



Subject: August Update and Guidance from Pastor Bill on the UMC's General Conference 2019

Over the next few months I'll be sharing highlights and notes concerning the upcoming February 2019 Special General Conference of the United Methodist Church. My goal is to keep you informed of the issues this conference will face and the possible outcomes. My second goal is to provide biblical and spiritual guidance that will promote and encourage us to continue loving God and all our neighbors.

What is the General Conference?

Every four years an international body of nearly 1,000 delegates across the United Methodist Church (UMC) meet in what is called the General Conference. Half of the delegates are laity (non-clergy members), half are clergy. Delegates discuss and vote on petitions and resolutions proposed by various groups within the denomination. Those approved petitions result in a revision of the *Book of Discipline*, the denomination's book of law, and its *Social Principles*, the denomination's book of resolutions on social and contemporary issues.

A Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church will be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri to address specifically the recommendations of the Commission of the Way Forward concerning human sexuality (i.e. defining marriage, ordination standards, etc.) and how to best move forward as a denomination in the context of contemporary sexual ethics and culture.

What is the *Book of Discipline* and what does it state regarding sexuality and ordination?

The *Book of Discipline* sets forth United Methodist Church laws, plan, polity and process by which the Church governs itself. Only the General Conference can amend, delete or add to the *Discipline*. It is the most current statement of how United Methodists agree to live their lives together and maintain the unity of the Spirit. It reflects the understanding of the church and articulates the mission: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The *Book of Discipline* states the following regarding human sexuality and ordination:

- a) 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 UMC (Par 304.3).
- b) Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches (Para. 341.6).

The *Social Principles of the United Methodist Church* state:

- a) We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love between a man and a woman;

- b) Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage;
- c) All persons, regardless of sexual orientation are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence;
- d) We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.

What is the Commission on a Way Forward?

The Commission was created by the 2016 General Conference to do a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph of the *Book of Discipline* concerning human sexuality and to explore options that help maintain and strengthen the unity of the church. After months of examination the Commission has recommended three options for the February 2019 General Conference to consider as the church faces the issues and dynamics of human sexuality: **The One Church Plan, the Connectional Conference Plan and the Traditional Plan.**

What is the One Church Plan?

The One Church Plan seeks to remove language from the *Book of Discipline* that restricts pastors and churches from conducting same-sex weddings. This plan also seeks to remove restrictions on annual conferences from ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexual persons. However, it seeks to add language to the *Discipline* 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 homosexual persons. One of the proposed amendments to the *Book of Discipline* states:

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

Marriage would no longer be defined as the “union of one man and one woman.” Annual conferences would decide how inclusive they would be in their ordination standards potentially permitting the ordination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons and permitting them to be appointed to serve as pastors of churches. Clergy would be permitted to preside at same-sex weddings and such marriages would be permitted to occur in churches (if approved by the local church). This plan would allow clergy who could not, as a matter of conscience, perform a same-sex union or support ordination of openly gay clergy to remain as clergy.

What is the Connectional Conference Plan?

This plan seeks to create three different branches within the United Methodist Church that have clearly defined values concerning marriage and the ordination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people. The plan would define marriage as between two adults and remove language that restricts homosexuals from being ordained. Each connectional conference would create its own book of polity and doctrine congruent with its’ beliefs and practices.

One of the proposed amendments this plan seeks is:

The United Methodist Church shall have jurisdictional connectional conferences, each covering the entire United States and its territories, made up as follows:

- a. Traditional Connectional Conference, in which marriage shall continue to be defined as between one man and one woman, same-sex weddings cannot be performed, and those practicing homosexuality cannot be ordained.
- b. Unity Connectional Conference, which pastors are allowed but not required to perform same-sex weddings, annual conferences are allowed but not required to ordain those practicing homosexuality, local churches are allowed but not required to receive an LGBT person as pastor, and in which no bishop, pastor, or congregation is compelled to act against conscience in these matters.
- c. Progressive Connectional Conference, in which same-sex weddings are performed by all clergy, all annual conferences ordain qualified LGBTQ persons, and all local churches welcome LGBTQ pastors who match the needs of the congregation and its ministry.

What is the Traditional Plan?

The Traditional Plan seeks to maintain the current United Methodist views and practices on marriage (e.g. between a man and a woman) and its ordination standards (e.g. homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching). The plan seeks to add language that intentionally holds clergy and bishops accountable to their covenants to support the polity and theology of the UMC. In addition, this plan would give current bishops, clergy, annual conferences and local churches the opportunity to exit the UMC without penalty, if they can no longer in good conscience abide by that covenant.

What encouragement and guidance do I give?

My hope and intention for Alliance UMC is for us to grow as a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, Bible-believing church that loves God and all people. As the body of Christ, we are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society. As Paul says, *“All fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). At the same time, we are called and commanded to pursue a Biblical standard of holiness, love and inclusiveness without compromising the holy standard in pursuit of it. As the Lord told the people of God, *“You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own”* (Leviticus 20:26).

May we of Alliance UMC continue to rejoice in the truth... and love of neighbor! I will continue to keep you up to date on General Conference 2019 and provide spiritual and biblical guidance going forward. As we continue the conversation about these possible plans, please speak lovingly, respectfully and truthfully to each other. Let us remember Paul’s words to the Corinthians, *“Love is kind...it does not boast...it is not easily angered...”* (1 Corinthians 13: 4-5).

I and the members of the Church Council value your input. Feel free to discuss with any of us your hopes, concerns and prayers for the UMC and Alliance! I want to be faithful, as your pastoral leader, to hear your voice, so please feel free to call on me anytime. More importantly,

I want to be faithful and hear God's voice...Lord, hear our prayer! Looking forward to God's Holy Spirit continuing to move on God's people at Alliance as we grow disciples of Jesus Christ!

Bill Killough
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Commission on a Way Forward: [COWF Homepage](#)
COWF's Report to the Council of Bishops: [COWF Report](#)