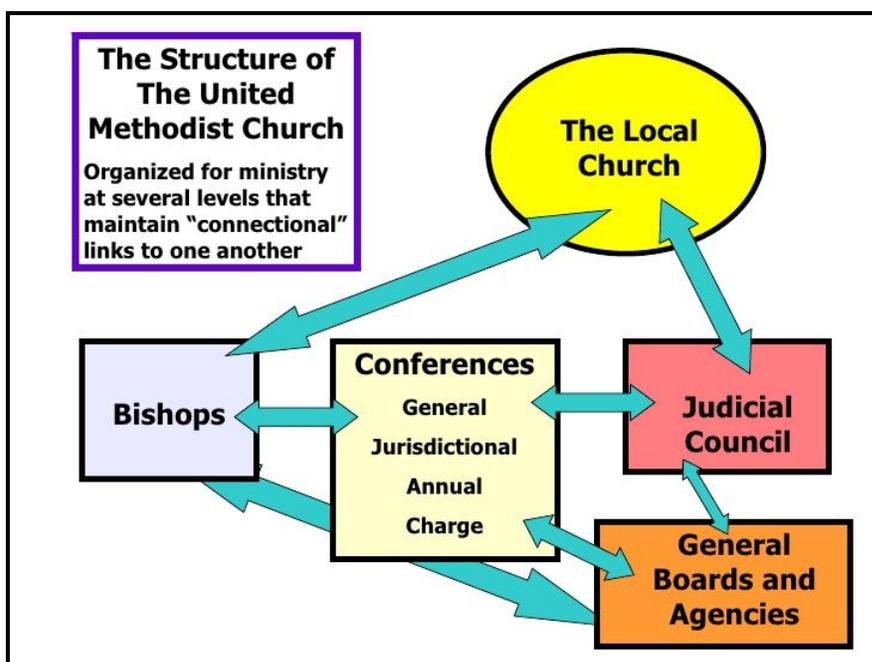
The Connectional Conference model: Creates three connectional conferences based on theology or perspective, each having clearly defined values (accountability, contextualization and justice). The three connectional conferences would function throughout the worldwide church and the five existing U.S. jurisdictions would be abolished. Adaptations to the Book of Discipline would be allowed by each connectional conference. Annual conferences would determine their affiliation with a connectional conference. Local churches who choose a branch other than the one chosen by their annual conference could vote to join another conference. This plan would require multiple amendments to the denomination’s constitution.

Each model represents values that are within the COB (Council of Bishops) and across the church and each model includes a gracious way to exit for those who feel called to exit from the denomination. Each model will include a theological statement that both informs the model and creates a compelling narrative for them.

How is the UMC structured and where will decisions be made concerning the LGBTQ issues?

The UMC denomination is organized in a “connectional” system, which “enables us to carry out our mission in unity and strength” (Book of Discipline, ¶ 701). Every local church is linked to an interconnected network of organizations that join together in mission and ministry, allowing us to accomplish far more than any one local church or person could alone.

Within the connectional structure of The United Methodist Church, conferences provide the primary groupings of people and churches for discernment and decision-making. Wesley described Christian conferencing as a spiritual discipline through which God’s grace may be revealed. At every level of the connection, church leaders and members come together in conversation, or conferencing, to discuss important issues and discover God’s will for the church. The word, conference, thus refers to both the assembly and organization of people as well as the process of discerning God’s call together.



General Conference

The only body that can set official policy and speak for the denomination is the General Conference.

The General Conference is an international body of nearly 1,000 delegates that meets every four years. The delegates are elected by annual conferences (at annual conference sessions) to attend General Conference. They represent all annual conferences around the world. Half of the delegates are laity (non-clergy members), half are clergy.

Bishops attend the General Conference but cannot vote. Different bishops serve as presiding officers during the conference. Other bishops cannot speak unless permission is specifically

granted by the delegates.

During General Conference, delegates discuss and vote on petitions and resolutions proposed by individuals, agencies, annual conferences, and other groups within the denomination. These actions result in a revision of the Book of Discipline, the denomination's book of law, and Book of Resolutions, policies of the denomination on current social issues.

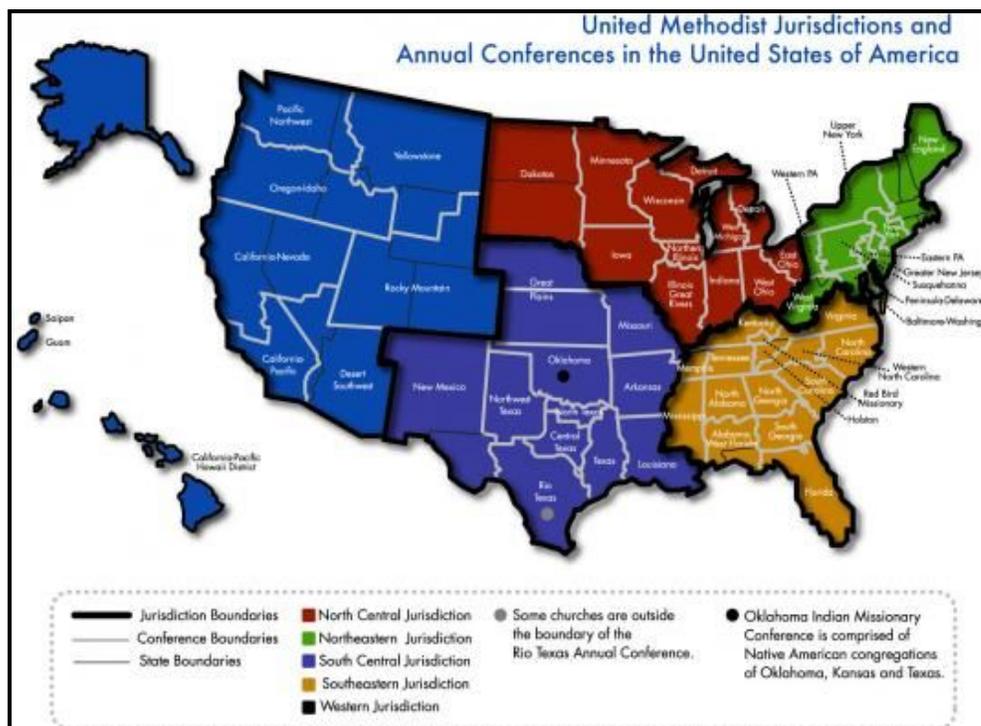
It is at General Conference where delegates wrestle with today's issues in light of scriptural teachings and the church's understanding of that teaching. Here is where the church's official stands and church policies are made regarding such issues as human sexuality, abortion, war and peace, as well as determination of ministries and funding.

General Conferences are held in years divisible by 4, such as 2008, 2012, 2016, etc.

Jurisdictions

In the United States of America, the United Methodist Church is divided into five areas known as jurisdictions: Northeastern, Southeastern, North Central, South Central and Western. These provide some program and leadership training events to support the annual conferences. Every four years the jurisdictional conferences meet to elect new bishops and select members of general boards and agencies.

Annual conferences located outside the United States are organized into central conferences, much like jurisdictions. There are seven central conferences: Africa, Central and Southern Europe, Congo, Germany, Northern Europe, Philippines, and West Africa.



Central Conferences

Outside the U.S., annual conferences are organized in seven central conferences. The central conferences are composed of equal numbers of lay and clergy members. They connect annual

conferences for common ministry, adapt regulations as the conditions in the respective regions may require, and elect bishops (*Book of Discipline*, ¶ 31) and fix their tenure.

Central conferences were first established in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Asia (India in 1885, and China in 1897), then in Europe (1908), and in Africa and Latin America in the 1920s.

In the 1930s and 1960s, for a variety of reasons, annual conferences outside the U.S. became autonomous, particularly in most regions of Asia and in all of Latin America. A large majority of these autonomous churches are affiliated autonomous or affiliated united churches with The United Methodist Church and send non-voting delegates to General Conference.

Since the early 1970s, membership in the central conferences has increased tremendously, and the number of members now far exceed those of the 1920s and 1960s.

Annual Conferences

When you hear the term “annual conference,” it could be referring to any one of three things. The annual conference is a regional body, an organizational unit, and a yearly meeting. Many of these yearly meetings happen in the U.S. in May and June. You can read reports from the 2017 Annual Conference sessions on our Annual Conference Report.

Regional body

The annual (sometimes referred to as ‘regional’) conference is described by the church's Constitution and (other parts of the) Book of Discipline as the “basic unit” of the church.

In the United States, an annual conference may cover an entire state, only part of the state, or even parts of two or more states. There are also three missionary conferences in the United States, which rely upon the denomination as a whole for funding.

The United States has 56 annual conferences, supervised by bishops in 46 episcopal areas. There are 75 annual conferences in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines, which are supervised by 20 bishops.

Organizational body

In the U.S., the annual conference has a central office and professional staff that coordinate and conduct ministry and the business of the conference. It likely has a director of connectional ministries, treasurer, directors of program areas (such as camping), communications director, and other staff as deemed appropriate for the annual conference and as required by the Book of Discipline. Clergy and laypersons may also serve on conference boards, commissions and committees.

Annual Conference sessions

Each year an equal number of clergy members and lay members attend their conference's annual conference session for worship, fellowship, and to conduct the business of the conference, which may last 3-5 days. These sessions include reports of past and ongoing work; adoption of future goals, programs and budgets; ordination of clergy members as deacons and elders; and election of delegates to Jurisdictional and General Conferences (every 4 years). The bishop presides over these meetings.

Districts

Groups of churches in a geographic area are organized to form a district, somewhat similar to the way cities and towns are organized into counties. Often, churches in a district will work together to provide training and mission opportunities.

Each district is led by a district superintendent (“DS”), an elder appointed by the bishop, usually for a six-year term. The DS oversees the ministry of the district’s clergy and churches, provides spiritual and pastoral leadership, works with the bishop and others in the appointment of ordained ministers to serve the district’s churches, presides at meetings of the charge conference, and oversees programs within the district.

Local Churches

It is primarily at the level of the charge consisting of one or more local churches that the church encounters the world. The local church is a strategic base from which Christians move out to the structures of society...Therefore, the local church is to minister to persons in the community where the church is located...to cooperate in ministry with other local churches...and to participate in the worldwide mission of the church... (2012 Book of Discipline)

Most individuals have their initial contact with the denomination in the local church. Some local church members don’t realize that they are part of a bigger whole or connection: an annual conference, a jurisdiction, the General Church, and churches and annual conferences around the world.

The Book of Discipline outlines rules and organization that local churches must follow providing ample room for a local church to adapt its distinctive ministries and mission to the needs, circumstances, and culture of its congregation and the local community.

What action(s) within the UMC led to the formation of “The Commission on a Way Forward”?

In early 2017 the United Methodist Judicial Council (the top court of the UMC) ruled 6 to 3 (Decision 1341) that the election of Karen Oliveto (Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco) as Bishop violated Church law, specifically the ban on ordaining noncelibate homosexuals.

“Under the long-standing principle of legality, no individual member or entity may violate, ignore or negate church law.” “It is not lawful for the college of bishops of any jurisdictional or central conference to consecrate a self-avowed practicing homosexual bishop.”

A key part of Decision 1341 is that a “same-sex marriage license issued by competent civil authorities together with the clergy person’s status in a same-sex relationship is a public declaration that the person is a self-avowed practicing homosexual.” While the majority decision did not name

Bishop Karen Oliveto, the denomination’s sole openly gay Episcopal leader, it was her election and consecration in 2016 that prompted a petition to the church court. The ruling marked the first time the denomination’s court weighed in on same-gender marriage licenses since the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015 established same-sex civil marriage as a constitutional right.

The Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops wants to reopen the decision about the legitimacy of a clergywoman in a same-sex union holding an Episcopal office. This has openly divided and created confusion. The Judicial Council has voted not to reconsider its decision and there is no timetable for resolution. Also, the Judicial Council also ruled that Karen Oliveto “remains in good standing”.

Keep in mind that the Judicial Council's actions are specific to the situation and their decision does not change the United Methodist Book of Discipline, nor will it change the mission, vision, and scope of work of the Commission on a Way Forward.

What does the Book of Discipline say about LGBTQ matters?

While affirming that all persons are people of sacred worth and that God's Grace is available to all, the United Methodist Church (UMC) does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers it not compatible with Christian teaching (§161f). Furthermore, we are reminded that the leaders in our congregations be persons of Christian character, discipline, commitment, as well as loyal to the ethical standards of the UMC as set forth in our Social Principles Currently, Section 304.3 of the Book of discipline states:

Part IV, Section VI, ¶140. Inclusiveness of the Church

The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. In The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.

Part V, Section I, ¶160 The Natural World

" . . . The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons."

Part V Section VII, ¶166 Our Social Creed

" . . . We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; the improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons."

Part V, Section III, ¶162 The Social Community

The rights and privileges a society bestows upon or withholds from those who comprise it indicate the relative esteem in which that society holds particular persons and groups of persons. We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person's value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing, education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection. We deplore acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation. Our respect for the inherent dignity of all persons leads us to call for the recognition, protection, and implementation of the principles of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights so that

Part V, Section III, ¶162. Section J, Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation

Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting the rightful claims where people have shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection before the law. Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against all persons, regardless of sexual orientation.

Part VI, Section V, ¶ 214. Church Membership

The United Methodist Church is a part of the holy catholic (universal) church, as we confess in the Apostles' Creed. In the church, Jesus Christ is proclaimed and professed as Lord and Savior. All people may attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments and become members in any local church in the connection (§ 4). In the case of persons whose disabilities prevent them from reciting the

vows, their legal guardian[s], themselves members in full covenant relationship with God and the Church, the community of faith, may recite the appropriate vows on their behalf.

Part VI, Chapter 2, Section I, ¶ 304.3 Qualifications for Ordination

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals¹ are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

Footnote: "*Self-avowed practicing homosexual*" is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual.

Part VI, Chapter IV. ¶ 613 Responsibilities [of the conference council on finance]

The [conference council on finance and administration] shall have authority and responsibility to perform the following functions:

19. To ensure that no annual conference board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The UMC "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends" (¶ 161F). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. This restriction shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic, nor shall it preclude funding for dialogs or educational events where the Church's official position is fairly and equally represented.

Part VI, Chapter 5, ¶ 806.9 Fiscal Responsibilities [of the General Council on Finance and Administration]

It [The General Council on Finance and Administration] shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The United Methodist Church "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends" (¶ 161G). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. It shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic.

Are other changes to the Book of Disciplines under consideration?

The standing committee on Central Conference Matters, at the behest of the General conference, is taking input from three groups:

- Faith and Order committee – works under the Council of Bishops providing input on leadership matters of faith, doctrine, order and discipline
- Ministry Study Commission – works with the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry to examine matters of leadership preparation and ordination
- Connectional Table – coordinates mission, ministries and resources in the UMC.

The standing committee's work is broken down into three work teams focusing on:

- Working on the chapter that deals with the work of the church agencies
- Working on the chapter that deals with judicial processes
- Working on Chapter 5 which deals with church agencies – began its work by developing a "theology of agency"

It's thought that the 2020 General Conference will approve the standing committee's recommendations as part of what they are calling a General Book of Discipline (presumed to be different than the Book of Discipline).

- Part VI of The Book of Disciplines will be revised and a new Part VII will be added.

- Part VII will apply to the US and the central conferences until the central conferences adapt portions of it.

Also, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, at the behest of the General Conference, is working with representatives from around the globe to propose revisions to make the Social Principles more globally relevant.

What does the Bible say about the LGBTQ issue?

Bible passages most often referenced in books, articles, etc include the following:

Genesis 1-2; 19:1-29 *
 Leviticus 18:2 *; 20:13 *
 Matthew 19:4-6
 John 15:1-17; 17:20-23
 Romans 1:18-32 *
 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 *; 12:12-13
 1 Timothy 1:8-11 *,
 Acts 15:28-29 *
 Galatians 3:25-29; 5:13-26; 5:25-6:2
 Colossians 3:12-17

* Identifies most frequently discussed in articles and books

Two methodologies used when studying and understanding the Bible are explained below. These methods lead to an awareness of both the literary context of a passage, as well as the historical situation out of which it emerges, and the primary audience to whom it is addressed.

- Contextual interpretation of a particular passage – a process that attempts to determine the meaning of a small unit of the biblical text – a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a brief paragraph – in light of its location in a part of the book, and then in the book itself. This focus on context attempts to avoid proof texting – and interpretation that takes a small unit out of its surrounding verses and chapters.
- The evaluation of those passages – a process of determining whether the meaning of a passage is local and temporal, or universal and timeless. Included in this process is determining if a passage is cultural or transcultural.

In the introduction of his book “What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?” Kevin Deyoung states the following:

“In one sense, there’s not a whole lot about homosexuality [in the bible]. The story of the Bible is not the story of God giving a lecture on same-sex marriage or trying a case before the Supreme Court. Although homosexuality is one of the most pressing and painful controversies of our day, it’s not what the church has been singing and praying and preaching about for two thousand years.”

In chapter 16 of Richard B. Hays’ book “The Moral Vision of the New Testament”, he states the following:

... the New Testament confronts us with an account of how the ordering of human life before God has gone awry. To use these texts (Romans 1:19-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10) appropriately in ethical reflection about homosexuality, we should not try to wring rules out of them, nor should we abstract principles from the. Instead, we should attend primarily to the way

the texts function to shape the symbolic world within which human sexuality is understood. If Romans 1 – the key text – is to inform normative judgments about homosexuality, it must function as a diagnostic tool, laying bare the truth about humankind’s dishonorable “exchange” of the natural for the unnatural. According to Paul, homosexual relations, however they may be interpreted (or rationalize; see Romans 1:32) by fallen and confused creatures, represent a tragic distortion of the created order. If we accept the authority of the New Testament on this subject, we will be taught to perceive homosexuality accordingly.

After a detailed discussion of Genesis 1-2, Genesis 19, Leviticus 18, 20, Romans 1, and 1 Timothy 1, Kevin Deyoung’s in his book “What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?”, he concludes with the following:

“We don’t get to pick the age we will live in, and we don’t get to choose all the struggles we will face. Faithfulness is ours to choose; the shape of the faithfulness is God’s to determine. In our time, faithfulness means (among a thousand other things) a patiently winsome and carefully reasoned restating of the formerly obvious: homosexual behavior is a sin. Along with most Christians around the globe and virtually every Christian in the first nineteen-and-a half centuries of church history, I believe the Bible places homosexual behavior – no matter the level of commitment or mutual affection – in the category of sexual immorality. „To write the same things to you, in an age of purposeful forgetfulness, is no trouble to me and is safe for you,” Paul might say (Philippians 3:1)”

“ . . . That doesn’t mean objectivity, clarity and scriptural integrity are impossible. It does mean that in thinking through this issue each of us needs to consider our predilections and predispositions, where we’ve been, and where we need to go.”

In chapters 13 and 15 of Philip Yancey’s book “What’s so Amazing About Grace?”, Philip discusses his experience with a self-avowed LGBTQ friend and the impact of legalism.

“We may be abominations but we are still God’s pride and joy. All of us in the church need “grace-healed eyes” to see the potential in others for the same grace that God has so lavishly bestowed on us.”

“ . . . the Pharisees did not seem to resent the obligations of the law. They kept inventing new rules, after all. The Pharisees saw strictness as a means of achieving, of gaining status. Jesus condemned that pride, and also condemned the tiered spirituality that ranked some sins as acceptable (hatred, materialism, lust, divorce) and others as unacceptable (murder adultery, breaking Sabbath rules).”

The summary to chapter 8 of Adof Hansen’s book “Is It Time – Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question at a Time” states the following [notice the words *same-sex orientation* vs. *heterosexual* and *homosexual*].

Over a number of decades of studying the Bible, I have come to the conclusion – slowly, yet deliberately – that the Bible does not say a *same-sex orientation* is wrong or evil and does not in any way denounce it (i.e., who a person wants to be with, is attracted to, and feels drawn to emotionally, romantically, and sexually someone of the same sex). It is an understanding of our generation – one that was not a part of the culture at the time in which the Bible was written.

What is the Council of Bishops and what is its involvement with the LGBTQ issue?

Bishops of The United Methodist Church provide spiritual leadership to almost 12 million persons in a broad range of settings on four continents, including North America, Europe, Africa and Asia.

In the United Methodist tradition, bishops are not “ordained” as bishops, but are clergy elected and consecrated to the office of bishop.

Historically, bishops play an important leadership role in ordering the life of the church and helping set the direction to fulfill its mission in the world. All bishops share in teaching, equipping, and encouraging mission and service. They serve as shepherds of the entire church, providing a prophetic witness for justice and unity. All bishops are members of the Council of Bishops, which collectively is charged with the general oversight and promotion of the temporal and spiritual interests of the entire Church. Bishops are specifically assigned to preside over the work of a regional area.

Following a late February 2018 four-day meeting, The Council of Bishops released a summary of two revised sketches (below) based on the three models presented last November by the Commission on a Way forward. These sketches provide avenues for unity, contextualization and mission and could change based on the commission’s work. These sketches could change based on the commission’s work at its next meeting.

What is the history of the UMC General Conference having addressed the LGBTQ issue in prior years?

1972 General Conference, Atlanta, Georgia – The first public debate on homosexuality began at the 1972 General Conference, four years after the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren churches united to form the United Methodist Church. When the 1972 General Conference adopted the Social Principles of

The United Methodist Church, the first public debate on homosexuality began. The words, “We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider it incompatible with Christian teaching,” were added to the phrase “persons of homosexual orientation are persons of sacred worth.” It was also the first time homosexual unions were noted: “We do not recommend marriage between two persons of the same sex.”

1976 General Conference, Portland, Oregon – Efforts at the 1976 General Conference to rescind the official condemnation of homosexual practice failed. Delegates added three statements banning the use of church funds to promote homosexuality. The 1976 delegates also revised the language in the Social Principles related to homosexual unions: “We do not recognize a relationship between two persons of the same sex as constituting marriage.”

1980 General Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana – Much of the debate at the 1980 conference centered on ordination. An unsuccessful effort was made to add the phrase “no self-avowed practicing homosexual therefore shall be ordained or appointed in The United Methodist Church.” A variety of other proposals on homosexuality also failed, leaving the 1972 and 1976 positions intact. Specific reference to homosexual unions was removed from the Social Principles, but a statement was included that said, in part, “We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant, which is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman.”

1984 General Conference, Baltimore, Maryland – Adopted, as a standard for ordained clergy, commitment to “fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness” and the following language on homosexuality: “Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.

1988 General Conference, St. Louis Missouri – The 1988 General Conference made one change in the Social Principles statement. “Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, we affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.” Delegates

instructed the General Council on Ministries to conduct a study of homosexuality and report to the 1992 General Conference.

1992 General Conference, Louisville, Kentucky – Delegates to the 1992 conference voted 710 to 238 to retain the church's stand that homosexual practice in "incompatible with Christian teaching" and left in place the ban on ordination, the prohibition of church funding to "promote the acceptance of homosexuality," and the statement in the Social Principles.

1996 General Conference, Denver Colorado – The 1996 General Conference added a definition of "self-avowed" practicing homosexual," and declaration that ceremonies to celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by United Methodist clergy or in United Methodist churches. An attempt to replace the "incompatibility" clause with one acknowledging that United Methodists are "unable to arrive at a common mind" failed to pass by a 577 to 378 vote.

2000 General Conference, Cleveland, Ohio – General Conference added to the Social Principles: "We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends." The delegates directed the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns to engage the church in a continued dialogue about homosexuality. Delegates rejected a plan requiring all pastors to sign a statement professing that homosexuality is not God's will. Soulforce, an ecumenical group, led demonstrations outside the hall and 191 people were arrested on May 10. The next day, a protest following the vote to retain the church's stance on homosexuality resulted in 30 individuals, including two bishops, arrested.

2004 General Conference, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – After 10 days of debates, delegates to the 2004 General Conference committed to the unity of the church. The nearly 1,000 delegates agreed that, "As United Methodists, we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and affirm our commitment to work together for the common mission of making disciples throughout the world." Delegates reaffirmed the denomination's positions on homosexuality. Their action was backed by Judicial Council decisions. Paragraph 2702 in the Book of Discipline was amended to clarify language and give bishops, pastors and diaconal ministers a list of chargeable offenses that could result in a church trial.

2008 General Conference, Fort Worth, Texas – Delegates to the 2008 General Conference on April 30 rejected changes to the United Methodist Social Principles that would have acknowledged that church members disagree on homosexuality. Delegates also approved a new resolution to oppose homophobia and heterosexism, saying the church opposes "all forms of violence or discrimination based on gender, gender identity, sexual practice or sexual orientation."

2012 General Conference, Tampa, Florida – Two items stating Christians have different opinions about homosexuality were not approved by the 2012 General Conference, leaving the current language in The Book of Discipline intact.

2016 General Conference, Portland, Oregon – The 2016 United Methodist General Conference meets May 10-21 in Portland, Oregon. The denomination's top lawmaking body will decide on church law for the next four years. Of the more than 1,000 pieces of legislation to be considered, over 100 deal with LBGTQ rights.

How many delegates (votes) do each of the regions have at the Special General Conference in February 2019

There are a total of 864 delegates. The following details sourced from Andy Langford's October 2017 article called "Some Reflections".

Regions	Delegates	%	Way Forward Members %
North Central	92	11%	9%
Northeast	86	10%	9%
South Central	108	13%	13%
Southeast	188	22%	22%
Western	30	3%	9%
Africa	260	30%	23%
Europe	40	5%	6%
Philippines	50	6%	6%
Other	10 *		

* Usually non-voting concordat churches

Where can I find information (internet sources, articles of interest, etc) to read and stay current with UMC LGBTQ activities?

“The people of the United Methodist Church”, www.umc.org

“Good News”, <https://goodnewsmag.org>

“Life Watch”, <https://www.lifewatch.org>

“Uniting Methodists”, <http://unitingmethodists.com>

“Wesley Covenant Assoc.” <https://wesleyancovenant.org>

“Western North Carolina Conference”, <https://www.wnccumc.org>

“Methodist Federation for Social Action”, <http://mfsaweb.org>

What resources (books, articles, links, etc) are available for in-depth reading and understanding?

“Anatomy of Peace”, by Arbinger Institue

“The Moral Vision of the New Testament”, by Richard B Hays, Chapter 16

“Let’s make a Deal, #UMC Style”, by David F. Watson

“What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?” by Kevin DeYoung

“Is It Time – Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question at a time” by Adolf Hansen

“Unafraid and Unashamed – Facing the Future of United Methodism” by Wil Cantrell

“Council of Bishops – President Address” by Bishop Bruce R. Ough, President of the Council of Bishops, November 5, 12017

“A Way Forward? The End of the United Methodist Church? New Birth: New Possibilities?” By Andy Langford, October 2017

“Finding A Way Forward – Resources for Witness, Contextual Leadership and Unity”, by Commission on a Way Forward Council of Bishops

<http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/gc2016-tackling-44-year-stance-on-homosexuality>

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nd99l78zc50nf1t/AACO_PI_Uo7a3Bwl73s2QULma?dl=0&preview=COWF+July+Report+-+Image+on+Powerpoint.pptx

http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/council-of-bishops/COWF_Handbook_2017_REVISED.pdf

<https://www.facebook.com/umcforward/videos/1960549247560792>

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The UMC Is divided In many ways, especially in our beliefs and understandings related to human sexuality. Is it possible for us to faithfully live as one united denomination? If so, what does that look like? If not, what does it look like?

The work of the Commission on a Way Forward will be helpful to the church in answering this question. The Southeastern Jurisdictional College of Bishops urges the people in the United Methodist Church to respond to the Judicial Council’s decision (whatever it may be) by: 1) continuing to focus on our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and 2) giving time for the commission to do its work of bringing recommendations to the proposed 2019 General Conference.