

Update on What's Happening with the United Methodist Church

In an effort to keep you informed of the facts surrounding the ongoing discussions regarding the future and structure of the United Methodist Church (UMC), this information sheet was developed and will be updated as things change.

The central issue causing much debate and disagreement for decades deals with certain language in the *Book of Discipline* pertaining to sexual orientation (specific language included below).

History of UMC's debate regarding sexual orientation:

- Before the 1960s, Methodists had given little attention to sexual orientation and gender identity (apart from gender equality, such as the debates that led to Maud Kiester Jensen being the first female to be given full clergy rights on May 18th, 1956)
- In 1972 a proposal was passed to include a statement that "homosexuals are people of sacred worth" but added that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching".
- In 1976 same-sex marriage was banned.
- In 1984, language was added to the *Book of Discipline* that no self-avowed homosexuals could be ordained.
- In 1988, language was added that banned United Methodist clergy from doing same-sex weddings and United Methodist Church from hosting same-sex weddings.

General Conference Debate and Vote (the global UMC Conference and governing body)

- In 2016, the General Conference requested guidance from the Council of Bishops on all issues in the *Book of Discipline* related to sexuality. The Council of Bishops formed the Commission on the Way Forward, composed of people on opposite sides of the debate as well as centrist. The Commission advocated for a **One Church Plan**, which would loosen restrictions and allow Board of Ordained Ministry to use their own discretion in who they ordain, and allow clergy and churches to make their own decisions regarding same-sex marriage, without compelling anyone to act contrary to his or her position.
- At General Conference in 2019, three proposals were presented; the **One Church Plan**, a **Traditional Plan** and a **Connectional Conference Plan**. (see separate sheet for details about each plan).
- Two-thirds of the U.S. delegates approved the **One Church Plan**, but it was rejected largely by delegates from Africa, a growing contingent. A **Traditional Plan** was passed by a small margin with a 53 percent majority, which upholds the language in the *Book of Discipline* and adds mandatory sentencing of clergy who perform same-sex weddings, as well as mandatory discipline of bishops who allow self-avowed homosexuals to follow their call to ministry.
- After the 2019 General Conference, there has been much dissent and challenges from U.S. churches protesting that the vote was unconstitutional and problems with the actual vote (vote fraud). The UMC Judicial Council explored these concerns but upheld the **Traditional Plan** which went into effect January 2020.

- In preparation for General Conference 2020, it is anticipated that proposals will be submitted in an attempt to challenge and reverse the 2019 vote.

Upper NY Conference Response (our regional conference)

Several proposals were presented at our Upper NY Conference in June 2019 to challenge the vote at the General Conference. Three key proposals that were supported are as follows:

- **Response to Actions of the 2019 General Conference**- condemns the decisions of the General Conference 2019, apologize for harm caused, assert and affirm that no human being is incompatible with Christian teaching, and refrain from expending funds on complaints, resolutions, or trials pertaining to LGBTQIA+ ordination and marriage.
- **A Call for Structural Change** – requesting Bishop Webb has 30 days to decide if resolutions violate church law (don't know the outcome of this)
- **Create a Team to Consider Processes for Future Movement** – which calls on the UNY Conference to put together a team to examine all the details involved with a large-scale separation movement of churches and clergy to an alternate Methodist denomination.

While our local conference can take action with some limitation, it is important to note that **General Conference is the only body that can speak for the denomination and make changes to *The Book of Discipline*. At this point, no final decisions have been made and none will be made until the General Conference meets May 5-15, 2020 in Minneapolis.**

So, how will this affect our church at the present time? We should not see any immediate impact regarding our pastor, current worship, mission work etc. We will continue to be a welcoming church and continue to love and care for all.

What can we do? Stay informed and educated on the issues and ongoing debates

What can we expect following General Conference in early May 5-15, 2020? More discussion and clarification will take place at the Upper NY Conference meeting taking place May 28-30 which will provide further direction. Our church will most likely need to decide what direction we take which would require information sessions and a vote among our church members.

SUMC Welcoming Statement

We are a community of people on a shared journey of life and faith as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are committed to inclusivity and being a place of welcome, safety, love and respect for all persons regardless of age, sex, color, ability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other category that segregates people from each other. We celebrate that we are all children of the same God, called to love one another. We embrace, in both thought and action, open hearts, open minds and open doors.

For questions or more information contact: Carole Jacobson, Stephen Long, Deb Elliott , Pastor Chris