**We must keep our eyes on Jesus and the ministry of the church while we work through the situation at hand.**

The knowledge of what is taking place in the greater UMC varies from person to person. So, I am going to give a brief history as I address the current official position of the UMC on sexuality, marriage, and ordination as stated in the Book of Discipline 2016. The current position was put in place over a period of years as issues were addressed.

The Methodist Protestant Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, and The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, united in 1939 to become The Methodist Church.

In 1968, The Evangelical United Brethren and The Methodist Church united to become the United Methodist Church.

**General Conference (GC) 1972** saw the first conversations about the practice of homosexuality that led to a statement in the Book of Discipline.

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 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 Gods’ grace is available to all. Para. 161.G of the Nurturing Community section of the Social Principles (2016).

I believe this was an important starting point where grace and truth came together. John 1:17. Wesley has called us to spread **scriptural holiness** across the land.

**GC 1984** addressed clergy requirements with respect to homosexuality.

Paragraph 304.3 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 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 United Methodist Church.**

**GC 1996** provided this clarification: “‘Self-avowed practicing homosexual’ is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee or ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual.”

**GC 2004** added 2702.1 Chargeable offences: (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**…

**Para. 341.6** Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches. (wording in BOD 2016) Revised 060922 - Going Forward

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**On October 26, 2013 retired Bishop Melvin Talbert** came to the North Alabama Conference and performed a same-sex wedding for two gay men in Birmingham against the wishes of Bishop Wallace-Padgett. This did not take place in a United Methodist church. After a just resolution was accepted by all parties, all parties agreed to follow the teaching of the Book of Discipline. Retired bishop Talbert has since performed other same-sex weddings. This was the first public same-sex marriage performed by a UM bishop.

**GC 2016** – days before GC 2016 111 elders, candidates for ministry, etc. came out in a letter titled “ A LOVE LETTER TO OUR CHURCH FROM YOUR LGBTQI RELIGIOUS LEADERS”.

Another contentious GC took place. In an effort to avoid a church split, the **Commission on a Way Forward** was established to guide us forward on this issue. A special GC was recommended and took place in 2019.

**The Western Jurisdictional Conference 2016 saw the election of Karen Oliveto an openly gay married person to the office of Bishop.** On Friday July 15, 2016 Karen Oliveto was elected bishop on the 17 ballot of the Western Jurisdictional Conference. After the 16th ballot nominee Dottie Escobedo-Frank and Walter “Skip” Strickland both withdrew their names from the election leaving only Karen Oliveto on the ballot. On ballot 17 Karen Oliveto was unanimously elected with 88 votes with 12 abstentions (100 delegates).

https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/person-detail/2463386 "Bishop Oliveto is the first openly lesbian bishop in The United Methodist Church. Her wife, Robin Ridenour, a nurse anesthetist, is a deaconess in The United Methodist Church.”

**Judicial Council Decision 1341** declared that the consecration of a self-avowed practicing homosexual was a violation of church law. The Western Jurisdiction would have to engage an administrative or judicial process to address the matter. Karen Oliveto remains in the office of Bishop in the Mountain Sky Area (Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah and a small portion of Idaho).

**Wesley Covenant Association** – at a meeting in Chicago, Illinois, on Friday, October 7, 2016, over 1,700 people affirmed and approved the creation of the Wesleyan Covenant Association. The association is a coalition of congregations, clergy, and laity from across The United Methodist committed to upholding the traditional view of scripture on sexuality and marriage.

**The Northern Illinois Conference on the evening of June 4 (2017) commissioned an openly transgender individual named M. Barclay as a provisional deacon**. “Barclay is the first openly “non-binary trans person” to become a United Methodist deacon…” UM News June 5, 2017.

M. Barclay, a transgender person who identifies as neither male nor female and thus uses the pronoun “they,” was commissioned on Sunday (July 15, 2018) as the first non-binary member of the clergy in the United Methodist Church.

**2019 GC saw the Traditional Plan passed** by a small margin and the current language of the Book of Discipline was upheld. A disaffiliation paragraph was added to the Book of Discipline 2553 that allowed churches to leave the denomination under certain conditions.

General Conference 2019 was to settle the issue of sexuality, marriage, and ordination. The Traditional Plan was passed and affirmed the current wording of the Book of Discipline. At the end of GC 2019 the Western Jurisdiction was allowed by GC to have the last word. There statement addressed their intention Revised 060922 - Going Forward

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to continue full inclusion regardless of the decisions of General Conference. It was made clear at GC 2019 the only way forward was a church split.

So, it was determined by leaders of diverse theological positions that the only way forward was an amicable division. The **Protocol** was formulated by a group of theologically diverse leaders and was to be presented at GC 2020 (cancelled), 2021 (Canceled), and 2022 (cancelled). The Protocol would allow churches who wished to depart the UMC with property in hand could do so without penalty. A huge push back has taken place from both sides of the issue at the cancellation of GC2022. The Council of Bishops is working to provide an exit plan similar to the Protocol that will allow any church to leave the United Methodist Church but with a cost.

**Hope Church UMC Illinois hosted a Drag Queen Sunday - April 11, 2021** – featuring a sermon by Isaac Simmons in drag named “Penny Cost” a play on Pentecost. Isaac Simmons, 23, is the first openly gay man to be certified within the Illinois Great Rivers Conference and, as far as anyone can tell, the first drag queen certified candidate for ministry in the United Methodist Church Vermillion River District Committee on Ordained Ministry (DCOM). The video is still available on the church’s Facebook page. The **second Drag Queen Sunday took place June 5 Pentecost Sunday** where Isaac Simmons in full drag preached.

**Bishop Laurie Haller** of the Iowa Conference cast a vision titled “Leading Now and Into the Future – Our Vision” on 11/23/21 which allows for pastors and churches to violate the Book of Discipline’s teaching on marriage.

“As we lead now into the future, we desire to equip local congregations to do the ministry God is calling them to do. No one will be compelled or required to act contrary to their convictions, understanding of scripture, or conscience. Likewise, no one will be prevented from doing the ministry God is calling them to offer. **To put it clearly, pastors will be able to choose which weddings they officiate, as long as it is two consenting adults who have been counseled. Likewise, church leadership, in consultation with their pastors, will be able to determine their own policy regarding weddings**. Our ministry and witness to the world is stronger due to our connection. We will live into the trust we have in one another knowing our congregations and clergy are deeply engaged and informed by scripture, are convicted by the Holy Spirit, and are being responsible to the mission God has called us to – even when we don’t all agree, or our ministries are different.”

At least 11 of 54 Annual Conferences in the US including the entire Western Jurisdiction have policies in place that will allow practicing homosexuals to be certified as ministry candidates. This is a violation of the Book of Discipline. Clergy and laity serve on the Board of Ordained Ministry at the pleasure of the Bishop.

**Bishops and Boards of Ordained Ministry are acting contrary to and in violation of the General Conference and the Book of Discipline. Our Bishop has been diligent to uphold the Book of Discipline**. That is not the case of many bishops and Boards of Ordained Ministry across the country.

Since the announcement of the postponement of the 2022 General Conference, a large group of GC delegates signed an open letter promoting upcoming GC2024 and the changes they anticipate taking place with regards to the position of the UMC on homosexuality and the implementation of something akin to the One Church Plan where churches can operate based on their context. Do what works for your context. Revised 060922 - Going Forward

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So, we as a church have begun the discernment process to clarify who we are as a church and determine our path forward. The current Book of Discipline is very good. The UMC is moving away from its guidance at a fast pace. Current petitions to GC include changes to the BOD with reference to these sexuality issues.

**We must keep our eyes on Jesus and the ministry of the church while we work through the situation at hand.**

**Options to go forward:**

Remain United Methodist in its current and evolving state.

Wait for the **Protocol** to pass at GC 2024. The Judicial Council must approve the Protocol as well. Some of the Protocol’s past supporters are walking away. As of 06/09/22, some of the original signers of the Protocol have stated they will not support the Protocol in 2024 if brought to the floor of General Conference.

Paragraph 2548.2 of the Book of Discipline allows a church to withdraw and join another Evangelical Wesleyan movement. Our bishop is not allowing this paragraph to be used to disaffiliate.

Paragraph 2549 allows for church closure. This will not be allowed to be used for disaffiliation.

Paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline added at GC 2019 allows for disaffiliation related to sexuality issues. A Disaffiliation Plan has been put into place by the North Alabama Conference.

If we disaffiliate, we must determine where we will go. Possible options: Free Methodist Church? Global Methodist Church (GMC)? Other Wesleyan denomination or group? Independent?

**Draft disaffiliation plan for NAC 2023 Annual Conference**