

Homosexuality: Book of Discipline statements

The General Conference – The highest legislative body of The United Methodist Church is the General Conference. As a representative democracy, the voting membership consists of an equal number of clergy and lay delegates elected by annual conferences around the world. It convenes every four years to determine the denomination's theology and polity. It is the only body that can speak officially for the church, and its decisions are reflected in The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church and The Book of Resolutions. The Book of Resolutions reflects the views of the church, but it is not church law.

¶ **4. Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church** – The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.

¶ **161.g Human Sexuality** – ...The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching...

¶ **304.3 Qualifications for Ordination** – Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals¹ are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. (*"Self-avowed practicing homosexual"* is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual).

¶ **341.6 Homosexual Wedding Ceremonies** "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

¶ **613 & ¶ 806.9 Responsibilities** General and Annual Conference boards, agencies, committees, commissions and councils will not give any funds to support any LGBT caucus or group to promote acceptance of or violate the commitment of the UMC "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends".

A Brief History of General Conference and Homosexuality

1972 – *Added statement the statement-*

"Homosexuals no less than heterosexuals are person of sacred worth, who need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. Further we insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured, although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."

1976 – *"no church funds shall go to support homosexual causes"*

1984 – adopted as a standard for ordained clergy is a commitment to *"fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness"*

In addition, "self avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates for the ministry or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."

1988 – *"we affirm that God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons."*

The General Conference created a committee to study homosexuality. All members were heterosexual.

1992 – The committee to study homosexuality reported back to General Conference that homosexuality is a normal human sexual variant that can be healthy and whole. The report was not adopted.

"We insist that all persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured."

"as United Methodists we are committed to support [basic human rights and civil liberties] for homosexual persons."

1996 – *ceremonies to celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by UM clergy or in UM churches.*

2000 – *"we implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends."*

2016 – The General Conference was unable to get any movement on this issue, so an unprecedented request was made to the Council of Bishops for advice on how we might move forward. The Council of Bishops response was to suggest forming a study group called the Commission on a Way Forward to offer options for the denomination's future life together. Furthermore, the delegates asked the Council of Bishops to schedule a called General Conference prior to

2020 to address the Church's stance on human sexuality. The called General Conference will occur February 23-26, 2019 in Saint Louis, Missouri.

The Decisions facing General Conference, February 23-26, 2019

What are some possible outcomes of General Conference 2019?

- Adoption of one of the plans as they are presented
- Adoptions of one of the plans after it is amended
- Adoption of only portions of the recommendations
- Adoption of other legislation that has been submitted outside of the three recommendations
- Defeat of all the recommendations keeping things the same

The Three Plans

The One Church Plan

- Removes the language from the discipline that says homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching
- “In the One Church Plan, no annual conferences, bishops, congregations, or pastors are compelled to act contrary to their convictions.”
- Pastors would be able to individually decide whether or not to preside over a same-sex marriage
- Annual Conferences and related Boards of Ordained Ministry, would have the authority over who they can ordain.
- Local churches would by default retain not allowing same-sex weddings on their premise. A local church can by a simple majority vote at a church conference vote to allow same-sex weddings on their premise if they desire.
- “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”
- Funding for bishops salaries will be provided at the Annual or Jurisdictional conference level.

The Connectional Plan

- Would create three connectional conferences defined by theology rather than geography
- Each connectional conference would create its own *Book of Discipline*, tailored to their theological perspectives
- The jurisdictional conferences would have first vote to choose which connectional conference they join
- If an annual conference wishes to choose differently than their jurisdictional conference they may do so
- If a local church wishes to choose differently than their annual conference they may do so
- This plan requires constitutional amendments in addition to General Conference approval (Must succeed with a 2/3 vote rather than simple majority, Annual Conferences must also vote on it to approve)
- Will take several years to implement

The Traditionalist Plan

- Would reaffirm the United Methodist Church’s present teachings on human sexuality
- Would call for enhanced accountability standards for clergy, bishops and annual conferences
- UM Clergy would not be allowed to preside at same-sex weddings and same-sex weddings would not be allowed on UM property
- Self-avowed, practicing homosexuals would not be eligible for ordination in the UMC
- Require bishops and Annual conferences to affirm that they will uphold the Discipline’s standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination
- Annual conferences not willing to affirm may form an “autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church” (ex: connected to the UMC with voice but not vote)
- Local churches can choose to go against their Annual Conference’s decision

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.