

# A WAY FORWARD

{ A Called Session of General Conference  
{ February 23-25, 2019, St. Louis, Missouri

## Opening Prayer:

Lord, make us instruments of Thy peace;  
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is error, truth;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,  
Grant that we may not so much seek  
To be consoled, as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

(adapted from St. Francis)

## Scripture Reading:

James 1:19-21

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

## SOME BACKGROUND...

The United Methodist Church is a Connectional, Global Church

This means that we do not have a central headquarters, or a single executive leader. Duties are divided among bodies that include the **General Conference**, the **Council of Bishops**, and the **Judicial Council**.

Each of these entities is required by our Constitution to be part of our structure, and plays a significant role in the life of the denomination.

## SOME BACKGROUND...

The **GENERAL CONFERENCE** is the top legislative body of The United Methodist Church, and is the only body that speaks officially for the denomination. Normally meeting every 4 years to determine legislation affecting connectional matters, it is composed of no fewer than 600, and no more than 1,000 delegates (equal numbers of clergy and laity).

Only the General Conference can vote to make changes in the denomination's Book of Discipline.

## SOME BACKGROUND...

The COUNCIL OF BISHOPS is comprised of active and retired bishops. Bishops are elected from the elders and set apart for a ministry

of servant leadership, general oversight and supervision.

As followers of Jesus Christ, bishops are authorized to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church.

The role of the bishop is to exercise oversight and support of the Church in its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Bishops are elected by the Jurisdictional Conference, and are then assigned to a particular ministry area comprised of one or more Annual Conferences.

Front Street UMC is part of the Corridor District within the North Carolina Annual Conference. Our bishop is the Reverend Hope Morgan Ward.

## SOME BACKGROUND...

The JUDICIAL COUNCIL is the denomination's highest judicial body. Its 9 members, made up of laity and clergy, are elected by the General Conference, and normally meet twice a year. They consider whether actions of the various church bodies are constitutional.

According to the Constitution, decisions of the Judicial Council are final.

## SOME BACKGROUND...

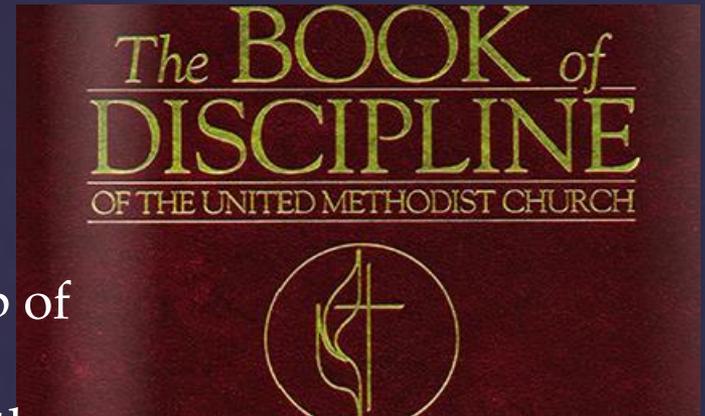
- General Conference 1972: This was the first GC at which debate occurred regarding LGBTQ persons, their inclusion in the church, and Book of Discipline language around that inclusion.
- Every 4 years since 1972 that language has been debated.

## SOME BACKGROUND...

¶161.G Human Sexuality— We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift.

Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

We deplore all forms of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused children. All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults.



(¶161.G Human Sexuality, continued)

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self.

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.

## SOME BACKGROUND...

Current language of the Book of Discipline related to LGBTQ persons:

- Regarding church inclusiveness: 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. ¶1.Article IV
- Regarding marriage: Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches. ¶341.6

## SOME BACKGROUND...

- Regarding 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 homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

¶304.3

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Since 1972, thousands of pieces of legislation have been introduced at General Conferences related to LGBTQ persons. Each gathering brought lengthy, painful debate.
- At the 2016 General Conference, just before debate was to begin, a vote was taken to pause and ask the Council of Bishops to make a recommendation for a better way forward.
- The Council of Bishops created the COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD – a 32-person body, made up of lay and clergy persons from across the connection. The group represented as many theological/ideological viewpoints as possible.
- This group gathered 9 times over 17 months to pray, listen, study, and to offer recommended plans for a way forward.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The Commission ultimately considered 3 options:

- Keep the Disciple language “as is.” This plan would also increase accountability, particularly among clergy, including bishops.
- One Church Model: Remove the BOD’s restrictive language regarding LGBTQ practices. This model allows for clergy and congregations to act within their consciences regarding the acceptability of actions such as same-sex weddings and ordination of LGBTQ persons.
- Multi-branch Model: Creates 3 branches of the church.
  - Liberal Branch
  - Unity Branch
  - Traditional Branch

## WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

- A called session of General Conference will take place in February 2019. The report from the Commission on A Way Forward will be evaluated, debated, modified, thrown out, accepted (you get the idea). Ultimately we assume a vote will be taken and a decision will be made. The outcome may look like one of the suggested plans, or it may be totally different.
- If changes are made to the Book of Discipline, each Annual Conference will have decisions to make on how to address those changes.
- At Front Street UMC, I ask that you be in prayer for all of the delegates that will be attending the Conference. Pray that the Lord of the Church is the head of this gathering, and that the Holy Spirit guides the discussions and the outcomes, that the Father may be glorified.

# An Overview of the Plans

Questions?