

Listening Session #1 Sunday June 12th @ 4:00 Held in the Sanctuary –
Speaker Randy Hardy

Hi Nick,

Below are my answers to your questions – note that for the specific questions, I tried to answer specifically and for general questions, I answered accordingly. As related to Biblical interpretation, I perspective-commented, knowing that the Holy Spirit works in and through each of us differently on purpose.

Blessings,

Randy

Questions:

1. If the discipline states marriage is between Man & Woman – Why do churches not obey this and why are they not reprimanded by the Conference?

I don't think that I should speak for or make assumptions for other churches as related to this subject, or like-kinds. If there's a specific question as related to a specific instance within the NGC, I would be glad to pass it along to their DS to be addressed.

That said, in my church – McEachern UMC, I don't know of (or have heard of) any instance(s) relating to this question.

2. I completely accept that the discipline has not changed. But has the position of conference leadership changed on enforcement of the discipline?

First, it's SO refreshing to hear that you are aware of the fact that the Discipline hasn't changed, even though there's much misinformation “out there” that it has.

As far as Conference leadership changing any type of position relating to enforcement, I have not personally observed any “change” from the Bishop and Cabinet's previous statements

relating to uphold the Discipline. If there are specific instances within the NGC where leadership's enforcement have perceivably "changed", I'd be glad to pass those along to the Cabinet to be addressed.

3. If it's not about theological issues, what do you think all of this is about?

My opinion is that "theological issues" are a part of our current controversies, and that differing theological perspectives similar to our current controversies have been debated for many decades.

That said, there is another significant driving factor currently - the unprecedented trust clause release provision, available through section 2553 of our Discipline, for the first time since Wesley implemented it. This procedural release has incentivized some congregations to consider leaving the UMC, whether their desires to leave are rooted only in the "theological issues", or for various other reasons.

4. Will the United Methodist Church intend to ever revise the "Book of Discipline"?

Our UMC Book of Discipline can be (and is routinely) changed every four years at General Conference. No one can predict with certainty or for sure what changes we may or may not see at our next General Conference in 2024, nor can anyone predict with certainty passage of said requests for change(s).

5. How if we believe in the Bible can either of the Methodist church divisions survive? Much less both?

I am sorry, but I don't understand this question.

That said, I am a firm believer that with God all things are possible, so I believe survival is possible after division.

6. Choosing Unity – If the discipline is currently in the "corner of the conservative" – why?

Our Disciple is reflective of a majority vote on subject(s) contained therein, except that the Articles of Religion cannot be changed.

How do you support the move to change it?

Personally, I support the work of the people we all elect to represent us at General Conference and have adhered to their collective decision(s) as a loyal United Methodist lay member in the past.

How is it that those who are pushing for change see themselves as the united? I struggle with the idea that those who are driving the dis-unity or division are portrayed as the heroes. Please explain this.

Whether family, business, society, church, or other type of organized group and/or dynamic, I acknowledge, understand, and accept that *change* is actually a part of life`s natural progression. I don`t see *change* as always divisional. However, I do understand how the way we go about persuading *change(s)* could be. My prayer for the UMC is for unity, however I don`t know what that “unity” will ultimately look like, from God`s perspective.

7. Will anyone ever talk or have a list of the items being proposed to the discipline?

I am not aware of a published list/agenda for General Conference 2024 which indicates any specific proposals.

8. The perspective on interpretation of scripture seems to be the issue not the authority of scripture. Why does the leadership of the UMC not submit to the authority of the book of discipline and fulfil their vows?

As I was writing my book – *The Matter at Hand*, I felt that the Holy Spirit place this phrase on my heart “*Who amongst us – what man or woman, can take the entire Inspired Word of God and interpret it Infallibly?*”

If there is one amongst us who feels they are equipped to answer, “I can”, please ask them to contact me, as I have a lot of questions I’d like to have answered.

As for the UMC leadership “*not submitting to the authority of the book of discipline and fulfil their vows,*” I would like to hear more details and specifics of this statement – names and specific circumstances in the NGC?

(9) Jesus sat, ate, visited etc., with folks who were considered sinners, outsiders, undesirable. Why are we not willing to do the same with the LGBTQIA community? Are we not to emulate him?

I surely hope and pray that we would all be both followers of Christ as well as neighbor-lovers without judgement, thusly living out our life as Christ followers. I’m still reading and learning, but I have not yet found any sort of exclusion-exception in the Bible. Please forward those passages (as well as contextually supportive passages) to me if I have overlooked them. The answer to your question as I understand it is, “yes” we are to emulate Jesus.

(10) If any conference loses faith in any Bishop what is the process for removal?

I am not equipped to offer the details of “process for removal” of a Bishop in the UMC, however I believe reference can be found in our Discipline and/or contact our NGC office for specific information.

(11) In your book you say why can’t we all just get along. And you say let’s collaborate and move through this season together. How do you suggest we do this?

GREAT QUESTION!

I feel that if our leaders and our congregations would spend more time studying the subject of unity from a Biblical perspective, instead of promoting division(s), we`d have a much better chance of getting along, collaborating and moving through this season together.

There's a book out right now from Andy Stanley entitled "*Not in It to Win It*" that helps answer this question on a much deeper and thoughtful level. Please check it out!

It's the subtitle of the book that really nails it though.... "*Why Choosing Sides... Sidelines the Church*". Does it seem like choosing sides has done great harm to the UMC and has thusly sidelined many ministry opportunities; it does to me?

To that point, one of the saddest things I have personally observed around our conference (within all sized churches) is that more people usually come out to hear talks about potentially splitting, than attend the church's worship service and small groups.

I have much more to say about the choice to unify rather than divide, but in the interest of time...

9. Do Progressives believe churches are not open to all if they do not allow same sex marriages performed by Methodist pastors?

Humbly, I don't claim to know any person's (or group's) heart nor their deeply held beliefs, so I'd be remiss to answer on behalf of "Progressives" or any other labeled group. Although I am not a far left or far right leaning person theologically, I do have friends who are; I find it both educational and fascinating to hear their perspectives on questions like this and encourage you to ask your friends (who aren't exactly like you) that question to hear how they might respond in person.

10. Explain the constant use of pronouns in the UMC? Pronouns were heavily noticed at the last Annual Conference in Athens a few weeks ago.

I didn't really understand the pronoun usage at conference, at first. I asked my millennial kids about it after Conference, and they told me it's trending now for people to sometimes use pronouns at their school, within the workplace, or in other public settings as they introduce themselves to others. That said, I was honored to be on stage at conference to read the list of pastoral moves within District

#1...after I did that and as I sat back down, it dawned on me that I should have used a pronoun too:

“Good afternoon, my name is Randy Hardy. I am a proud United Methodist”.

Missed opportunity...maybe next time!

Previous Questions from our Perspective email address emailed in advance of listening session.

1. The question I would like to have answered is:

How do you reconcile 1 Corinthians 6:9-10:

"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

If there is no new heaven and new earth, then it is loving to allow people to live the lifestyle they choose. But we know that people who chose a life of sin will NOT inherit the kingdom. As a church, how are we loving them if we condone their lifestyle?

Quite a series of good questions - I would encourage the asker to set up a Bible Study group to wrestle these and related questions to the ground. Maybe ask your Pastor(s) to do a sermon series to complement the small group studies. I feel that to even attempt to answer complicated questions like these take much prayer, discernment, and contextual consideration.

For me...I did note that there`s a whole bunch of other subjects on the list to be considered as well, none of which seem to be ranked on any hierarchical level, so we shouldn`t “cherry pick” from the “*wrongdoer*” list ...right?

The following are ALL on the “*wrongdoer*” list from the selected scripture (1 Corinthians 6:9-10):

- *The sexually immoral*
- *idolaters*

- *adulterers*
- *men who have sex with men*
- *thieves*
- *the greedy*
- *drunkards*
- *slanderers*
- *swindlers*

2. So, my understanding of the "Great Divide" is ordainment of UMC Clergy Persons. My understanding is that it is the "living in the sin and practice of homosexuality" that is the issue that should disallow this practice. My question is this: How does "living in the sin" of homosexuality differ from "living in the sin of divorce and remarriage"? Our pulpits are filled with divorced and remarried persons. I know and love many of them. Will this be their future.

That's a great question that's been debated regularly.

The varied perspectives about the act of "*living in sin*" are certainly feeding this "*Great Divide*", as you called it.

So, how many like-kind sin-subjects are there, and why aren't they classified in the same category as same-sex marriage, for people who only point to that one? That's a great question to ask folks who point out just one sin or another exclusively, without considering the others as like-kind. The phrase you used "*living in sin*" is in itself much debated, due to how people interpret the way it should be applied. What constitutes "*living in sin*" marriage, divorce, and remarriage, or is there a much wider net? What about the subjects above that were illuminated from question#1...assuming they continue?

Desiring to learn, I recently asked a theologically conservative leaning/seasoned/young UMC youth pastor what he thought the most damaging "*ongoing sin*" is that's facing our society in real time today.

He said “*there`s actually several*”.

Me, thinking same-sex marriage and/or divorce + remarriage and/or women leaders and/or the other sins noted above were about to be illuminated, I was surprised...

“The ongoing sins of gossip, deformation of character, misinformation and the intentional omission of information are the worst ones in my opinion”, he said.

I didn't see that coming, but I learned a lot from that brief conversation. The next generation is watching us. My prayer is that we will be a more Christ-like example to our successors in ministry, as our interpretive debates continue.