

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

**The One Church Plan**

**The One Church Plan gives churches the room they need to maximize the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible.**

**Changes to the adaptable paragraphs in *The Book of Discipline* apply only to the Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States. Central conferences, through the work of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, will have the authority to retain the present language regarding chargeable offenses of clergy and questions of ordination related to homosexuality found in *The Book of Discipline (2016)* or adopt wording in these paragraphs that best serves their missional contexts.**

**Summary of Plan**

The One Church Plan provides a generous unity that gives conferences, churches, and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context without disbanding the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church. In the One Church Plan, no annual conferences, bishops, congregations, or pastors are compelled to act contrary to their convictions. The plan maintains the leadership structure of The United Methodist Church, including the Council of Bishops, the General Conference, and the annual conferences as one body and one church. It offers greater freedom to many who desire change but do not want to violate *The Book of Discipline*. Voting is kept to a minimum except where it is helpful. There is no mandate that requires local churches, conferences, or pastors to participate in a vote that divides, segments, or separates. The United Methodist Church remains in connection, upholding unity of mission without uniformity of practice. The plan grants space for traditionalists to continue to offer ministry as they have in the past; space for progressives to exercise freely a more complete ministry with LGBTQ persons; and space for all United Methodists to continue to coexist without disrupting their ministries. Additionally, this plan creates space for annual conferences in various part of the world to practice ministry according to their national or regional contexts with the connectional autonomy of the adaptable portions of *The Book of Discipline*.

The One Church Plan removes the language from *The Book of Discipline* used in the United States that restricts pastors and churches from conducting same-sex weddings and annual conferences from ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexual persons. It adds language 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. Central conferences can adapt portions of *The Book of Discipline* for their own contextual practices, and are not bound by decisions taken in Jurisdictional Conferences. This plan provides United Methodists the ability to address their missional contexts in different ways.

The plan ends the threat of church trials over same-sex weddings. Boards of Ordained Ministry already have the authority to discern whom to credential. Local churches already have the authority to establish wedding policies. Pastors already discern whom they will or will not marry. While some annual conferences and related Boards of Ordained Ministry can adopt new practices, no annual conferences must make further choices or amend current practices unless they desire to do so. United Methodist institutions, foundations, universities, agencies, and General Boards will continue to offer their

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

ministries without significant disruption or costly legal counsel related to their charters or articles of incorporation. Wespath will be able to continue to offer its services without disruption.

The One Church plan also asks the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) to find a means consistent with *The Book of Discipline* to assure that each jurisdictional conference or area supports the costs of its own episcopal leader and offices. All jurisdictional conference bishops will be paid the same salary, but the area where a bishop is assigned will, through a process developed by GCFA, provide the funding, similar to how episcopal housing allowances are now managed. This plan continues our historic Episcopacy Fund to help support central conference bishops, and provide for our ecumenical commitments. This does not affect central conferences. Central conference bishops and episcopal services will continue to be covered out of the current General Church Episcopal Fund.

**Theological & Biblical Foundations**

The work of the Commission on a Way Forward is missional in nature. It is done with a desire to see the church make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The church fulfills its mission not at the center of its institutional life, but at the edge, the margins where it engages the world in a variety of contexts. The role of leadership in the church is to draw the attention of the church toward the margins. It's at that margin that people who belong to the church engage other people beyond the church with the evangelistic mission of the church, inviting them to the spiritual life. It's at the margin that we offer our ministries of mercy, service, and justice to relieve suffering, seek peace, and reconcile people. The role of leadership in the church is to direct the attention of the church toward those contexts, and therefore toward the mission.

The apostle Paul speaks to the complexity of this task when he writes, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:20-23 NRSV)

The One Church Plan acknowledges that practices among vital churches need room to thrive depending on their mission field, and the necessary incarnational identification with those we seek to serve. The variety of answers to the question "Who is my neighbor?" determines how practices in one context will be different from another.

The Commission hears a yearning from both traditionalists and progressives for more space. More space means more structural distance from people who practice ministry differently or more autonomy to adapt practices to the context that may not be requested elsewhere. Traditionalists do not want to be required to participate in same-sex weddings, the ordination of gay persons, or the financial support of a bishop in a same-sex marriage. Progressives want space to freely exercise ministries that include same-sex weddings, the ordination of gay persons, and the same-sex marriage of clergy. United Methodists in central conferences want space to shape conversations about sexuality according to their national

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

context and without replicating whatever practices shape churches in the United States. Other United Methodists want to give space as generously as possible without compromising core identity and mission.

This desire for space is both a yearning for the necessary contextualization for missional vitality and a challenge to the unity of the church. Too much space challenges the unity of the church by risking further separation of our connection. Little or no space will lead us to enforce uniformity in ways that could continue our impasse. The One Church Plan is built on the belief that it is possible to live with more space while we focus on our common mission. The One Church Plan has no impact on conferences outside the U.S. that are located in countries where same-sex marriage is illegal or whose members desire for the current language of *The Book of Discipline* to remain applicable in their context.

The One Church Plan honors the perspective of United Methodists who believe that our current impasse over marriage and ordination of homosexual persons does not rise to the level of a church dividing issue. Such persons are deeply convicted by and committed to the words of Jesus prayer for unity in John 17:20-26. Here Jesus prays, “that all of them may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (NRSV)

While some may see dividing the United Methodist church as a function of greater holiness or righteousness, others see it as a sign of the brokenness of the body of Christ. This division, some may argue, is not in keeping with the will of God for a community of believers who share a common heritage, doctrine, beliefs, and ministry.

Division also comes at a great expense. Historically, the common desire to alleviate suffering and address injustice in the world has been a focus of unity for our diverse denomination. Because of unity, United Methodists across the globe work together to offer Christ to their neighbors, build schools so that children are educated, operate hospitals and clinics that heal the sick, offer food and relief to the poor and victims of natural disasters, along with other efforts beyond measure. We understand that suffering is part of the human condition. We also recognize that there are forms of suffering in the world that are contrary to the will of God. We believe that suffering causes harm and that the alleviation of suffering to be part of the common mission of the United Methodist Church, where we believe that, “if one member [of Christ’s body] suffers, all suffer together with it...” (1 Corinthians 12:26 NRSV)

We are aware that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) persons exist in every nation and every culture in the world, with varying degrees of openness, acceptance, and freedom. LGBTQ persons are our brothers and sisters; they are parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and friends. There are, and have been, LGBTQ persons serving at all levels of leadership in the UMC, as laity and clergy. Currently they suffer as they are unable to live into God’s calling on their lives to ordination or to lay leadership.

The UMC Social Principles state that all people are persons of sacred worth. This calls us to honor the human dignity of all persons and we believe that it is the calling of the church to be about the eradication of all forms of suffering. It is our sacred obligation to work to end suffering everywhere, that

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

all might be free. We do this in order to live into our calling to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

The common desire to both minister to those who suffer and eliminate injustice is a meeting point of community for the United Methodist Church. As we resolve these issues, our witness can be magnified in places of ministry where we experience shared determination to end suffering, which is informed and enriched through the viewpoints and knowledge of our various cultures.

The authors of “Wonder, Love and Praise” write about the unexpected ways God creates community that are essential to the United Methodist Church. *The church comes into being because the Spirit of God leads us into community—perhaps with persons with whom we would least expect to associate—as the very matrix of our salvation. That Spirit-formed community becomes the context within which we enter into the new life God offers us, and it is a community whose reach is constantly being extended as its members, in the power of the Spirit, offer the gift of community to others, and likewise receive it from them. In that very Spirit, Wesley and those in connection with him found themselves moving beyond the established norms of churchly behavior, and challenging the church, by their own example, to enact more fully God’s gift of community. Thus the term “connection” took on new resonances of meaning, as what Wesley called “social holiness”—the growth in love and in the other fruits of the Spirit that is possible only in community—was realized in new situations and settings. This willingness to transgress boundaries of convention, class, and culture in pursuit of God’s gift of community, notes United Methodist historian Russell Richey, illumines connectionalism’s essentially missional character. From the beginning, connectionalism stood in service of mission, tuning every aspect of Methodist communal life—from structure to polity to discipline—to an “evangelizing and reforming” purpose. . . . [It is United Methodism’s] means of discovering mission and supporting mission; in this bonding we seek to understand and enact our life of service.’<sup>8</sup> Together, these convictions shape our United Methodist understanding of what it is to be the church. The ways they have come to expression in our history account in part for our particular ways of being the church, within the larger body of Christ. (Wonder, Love and Praise, lines 185-206)*

The One Church plan acknowledges the consciences of many by giving options to pastors who desire to perform marriages and conferences who wish to ordain gay persons. It offers assurances to pastors and conferences who do not wish to do so. The One Church Plan reminds the church that the question before us is how we will include homosexual persons that are among us now as well as those who will be part of The United Methodist Church in the future. It affirms clear teaching of the bible that promiscuity, whether among persons who are straight or gay, is neither a healthy nor a holy lifestyle. It also honors the missiology of The United Methodist Church and enables central conferences to be self-determined in matters of ordination and marriage.

Practices introduced in the early church also impinged the consciences of devout Christ followers in different ways. In Romans 14, Paul speaks of questions related to eating meat sacrificed to idols or which day of the week should be considered sacred. While the diversity of opinion on such issues in Paul’s time may seem inconsequential today, it created deep division in the early church and was considered essential to different groups of believers. The practices of some of these groups were rooted

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

in scripture and the tradition of God's people in Paul's time, as well as the lifestyles they left when they became followers of Christ. In such matters, Paul called those in Rome to give up judgement and contempt of each other as they worked out these differences in community. Paul writes, *"Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."* (Romans 14:19 NRSV)

Over 60 years ago United Methodists followed this admonition when its members decided to ordain women over the objection of many who did not believe scripture supported the practice and found little backing for it in the tradition of the church. At that time the church accepted a new practice that led to mutual edification and over time, resisted the impulse to judge each other in the midst of disagreement. Such changes, including those we now contemplate in the One Church Plan, are formed in the desire to be responsive to the movement of the Holy Spirit and our common humility before God. These qualities are displayed by a Pharisee named Gamaliel in Acts 5 whose words protected the apostles before the Sanhedrin. When Peter and the other apostles refused to give up their preaching of the gospel in Jerusalem, the High Priest and body of elders of Israel called for their deaths. Gamaliel offered a non-reactive response that demonstrated a heart of peace. He advised his fellow council members, *"So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"* (Acts 5:38 NRSV)

Those who support the One Church Plan embrace this same convicted humility when they consider the matters before The United Methodist Church. They hold their convictions deeply but are open to the possibility that God is doing something new in our midst. While all may not exercise new practices allowed by this plan related to marriage or ordination, they acknowledge that they share in common a sexual ethic framed by celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage. They do not wish to stand in the way of the prompting of the Holy Spirit found in so many of their brothers and sisters in Christ who will embrace these opportunities. Rather than dividing people into various camps based solely on these issues, they are willing to continue the journey together, understanding that while a purpose of human origin will fail, a purpose from God will not ultimately be hindered. It is clear that the desire of God is for The United Methodist Church to engage its mission field with renewed vitality, in order to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

**The effects of the One Church Plan on each segment of The United Methodist Church**

**Local Churches**

Local churches are not required to vote. Most would likely make no changes in practice at the local level. Some congregations might rewrite their wedding policies to either explicitly allow or explicitly prohibit same sex weddings in their facilities. They could continue their current practice. Pastors who want to perform a wedding outside of church property could do so based on their own conscience and in consultation with church leaders. This could happen in the same way other decisions are made and without any voting. This plan minimizes disruption in the local church (in most cases) and gives freedom to churches to adapt in order to minister to the LGBTQ community in their context. It allows for independence as well as interdependence and creates a contextual church for the next generation. It

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

maintains the highest amount of unity among local churches and keeps a diverse group of local churches in relationship and in conversation together. No local church is forced into a decision or position. Residential bishops and their Cabinets will be of great assistance if they will offer a process to assist pastors in the discussion of their decisions related to same-sex weddings with their local church. They could serve local churches if they will offer a process for those congregations who would like to consider whether to allow same-sex weddings to take place on church property. The process should be simple, collaborative, and contextual and take into account specific provisions for pastors and congregations who desire the current practice of prohibiting same sex weddings to remain the same. In annual conferences where the ordination of practicing homosexuals is allowed, churches may indicate their preference to receive or not receive these clergy through the use of a covenant established with their bishop.

**Clergy**

Clergy would have the freedom to exercise individual conscience. Clergy could place in their clergy profile their theological convictions and the bishop and Cabinet could take those convictions into account throughout the appointment and transfer process. Clergy who believe they cannot remain in The United Methodist Church because the change in language in *The Book of Discipline* gives too much freedom or because it does not give enough freedom could leave with a blessing. Provisions in the policies of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (Wespath) protect their vested pension at the time of their departure. This plan does not require clergy to transfer to another annual conference. However, clergy who are uncomfortable with new policies of their current annual conference will be supported in their desire to transfer. It ends trials against clergy who wish to perform weddings which in turn eliminates distractions to our mission and costs. LGBTQ clergy could be ordained by their annual conference upon approval of the Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference unless the clergy session develops and approves restrictive language. LGBTQ clergy could be appointed at the discretion of the bishop and Cabinet keeping in mind the convictions and context of the local church. LGBTQ candidates who are in an annual conference that does not ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals could request a transfer of their candidacy to another annual conference if they choose to do so.

**Annual Conferences**

No annual conferences would have to vote on this matter. Boards of Ordained Ministry or annual conference clergy sessions who wish to ordain LGBTQ clergy or wish to add language to their Standing Rules to restrict ordination could enter into a discernment process with the Board of Ordained Ministry in consultation with the bishop and Cabinet. The bishop and Cabinet could continue to use clergy and church profiles to understand the context of each local church in making appropriate appointments. This plan would reduce costs and energy spent on trials. If there are clergy who wish to transfer to another annual conference, they could do so through the current *Book of Discipline* processes with grace. If there are local churches and clergy who wish to leave the United Methodist Church, they could do so through the current *Book of Discipline* processes with grace. The possibility also exists that the General Conference would develop new disciplinary language and direction for congregations that wish to exit The United Methodist Church. This plan allows for the greatest level of continued connection among annual conferences.

## **A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD: The One Church Plan**

### **Council of Bishops**

The Council of Bishops remains as one body, interconnected in our United Methodist witness. Assignments of bishops in the US would continue to be done by the Jurisdictional Committees on Episcopacy and would reflect the convictions of the bishops and annual conferences. Bishops would be protected from ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexual persons if that does not align with their conscience. Additionally, central conferences, through the adaptable portions of *The Book of Discipline*, can create guidelines for marriage and ordination that fit their context.

### **General Agencies**

All existing General Agencies would continue under the One Church Plan unless and until some future General Conference were to make structural changes. There is no change to agencies inherent in adoption of the One Church Plan. If the financial sustainability and vitality of the United Methodist Church continues to decline, General Boards and Agencies will need to consider a strategic restructuring of their work to reflect the economic model of the present and future church. Sustainability issues are separate from the Commission on a Way Forward.

### **UMC Related Institutions/Camps/Colleges/ etc.**

Conversations with several UMC-related institutions affirm that this plan makes it more likely that such institutions would retain their current denominational affiliation. They could create their own contextual approach as needed and in consultation with the annual, jurisdictional or central conference to which they relate. This keeps funding intact and reduces anxiety. If UMC-related institutions choose to change their affiliation, they could do so through the processes in *The Book of Discipline* and according to their applicable by-laws.

### **Mission Field**

This plan allows for the most contextual flexibility and creativity. It means leaders do not have to invest immense time and energy in restructuring so they can focus their energy and gifts on reaching the mission field. The gifts of diverse people could be used. This plan enables local churches and pastors to engage their mission fields in the most contextual and strategic ways possible.

### **Global Church**

This plan keeps relationships in the global church intact and doesn't compel any central conference to act contrary to its beliefs. Central conferences will continue to relate to the Council of Bishops, the General Agencies, and the General Conference in the same manner as they do today. No central conferences have to change their current practices and they would have the opportunity to compose their own Disciplinary language regarding sexuality and practice to fit their national or regional context. If a central conference desires variability within the annual conferences of that central conference, they may vote to allow for variability in a way consistent with adaptable portions of *The Book of Discipline*. Persons outside the UMC who desire to understand a central conference's practices related to human sexuality may be directed to the adaptable portions of *The Book of Discipline* used in that central

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

conference for explanation. The plan retains the present system of resourcing central conferences, enhances the mutual exchange of gifts in a global church, and keeps central conferences fully at the table of shared ministry.

**Financial & Pension Considerations**

This plan has few financial and pension implications. If churches choose to leave the United Methodist Church, there would be implications to long-term pension liability. If apportionment support for annual conference and General Conference funds declines, the annual conference and General Conference would have to respond to that reduction. This response is in line with what annual and General Conferences are already doing in the area of sustainability. The expertise needed to project the full impact on pension funds for this or any plan for a way forward properly rests with Wespath and not the Commission on a Way Forward. Appendix 4 of this report provides Wespath's analysis and input. Commission members are grateful for their expertise and advice and agree with the Disciplinary and non-Disciplinary policies they propose. Two petitions, one amending *Book of Discipline* ¶1504 and one amending the Clergy Retirement Security Program, are recommended with the One Church Plan, below, and should be considered with any Plan, or in the event that no Plan secures majority support.

**Episcopal Fund Notes**

The Commission recognizes that the Episcopal Fund supports the work of the Council of Bishops beyond episcopal salary and benefits. Examples of this general support include expenses such as those related to meetings of the Council of Bishops, the Council of Bishops office staff, legal fees, and denominational travel. In the One Church Plan, these expenses will continue to be proportionally shared based on the general church apportionment formula adopted by the General Conference. Compensation for episcopal salary and benefits (as determined by the General Council on Finance and Administration), however, should be funded by each Episcopal Area. The General Commission on Finance and Administration (GCFA) will set the salary and benefit levels for all jurisdictional bishops. GCFA will set the salary and benefit level for all central conference bishops, who will continue to be supported, as they are now, by the Episcopal Fund. GCFA will work to determine a method to ensure that all Episcopal Areas in the United States will contribute at least the cost of their own bishop's compensation package (salary, benefits, and housing allowance) along with its share of apportionments for the Episcopal Fund. With this plan, GCFA would still receive and distribute all Episcopal Funds.

**Additional Resources for this Plan**

Additional resources for this plan would include a document that would assist bishops, pastors and laity in conversations related to the changes created by this plan. A group of episcopal leaders led by bishops who currently serve on the Commission on a Way Forward would create this resource.

**Constitutional Amendments needed for this Plan**

No Constitutional Amendments are needed for the One Church Plan as far as we can determine.



**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

**Implementation Plan for this Plan**

An advantage of the One Church Plan is that it does not appear to require any changes to the UMC constitution. If passed at General Conference 2019, it can take effect on January 1, 2020 (See ¶ 508 – Legislation Effective Date). However, to allow central conferences, annual conferences, pastors, congregations, and other connected bodies the opportunity to acclimate to the nuances of this plan it is recommended that the UMC take until December 31, 2020 to fully implement this plan. This “settling in” period will allow all involved the opportunity to engage in conversation and discernment regarding issues related to marriage and ordination. It will also allow central conferences to vote on any changes to their respective Central Conference *Book of Discipline* (see ¶ 543.16)

**Names of Commission Members who signed the One Church Plan**

*Note:* The Commission never took a vote regarding which members of the Commission supported which plan. At various points in the work, Commission members did express preferences for plans. Some Commission members could support the Commission's work on every plan while others expressed a preference for one or two of the plans. At the end of our process, in order to place the plans in petition format, Commission members were asked to which plans they were willing to give public support. Several Commission members gave support to more than one plan. For a variety of reasons, some members of the Commission, while giving their support to the Commission's report, chose not to express a preference for any of the plans.

The following Commission Members publicly support the One Church Plan: Brian Adkins, Jacques Akasa, Tom Berlin, Matt Berryman, David Field, Scott Johnson, Myungrae Kim Lee, Julie Hager Love, Mazvita Machinga, Dave Nuckols, Casey Orr, Donna Pritchard, Tom Salsgiver, Jasmine Smothers, Leah Taylor, Rosemarie Wenner, Alice Williams, Alfiado Zunguza

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

*Note:* The following disciplinary changes will be submitted as legislative petitions. They are included here for informational purposes.

**Disciplinary Changes for the One Church Plan**

**Amend ¶ 105 - Our Theological Task- The Present Challenge to Theology in the Church**

We agree that we are not of one mind regarding human sexuality. As we continue to faithfully explore issues of sexuality, we will honor the theological guidelines of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience, acknowledging that God’s revelation of truth and God’s extension of grace as expressed in Jesus Christ (John 1:14) may cause persons of good conscience to interpret and decide issues of sexuality differently. We also acknowledge that the Church is called through Christ to unity even amidst complexity. We affirm those who continue to maintain that the Scriptural witness does not condone the practice of homosexuality. We believe that their conscience should be protected in the church and throughout society under basic principles of religious liberty. We also affirm those who believe the witness of Scripture calls us to reconsider the teaching of the church with respect to monogamous homosexual relationships.

*Rationale:* This addition acknowledges the common theological guidelines that are the sources of the diverse views in our global church regarding human sexuality. It recognizes the desire of the church to fulfill Christ’s call to unity while holding a convicted humility toward one another as we honor religious liberty for all.

**Amend ¶ 161.C- Social Principles**

C) *Marriage*—We affirm the sanctity of the monogamous marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity, traditionally understood as a union of one man and one woman. ~~between a man and a woman.~~ We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. Where laws in civil society define marriage as union between two adults, no United Methodist clergy shall be required to celebrate or bless a same-sex union. ~~We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.~~

*Rationale:* The traditional understanding of marriage is honored. Religious liberty is intentionally protected for those whose consciences would be impinged if they celebrated a same-sex union in societies where it is allowed.

**Amend ¶ 161.G - Social Principles**

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 between two adults. 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. 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

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

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.

*Rationale:* Sexuality is affirmed as a good gift to all people. Sexual relations are bound by the covenant of monogamous marriage between two adults. The elimination of this language is in recognition that we are not of one mind.

**Important Note:** According to ¶131.5, ¶101, and the action of the 2016 General Conference, central conferences, through the work of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters on a *General Book of Discipline*, will have the authority, in paragraphs after ¶ 166, to continue the present language of *The 2016 Book of Discipline* or adopt such other wording in these paragraphs that best serves their missional contexts.

**Amend ¶ 304.3 - Qualifications for Ordination**

3. 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 responsibility for determining how standards, including standards related to human sexuality, may apply to certification or ordination in a given annual conference falls to the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference. The bishop may choose to seek the non-binding advice of an annual conference session on standards relating to human sexuality for ordination to inform the Board of Ordained Ministry in its work. ~~The practice of homosexuality incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexual persons are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as minister or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.~~

*Rationale:* The Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference set standards of holy living for clergy. By expanding this responsibility to include standards of human sexuality, they can best serve their missional context. Bishops can seek the non-binding input of the annual conference session.

**Amend ¶ 310.2.d footnote - Candidacy for Licensed and Ordained Ministry**

The General Conference, ~~in response to expressions throughout the Church regarding homosexuality and ordination,~~ reaffirms the present language of the Discipline regarding the character and commitment of persons seeking ordination and affirms its high standards. ...

~~In The Social Principles, the General Conference has said that we “do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” Furthermore, the Principles state that “we affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two adults between a man and a woman.~~

*Rationale:* This footnote is adjusted to reflect proposed changes in ¶ 161.C and ¶ 161.G.

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

**Add new sub-paragraph after ¶ 329.3 - Ministry, Authority, and Responsibilities of Deacons**

¶ 329.4 In conferences where civil law permits a pastor to perform a same-sex marriage service, no deacon in full connection shall at any time be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union or blessing of same-sex couples, or of any couples. Each deacon shall have the right to exercise his or her conscience to refuse or agree when requested to perform any marriages, unions, or blessing as a matter of his or her individual religious liberty.

*Rationale:* Deacons currently have the ability to decide whether or not to perform a marriage, union or blessing of heterosexual couples. This ability would be extended to these services for same-sex couples where legal. The right to refuse such a service due to conscience is expressly protected.

**Add new sub-paragraph after ¶ 334.5 - Ministry, Authority, and Responsibilities of an Elder**

¶ 334.6 In conferences where civil law permits a pastor to perform same-sex marriage services, no elder shall at any time be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union or blessing of same-sex couples, or of any couples. Each elder shall have the right to exercise his or her conscience to refuse or agree when requested to perform such marriages, unions, or blessing as a matter of his or her individual religious liberty.

*Rationale:* Elders currently have the ability to decide whether or not to perform a marriage, union or blessing of heterosexual couples. This ability would be extended to these services for same-sex couples where legal. The right to refuse such a service due to conscience is expressly protected.

**Add new sub-paragraph after ¶ 340.2 - – Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors**

¶ 340.3 a. Each clergy shall have the right to exercise his or her conscience when requested to perform such marriages, unions or blessing as a matter of his or her individual religious liberty.

b. In conferences where civil law permits a pastor to perform same-sex marriage services, no clergy shall at any time be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples, or of any couples.

c. Clergy who cannot in good conscience continue to serve in a conference based upon that conference's standards for ordination regarding practicing homosexuals, may seek to transfer under ¶ 347, and shall be supported and assisted in that process. Similarly, clergy who cannot in good conscience continue to serve a particular church based on unresolved disagreements over same-sex marriage as communicated by the pastor and Staff-Parish Relations Committee to the district superintendent, shall be reassigned. All clergy with security of appointment shall continue under appointment by the bishop of the annual conference.

*Rationale:* Clergy would be allowed to perform or not perform a marriage, union or blessing of same-sex couples where legal. Clergy who desire transfer from conferences that ordain gay persons could transfer. Continued security of appointment for clergy is affirmed.

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

**Amend ¶ 341.6 - Unauthorized Conduct**

6. Ceremonies that celebrate ~~homosexual unions~~ same-sex marriage shall not be performed conducted by clergy or ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches on church-owned property unless the church decides by a majority vote of a Church Conference to adopt a policy to celebrate same-sex marriage on church property.

*Rationale:* This provision allows local church members to decide what is best for their congregational and missional context related to ceremonies of same-sex marriage on church property. A called Church Conference requires due notification of the meeting and invites all members to participate.

**Amend ¶ 415.6 - The Superintendency, Specific Responsibilities of Bishops**

Add: No bishop shall be required to ordain an elder or deacon, commission a deaconess, home missionary, or missionary, or license a local pastor who is a self-avowed practicing homosexual. The Jurisdictional College of Bishops shall provide for the ordination, commissioning, and licensing of all persons recommended by the Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference in the bounds of its jurisdiction. All clergy with security of appointment shall continue under appointment by the bishop of the annual conference.

*Rationale:* The religious liberty of bishops who cannot in good conscience commission, license or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals is protected. Provision is made for such persons in annual conferences where they are deemed to be duly qualified and approved candidates. Security of appointment for appointed clergy is continued.

**Add new sub-paragraph in ¶416 - Specific Responsibilities of Bishops**

Add: 8. The bishop shall neither require any pastor to perform nor prohibit any pastor from performing any marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples.

Add: 9. The bishop shall neither require any church to hold nor prohibit any church from holding a same-sex marriage service on church property.

*Rationale:* Clarity related to the boundaries of authority for bishops related to marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples enables clergy and congregations to know that their religious liberty will be affirmed in the future without penalty or unforeseen consequence.

**Add new sub-paragraph in ¶419 - Specific Responsibilities of District Superintendents**

Add: 13. The superintendent shall neither require any pastor to perform nor prohibit any pastor from performing any marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples.

Add: 14. The superintendent shall neither require any church to hold nor prohibit any church from holding a same-sex marriage service on church property or otherwise coerce, threaten, or retaliate against any pastor who exercises his or her conscience to perform or refuse to perform a same-sex marriage.

*Rationale:* Clarity related to the boundaries of authority for district superintendents related to marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples enables clergy and congregations to know that their religious liberty will be affirmed in the future without penalty or consequence.

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

**Add new sub-paragraph to ¶605 Annual Conference - Business of the Conference**

Add: 10. At any clergy session of an annual conference, the chairperson of the Board of Ordained Ministry shall, if directed by a vote of the Board of Ordained Ministry, present a motion regarding certification, ordination, and appointment of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Provided, however, that any clergy session of an annual conference that votes on such matters shall not, without the consent of the presiding bishop, take up any subsequent motion on that issue during any called or special session of annual conference held within 30 full calendar months from the date of such vote regardless of the outcome.

*Rationale:* After receiving a motion from the Board of Ordained Ministry related to the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals, the clergy session will not re-address this matter unless, the Bishop sees a critical need to re-address the question sooner.

**Amend ¶2702.1 – Chargeable Offenses**

**¶ 2702.** 1. A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶ 370), local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶ 2702.4) with one or more of the following offenses: (a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a ~~heterosexual a monogamous~~ marriage; (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, ~~including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies;~~ (c) crime; (d) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church; (e) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (f) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor; (g) child abuse; (h) sexual abuse; i) sexual misconduct including the use or possession of pornography, (j) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; (k) racial or gender discrimination; or (l) fiscal malfeasance.

*Rationale:* The language is adjusted to reflect proposed changes in ¶ 161.C, ¶ 161.G, ¶ 304.3, and ¶ 341.6.

**Amend ¶543.17 – Central Conference Powers and Duties**

17. In a central conference or provisional central conference using a language other than English, legislation passed by a General Conference shall not take effect until ~~twelve~~ 18 months after the close of that General Conference in order to afford the necessary time to make adaptations and to publish a translation of the legislation that has been enacted ...

*Rationale:* An additional six months give the central conferences the appropriate time to meet, translate the legislation and consider whether they want to make adaptations.

**A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD:  
The One Church Plan**

**Disciplinary Changes Related to General Board of Pension and Health Benefits**

*Note:* As previously noted above, these changes should be considered with any plan, or in the event that no plan secures majority support.

**Amend ¶1504, effective as of the close of the 2019 General Conference, by adding a new subparagraph 23 to read as follows:**

If a local church or charge in the United States changes its relationship to The United Methodist Church through closure, abandonment, or release from the trust clause pursuant to ¶2548, ¶2549, or otherwise, notwithstanding whether property with title held by the local church is subject to the trust (under the terms of ¶2501), the local church shall contribute a withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall determine the aggregate funding obligations of the annual conference using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider, from which the annual conference will determine the local church's share.

*RATIONALE:* Local churches that change the nature of their connection to the Church must pay a proportional fair share of the annual conference's aggregate unfunded pension liability using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider to account for the investment, longevity, and other risks they leave to the Church.

**Revise the Clergy Retirement Security Program ("CRSP"), which is incorporated by reference in ¶1504.1 of *The Book of Discipline*, including any needed revisions to CRSP section numbering, formatting, pagination, or Table of Contents, effective as of the close of the 2019 General Conference as follows:**

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits is directed by the General Conference to amend the Clergy Retirement Security Program such that active clergy participants who terminate their annual conference relationship under ¶360 of *The Book of Discipline* will be treated as terminated vested participants under the Clergy Retirement Security Program. The terminated vested participant's accrued pension benefits shall be secured and protected from future disruptions by converting such benefits to an actuarially equivalent account balance, using factors corresponding to those used when determining annual conference plan sponsor contributions to the Clergy Retirement Security Program. Such converted benefits, along with all other retirement account balances, shall be transferred to the United Methodist Personal Investment Plan, a voluntary defined contribution plan maintained by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits under ¶1504.2. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits is directed, authorized, and empowered to amend the Clergy Retirement Security Program effective as of the close of the 2019 General Conference and in the manner described above.

*RATIONALE:* The Clergy Retirement Security Program should be amended so active clergy who change their covenant are removed from the defined benefit and annuity risk pools for their former annual conference and the Church, and are provided an actuarially equivalent account balance benefit.