

# Monthly Update

March 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The March Update is devoted exclusively to news from the special called session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church (GC2019) in St. Louis. In the body of the coverage, we start off with a statement from the Council of Bishops (COB) – and finish with a statement from the COB. It is interesting that they had come out strongly for the One Church Plan in view of the fact that the Traditional Plan prevailed. John Lomperis from UMAction provides an excellent summary of much of the legislation. The April Update will contain more information we could not squeeze into this Update.

Before we cover the “before and after” of GC2019, I need to point out an error we made on page 2 of this Update. The acknowledgments at the end of Dr. Jerry Kulah’s speech mention “Mark truly”; perhaps this is a Freudian slip because I have known Mark Tooley for thirty years and am appreciate his leadership of the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), one of our sister renewal groups based in Washington, DC. He truly is a warrior by every measure in contending for the orthodox Wesleyan Christian faith in our United Methodist Church. I don’t know many people with the intellect or eloquence that he has.

In response to our request, just some of the prayers for General Conference that came in:

*Praying the Lord uses you mightily. You have been faithful in your fight! Keep up your work for His glory. From Tammi in NC; Met you at National Right to Life Convention in KC and have been given hope because of Methodists like you. Don’t want to give up our church and Biblical principles! From Bev in Kansas; Praying for you Allen Morris. #HarnettCounty. Brenda in Dunn, NC; Churches are praying From Betty in Trinity, NC; Allen, I pray for you, the church and our country. We could all use Divine guidance. From Scott in Katy, Texas; Just pray[ing] for you Allen. From Tom (a pastor) in Fayetteville, NC; Praying From Scarlett in NC; Praying Allen! From Anna in Lemoore, CA.*

Of the three main plans that received serious consideration, One Church Plan, “Simple Plan” and Traditional Plan (the Connectional Conference Plan had no chance), the first two would have provided for “same-sex” activities within our church; only the Traditional Plan would have prohibited them. What is extremely troubling is that a large majority of our bishop supported the One Church Plan. We shall examine this and other aspects of GC2019 next month. However, after GC2019, I am optimistic for our church.

General Conference 2019 has been the most turbulent one that I have ever seen of all: 1996 Denver, Colorado; 2000 Cleveland, Ohio; 2004 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; 2008 Fort Worth, Texas; 2012 Tampa, Florida; 2016 Portland, Oregon – and now this one.

When I walked out of the convention center the last night, I was a bit surprised to see all of the police vehicles. I guess they had taken seriously the threats to shut down the conference – and responded to them. I ask that you all continue to pray for our church.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris  
Executive Director

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## March 2019 Update

### **Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church**

Are you faithful to do what God has called you to do? – Dr. Robert Jeffress

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**The Good Stuff.** *African United Methodists Won't Trade Bible for Dollars*, by Dr. Jerry P. Kulah. , Dean of Gbarnga School of Theology, United Methodist University in Liberia, to the Reform and Renewal Coalition Breakfast at the United Methodist Church Special General Conference Session in St. Louis, Missouri, Saturday, 23 February 2019.)

“Brothers and sisters of The United Methodist Church from all around the world, I humbly greet you in the strong name of Jesus Christ!

We thank God for all who have participated in observing a sacred season of fasting and prayer as we have prepared for this special General Conference session. And we praise God there are thousands upon thousands still on bended knees interceding on our behalf as we make a defining decision regarding the future of The United Methodist Church.

I thank God for His precious Word to us, and I thank him for you, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ.

As the General Coordinator of UMC Africa Initiative I greet you on behalf of all its members and leaders. We want to thank the Renewal and Reform Coalition within the United Methodist Church for the invitation to address you at this important breakfast meeting.

As I understand it, the plans before us seek to find a lasting solution to the long debate over our church's sexual ethics, its teachings on marriage, and its ordination standards. This debate and the numerous acts of defiance have brought the United Methodist Church to a crossroads (Jeremiah 6:16).

One plan invites the people called United Methodists to take a road in opposition to the Bible and two thousand years of Christian teachings. Going down that road would divide the church. Those advocating for the One Church Plan would have us take that road.

Another road invites us to reaffirm Christian teachings rooted in Scripture and the church's rich traditions. It says, “All persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God,” that “All persons need the ministry of the Church,” and that “We affirm that God's grace is available to all.”

It grounds our sexual ethics in Scripture when it says, the UM Church does “not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers [it] incompatible with Christian teaching.”

While “we commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons,” we do not celebrate same-sex marriages or ordain for ministry people who self-avow as practicing homosexuals. These practices do not conform to the authentic teaching of the Holy Scriptures, our primary authority for faith and Christian living. However, we extend grace to all people because we all know we are sinners in need of God's redeeming. We know how critical and life changing God's grace has been in our own lives. We warmly welcome all people to our churches; we long to be in fellowship with them, to pray with them, to weep with them, and to experience the joy of transformation with them.

Friends, please hear me, we Africans are not afraid of our sisters and brothers who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, questioning, or queer. We love them and we hope the best for them. But we know of no compelling arguments for forsaking our church's understanding of Scripture and the teachings of the church universal.

And then please hear me when I say as graciously as I can: we Africans are not children in need of western enlightenment when it comes to the church's sexual ethics. We do not need to hear a progressive U.S. bishop lecture us about our need to “grow up.”

Let me assure you, we Africans, whether we have liked it or not, have had to engage in this debate for many years now. We stand with the global church, not a culturally liberal, church elite, in the U.S.

We stand with our Filipino friends! We stand with our sisters and brothers in Europe and Russia! And yes, we stand with our allies in America.

We stand with farmers in Zambia, tech workers in Nairobi, Sunday School teachers in Nigeria, biblical scholars in Liberia, pastors in the Congo, United Methodist Women in Cote d'Ivoire, and thousands of other United Methodists all across Africa who have heard no compelling reasons for changing our sexual ethics, our teachings on marriage, and our ordination standards!

We are grounded in God's word and the gracious and clear teachings of our church. On that we will not yield! We will not take a road that leads us from the truth! We will take the road that leads to the making of disciples of Jesus Christ the for transformation of the world!

I hope and pray, for your sake, that you will walk down that road with us. We would warmly welcome you as our traveling companions, but if you choose another road, we Africans cannot go with you.

The vast majority of we Africans support the Modified Traditional Plan for two very important reasons.

First, we believe it is clearly rooted in Scripture and the teachings of Christians in all times and in all places. It reaffirms our church's belief that "marriage is defined as a sacred relationship between one man and one woman," not between any two consenting adults.

Second, passage of the Modified Traditional Plan will keep far more United Methodists united as one church than any of the other plans.

I want to be united with my sisters and brothers in our global connection. I hope you want that as well. Let us all walk together in a church steeped in Scripture and the life transforming teachings of our church.

Finally, I trust you will support a gracious exit petition. Some Africans have been told that if a gracious exit petition is passed our evangelical friends in the U.S. will go their own way and no longer support efforts in Africa. That is not true.

Many of us in Africa have developed deep and long lasting friendships with our brothers and sisters in the U.S. Those relationships will not be severed if a gracious exit petition passes. Unfortunately, some United Methodists in the U.S. have the very faulty assumption that all Africans are concerned about is U.S. financial support. Well, I am sure, being sinners like all of you, some Africans are fixated on money. But with all due respect, a fixation on money seems more of an American problem than an African one. We get by on far less than most Americans do; we know how to do it. I'm not so sure you do. So if anyone is so naïve or condescending as to think we would sell our birth right in Jesus Christ for American dollars, then they simply do not know us.

We are seriously joyful in following Jesus Christ and God's holy word to us in the Bible. And in truth, we think many people in the U.S. and in parts of Europe could learn a great deal from us. The UM churches, pastors and lay people who partner with us acknowledge as much.

Please understand me when I say the vast majority of African United Methodists will never, ever trade Jesus and the truth of the Bible for money.

We will walk alone if necessary, and yet we are confident the ties of Christian fellowship we have with friends here in U.S. will not be severed even if they too must walk apart from a church that would adopt the One Church Plan.

We believe all local churches should be treated fairly and so we strongly support a gracious exit plan.

Friends, not too long ago my country was ravaged by a terrible civil war. And then we faced the outbreak of the Ebola virus. We are keenly familiar with hardship and sorrow, but Jesus has led us through every trial. So nothing that happens over the next few days will deter us from following Him, and Him alone.

We will persevere in the race before us. We will remain steadfast and faithful. And some day we will wear the victor's crown of glory with our King Jesus! Come walk with us!

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen!"

– Dr. Jerry P. Kulah., Dean of Gbarnga School of Theology, United Methodist University in Liberia, to the Reform and Renewal Coalition Breakfast at the United Methodist Church Special General Conference Session in St. Louis, Missouri, Saturday, 23 February 2019. As reported by Mark truly of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. [Note: This was included in this section "The Good Stuff" because it is so inspiring. – AOM]

## Of Interest.

### **+ *LGBTQI Delegates: “Shut Down” United Methodist General Conference before Traditional Plan Considered.***

A group of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) delegates to the United Methodist General Conference made clear Friday evening that they will not allow the denomination’s governing body to move forward if it becomes apparent that increased clergy accountability measures are poised to pass.

Asked if one of three plans submitted by the church’s Commission on a Way Forward (CoWF), known as the Traditional plan, could pass, The Rev. Dr. Alex da Silva Souto declared “we’ll shut it down.” Souto, Senior Pastor at New Milford United Methodist Church in Connecticut, spoke February 22 on a panel of LGBTQI delegates to General Conference titled “Conversation at the Crossroads”.

Several panelists voiced support for a progressive option known as “The Simple Plan” while some grudgingly offered support to a CoWF-proposed plan backed by a wider group of progressives, known as the “One Church Plan” as an interim measure. Panelists indicated that disruptive actions were a possibility as the conference began legislative work on Sunday. “Nothing is off the table at this point,” noted Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Delegate Jen Ilho, expressing concerns the OCP could be “co-opted” by unfriendly amendments. As for a modified version of the Traditional Plan, Ilho assessed it as “Frankly Dreadful” while another delegate dubbed it “Evil”.

New York Annual Conference Delegate Dorothee Benz called for a “refusal to be complicit in unjust structures.” “We are going to own our own agency in this and refuse complicity,” Benz declared of the legislative process, which several panelists dismissed as “unjust structures.” Instead, Benz called on those gathered in the standing-room-only Holiday Inn conference room to go about “creating a different reality. That is what has gotten us to this point and what will bring us home.”

The panel, which was convened by the Queer Clergy Caucus, insisted that the Simple Plan was not a radical plan, and that it and the OCP had been mischaracterized and misunderstood. They [central conference delegates] have been told that a vote for the One Church Plan or the Simple Plan is a vote for homosexuality, and that is not true,” asserted New York Annual Conference delegate Karen Prudente. “Missionaries really pounded in a colonial mentality that we [persons of Asian ancestry] then spread throughout the world.” Panelists were also clear about those who opposed their proposals. While acknowledging that some in the UMC held traditionalist views that they were working through, “I think there are a bunch of evil folks in the church who are into the pain thing,” assessed Dr. Randall Miller.

Asked about the Wesleyan Covenant Association, which advocates for a version of the Traditional Plan, Benz was dismissive: “If they want to leave, don’t let the door hit you on the way out.”

“I wouldn’t spend too much time worrying about them leaving,” Miller added. The former Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) executive advocates forming a commission that will “charge a high price” for those traditionalists who may seek to leave the denomination. “You’re not going to leave us with all the bills. Some friends genuinely grieve that we cannot all be together, I’m no longer one of them,” Miller announced. “There is no evidence that the WCA is leaving. God, let us savor the fact that we are in control of one teeny tiny thing: the trust clause.”

“That’s the key. We have to be solidly behind stopping any sort of gracious exit, because that’s the only reason some of those folks haven’t left,” asserted Ilho. “Let there be no exit plan beyond what is currently in the discipline, or, make it as difficult as possible so that they don’t leave and leave their debts behind.”

Down the hallway, other members of the broader Love Your Neighbor Coalition of progressive caucus groups held a connected event for international delegates featuring a bible study and dinner with an Illinois pastor originally from Kenya. The event, titled “Stronger Together” was billed as an opportunity for United Methodists from both the Central Conferences and the United States “see how we are already working together to advance justice and peace on a global basis.” The study was led by the Rev. Grace Imathiu, senior pastor at First United Methodist Church of Evanston, Illinois. A group of mostly U.S. delegates and volunteers gathered at the front of the Holiday Inn ballroom, which, unlike the Queer Clergy panel’s smaller capacity conference

room, was three-quarters empty. The ballroom would later mostly fill for the celebration dinner, and then again empty as delegates departed before the conclusion of the program.

Imathiu based her scripture study upon Matthew Chapter 28 verses 16-20, in which Jesus instructs the Apostles to “make disciples of all nations.” Imathiu interpreted Christ’s instruction as applying to not just language or ethnicity, but also to the “LGBTQI nation”. Unity, Imathiu asserted, means holding people to account for sins including tribalism, racism, sexism, and homophobia. “I am a recovering homophobe,” Imathiu confessed. “Making disciples means getting your hands dirty.” Baptism of those “called LGBT+” “has not been honored,” Imathiu protested. “We have been refusing to get into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

– By Jeffrey Walton , IRD, February 23, 2019.

### **A Way Forward.**

+ ***United Methodists urged to unite as 2019 General Conference convenes.*** [Introductory statement at the beginning.]

ST. LOUIS – Council of Bishops President Bishop Kenneth H. Carter today called on United Methodists to make every effort to maintain unity for the sake of God’s mission as the denomination’s top legislative body began its work in St. Louis, Missouri. Preaching in the opening worship of the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, Bishop Carter said that the unity of the body of Christ should be the passionate concern. “Remember: you are the people of the cross and the flame.” The Special Session was called to receive and act on a report from the Commission on a Way Forward on its work to examine paragraphs in The Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and to explore options to strengthen church unity. “If you watch and listen for the good in conservatives, centrists and progressives, you will see the cross and the flame. You will see people carrying the cross,” said Bishop Carter, noting that “...we are people who have professed our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. And we will pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit, to make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.”

– Rev. Dr. Maidstone Mulenga, Director of Communications – Council of Bishops, The UMC; February 24, 2019.

+ ***So What Did the 2019 General Conference Do?*** The United Methodist Church has just concluded its historic, specially called 2019 session of General Conference. The General Conference is our denomination’s highest governing body. This February 23-26 special session in St. Louis, Missouri, was called for the special purpose of seeking “a way forward” for internal United Methodist conflicts related to sexual morality. Our denomination has long taught both that we love and welcome all people, including members of the LBGTQ community, and that God’s good design is that sexual relations are only for monogamous, heterosexual marriage. However, in recent years there have been growing tensions, with some clergy and bishops openly breaking the rules banning “self-avowed practicing homosexual” ministers and forbidding our congregations from hosting or our pastors from performing same-sex unions.

Competing proposals to this General Conference would have taken our denomination in very different directions.

Those favoring the Traditional Plan (which would maintain our current position and increase accountability for clergy leaders) found ourselves facing one unusual barrier after another. For many months ahead of time, and through much of the final day, it looked like a real possibility that after all this time, effort, and money, we could actually have the result I had called “Option Zero,” of not passing anything. At one point this afternoon, a leader of a liberal caucus who is also a delegate gave a fiery speech denouncing the “hateful” Traditional Plan and openly admitting that he and other liberal delegates were pursuing any-means-necessary tactics to run out the clock for the sake of making the General Conference unable to pass proposals with which they disagreed. So much for the Golden Rule.

The conference showcased the very deep divides in our denomination. It was particularly odd to see liberal leaders call evangelical United Methodists hateful, “a bunch of evil folks,” and all kinds of names, and then at the same time see these same liberal leaders promote their primary liberal plan as reflecting their desire for

“we’re better together” unity with us. There was plenty of loud, angry protesting. So much hurt all around. It was a rather stressful day...

It is no small thing that a majority of delegates defeated the “One Church Plan” to liberalize church teaching and standards, by a final vote of 449 to 374 (54.6 to 45.4 percent). This was a dramatic rebuke of the way in which the Council of Bishops has tried to lead our denomination for the last several years. If this plan could not get passed at this General Conference, with all of the focused money, energy, institutional support, and marketing thrown behind it, it is hard to see how a plan like this could ever pass at future General Conferences, which beginning next year will have fewer American delegates and more from the Global South.

Then we adopted a partial version of the Traditional Plan, by a final vote of 438 to 384 (53.3 to 46.7 percent).

Now here is where it gets a bit confusing. The Judicial Council had previously declared that some parts of the Traditional Plan impermissibly conflicted with our denomination’s Constitution, while others were fine and constitutional. Several of us orthodox delegates had a series of amendments we were trying to offer to the Traditional Plan that would address the Judicial Council’s concerns. But the cynical “hours of delaying tactics” (in the words of the United Methodist News Service) by an organized bloc of liberal delegates, along with the already rather cramped schedule and some unhelpful moves from bishops (again, more on all of that later), severely limited the time available for serious work of perfecting the Traditional Plan. So we ended up passing an omnibus package of a mix of some provisions that have already been declared unconstitutional (and so we cannot expect them to take effect) and others that HAVE been declared constitutional (and so which do become our church law now). Unless otherwise specified, anything adopted at General Conference becomes church law in our denomination of January 1 of the following year.

Here is what WAS passed in the Traditional Plan that the Judicial Council has already upheld as constitutional, and so which will be our new church law before too long:

First, we enacted a Traditional Plan petition (#90032) that clarifies the definition of what we mean when we say we forbid “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” to be ministers, candidates, or appointed pastors in our denomination. It was widely understood what the church meant by this. However, for many years, liberal bishops and others had treated this as a loophole, and claimed that unless even openly partnered gay ministers said the precise words “I am a practicing homosexual” or answered uncomfortable direct questions about their regular “genital contact” with someone of the same sex, then there was “no evidence” that they had actually violated our moral standards. Through such word games, some clergy in some liberal areas have been allowed to remain in good standing while knowingly violating our moral standards. This petition closes this loophole, by saying that from now on, anyone who “is living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union,” or “who publicly states that she or he is a practicing homosexual” automatically meets the definition of who is in violation of our ministry standards, with no required further questions about “genital contact” or awkward reliance on whether or not someone says the magic words. This will make enforcement of this longtime standard much simpler and easier to prove than it has ever been.

Secondly, we enacted another Traditional Plan petition (#90044) that limits the ability of bishops to dismiss complaints against clergy accused of wrongdoing. Our process for disciplining wayward clergy begins when someone files a complaint with his or her bishop. However, in recent years, we have seen liberal bishops simply dismiss complaints against clergy who violated sexual-morality standards with which the bishop did not agree. Such abuses of their ability to dismiss complaints had the potential to let each bishop unilaterally both nullify any part of our standards for clergy with which they disagree and also perhaps protect personal friends from facing accountability. But now this petition forbids bishops from dismissing complaints unless the complaints have “no basis in law or fact.” This petition also requires that any time bishops dismiss a complaint, they must share a written explanation with the person who filed the complaint, something which bishops had not always readily done. And all of this also applies to complaints against bishops.

Thirdly, we enacted another Traditional Plan petition (#90046) that reforms the “just resolution” process (the UMC equivalent of out-of-court settlements) that had been subject to such abuse by liberal bishops in recent years. This petition prevents how some liberal bishops had arranged “just resolutions” for violations of our sexuality standards that completely cut out the person who filed the complaint (the complainant) from the

process. This new church law makes the complaint filer a party to the process, and requires that “every effort shall be made to have the complainant(s) agree to the resolution before it may take effect.”

Fourthly, we enacted half of another Traditional Plan petition (#90045) on “just resolutions.” This one requires that all just resolutions must “state all identified harms and how they shall be addressed.” This is an improvement over how previous “just resolutions” with clergy who violated our sexuality standards have avoided any pretense of addressing the concerns of the complainants.

Fifthly, we finally adopted another, particularly significant Traditional Plan petition (#90042), that has been filibustered for seven years since the 2012 General Conference, which requires mandatory penalties for clergy found in a church trial to have violated our covenant against performing pastorally harmful same-sex union ceremonies. Specifically, it requires that for a first offense, ministers must face a minimum penalty of a one-year suspension, while for any subsequent offence, they must be permanently removed from ministry. The idea behind this is not to inflict pain, but rather to prevent people from abusing the status of a United Methodist minister, and to ensure that there is a serious deterrent against our clergy harming people by violating this standard. Previously, disobedience to our standards has doubtless been encouraged and increased by the confidence liberal clergy in some regions have had that they would not face serious consequences.

Sixthly, we adopted another Traditional Plan petition (#90047) that establishes a church right of appeal. This is a key accountability measure evangelical reformers have been seeking for many years. Basically, if you had a case of “jury nullification,” in which a church trial refused to enforce certain church laws with which they disagreed, even when the facts of this church law being violated were clear, previously there was nothing that could be done. But now, for such extreme cases, there is be a right for those seeking accountability to appeal if there were clearly “egregious errors of church law.”

Seventhly, we enacted another Traditional Plan petition (#90043) that explicitly requires district committees on ministry and boards of ordained ministry to conduct a “full examination and thorough inquiry” into every ministry candidate’s compliance with our standards, forbids them from recommending any candidate who does not meet our standards, and requires bishops to prevent candidates who obviously violate our standards from being approved in clergy session.

Eighthly, we enacted another Traditional Plan petition (#90036) that establishes a duty of bishops to refuse to ordain or commission clergy candidates if these candidates are openly gay or if the board of ordained ministry (the group who reviews ordination candidates in each annual conference) has not provided certification that it has conducted the required full examination of whether or not this candidate meets our standards. This petition also prohibits openly gay candidates from being consecrated to become bishops, even if these candidates are elected by vote of their jurisdiction. There was an unfortunate unintentional error in the version of the Traditional Plan that was submitted, of omitting the key word, “practicing.” One of the amendments I and other traditionalist delegates wanted to make to the Traditional Plan would have fixed this to be clear that the barrier was only against openly “practicing homosexuals,” and not against persons who may be same-sex-attracted but who are committed to traditional Christian doctrine and a celibate lifestyle. And this amendment would have been made, were it not for the filibustering led by “Mainstream UMC” leader Mark Holland and others. This should be fixed at the 2020 General Conference.

All of the above petitions have been now enacted by this General Conference and have already been declared constitutional by the Judicial Council.

Additionally, we enacted a ninth Traditional Plan petition (#90037) which directly addresses the problem of how some boards of ordained ministry in some annual conferences have refused to screen candidates for their compliance with our expectation that United Methodist clergy abstain from homosexual practice. This new church law requires that before individuals can be appointed to the annual conference board of ordained ministry, they must be willing to uphold the entirety of our ordination standards. It also requires bishops to certify that they have only nominated people to this board who will uphold all of our ordination standards. An earlier version of this petition was ruled unconstitutional by the Judicial Council because of how it only focused on our ordination standards related to homosexuality. However, this petition was amended from the floor to broadly include such concern for all of our ordination standards (including but not limited to those on

sexuality). While this amended petition is now being challenged before the Judicial Council, the updated version certainly seems to satisfy the Judicial Council's expressed concerns.

There were also a few other noteworthy actions. By a majority vote, we enacted a petition that establishes a process for how congregations can gracefully leave our denomination with their property, if they desire to leave "for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow." This was no small feat, given the fierce opposition of bishops and liberal caucuses as well as the factual inaccuracies in the floor debate. This petition is currently a bit of a confusing legal situation. The petition's language explicitly states (but not in what it adds to the Discipline) that it is to be "effective as of the close of the 2019 General Conference." But the Judicial Council had hastily issued an advisory review of an earlier version of this petition, and six of the Council members bizarrely claimed that it was unconstitutional unless it required the permission of a two-thirds vote of the annual conference to let any congregation leave. Three other Council members sharply disagreed in a brief, must-read Dissenting Opinion (which can be read by scrolling to the bottom of this page). Before this petition was adopted, there was only time to make one of the two amendments needed to satisfy all Judicial Council concerns. As a delegate, I was in the pool to make the second amendment, but I was never recognized by the presiding bishop (who, to be fair, was dealing with a lot of stressful filibustering from many other delegates) before this was adopted. In any case, this puts our denomination's highest governing body on record as supporting some sort of gracious exit for congregations to leave our denomination with their property if they find that they cannot live with United Methodism's current approach to sexuality matters, in hopes of avoiding the ugly property lawsuits seen when congregations have departed from other mainline denominations over similar conflicts.

We also adopted another pair of petitions that help ensure the financial viability of pensions for retired clergy, including by requiring relevant fair-share payments from any congregations who may leave the UMC.

– By John Lomperis, UMAction; February 27, 2019. <https://juicyecumenism.com/author/lomperianreview/>

+ **The final results of key legislation at the Special General Conference (GC2019).** As GC2019 closed its session two key issues were decided. The tally for the One Church Plan was 45.4% Yes and 54.6% No; it failed. A modified version of the Traditional Plan was 53.3% Yes and 47.7% No; it passed. An exit plan passed: 51.85% Yes to 48.15% No.– AOM.

+ *General Conference maintains language on ordination of LGBTQI persons, same-gender marriage in UMC.*

### **Statement from the Council of bishops**

St. Louis – The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church would like to thank the delegates to the Special Session of the General Conference for their diligent work during the 2019 conference, which ended today in St. Louis, in the United States. The General Conference is the highest legislative body in the church and the only group who can decide church law and speak officially for the global denomination. The 864 delegates (half lay, half clergy) from all over the world met from Feb. 24-26 to discuss and act on the report of the Commission on a Way Forward over the issue of human sexuality. The delegates also considered petitions other than the report from the Commission. The decision of the General Conference was to offer a majority support for the Traditional Plan. The vote was 438 to 384. The delegates then voted to ask the Judicial Council, the highest court in the denomination, to review the constitutionality of the approved legislation.

What is the Traditional Plan? The Traditional Plan keeps the current language around sexuality and increases accountability by streamlining the processes to enforce penalties for violations of The Book of Discipline related to marriage and ordination of LGBTQI persons. Some parts of the Traditional Plan were ruled unconstitutional, and it will take some time to clarify which parts will become part of our church law and which parts will not. "We continue to teach and believe that all persons are welcomed in the church, all persons are persons of sacred worth and we welcome all to receive the ministry of Jesus. Human sexuality is a topic on which people of faith have differing views," said Bishop Ken Carter, president of the Council of Bishops, after



the conference ended. “Despite our differences, we will continue to work together to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and share God’s love with all people.” Since the legislation is not the official church law until January 1, 2020, the bishops are urging all United Methodists to stay focused on the mission that glorifies God and reaches new people with the gospel. Bishops will be holding meetings with clergy and laity in their annual conferences on how details will be handled in each area.

– Rev. Dr. Maidstone Mulenga, Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church; February 26, 2019.

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Sin does not make us cool, hip, fashionable, or trendy. It does not make us sophisticated, mature, or attractive.

It only makes us vile. – Dr. Charles F. Stanley, Life Principles Daily Bible, p. 1329.