

**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

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ministries without significant disruption or costly legal counsel related to their charters or articles of incorporation. Wespeth 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.

A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD: The Connectional Conference Plan

CONNECTIONAL CONFERENCE PLAN

Summary of Connectional Conference Plan

The Connectional Conference Plan reflects a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services. This plan creates three values-based connectional conferences that have distinctive definitions of accountability, contextualization and justice. Current central conferences have the choice of becoming their own connectional conference (up to five additional connectional conferences) or joining one of the three values-based connectional conferences. A redefined Council of Bishops focuses on ecumenical relationships and shared learning. Episcopal oversight, accountability, elections, assignments and funding occur within the College of Bishops of each connectional conference.

Features of Connectional Conference Plan:

- Five U.S. jurisdictions are replaced by three connectional conferences, each covering the whole country, based on theology including perspectives on LGBTQ ministry (i.e. progressive, unity, and traditional) (note: see page 50 of the report for a full description).
- Cross-connectional conference cooperation, relationships, and partnerships in mission and ministry continue as they do now, at the initiative of the entities involved. All connectional conferences would continue to support mission work and sustain ministry in the areas outside the U.S.
- General Conference is shortened and would still have authority over the shared doctrine and services of continuing general agencies. It would also serve as a venue for connecting the connectional conferences, worship, sharing of best practices/learning, and inspiration.
- Continuing general agencies include: Wespath, Publishing House, GCFA, Archives & History and parts of GBGM (as determined in consultation among the connectional conferences inside and outside the U.S.). Future structure of other general agencies would be decided based on which connectional conferences desire to participate in them, after a transition period. Any connectional conference could contract with any agency for fee-based services.
- The Council of Bishops houses ecumenical relations and functions as a collegial learning and nurturing body.
- Connectional conference Colleges of Bishops have authority for supervision and mutual accountability of bishops in their respective colleges.
- Each connectional conference elects and (in the U.S.) pays for its own bishops. Bishops outside the U.S. would continue to be supported by all U.S. annual conferences.
- Each connectional conference would create its own *Book of Discipline*, which would begin with The General Book of Discipline, including Articles of Religion, Confessions of Faith, the General Rules and other items that are commonly agreed upon by United Methodists. Each connectional conference also has the authority to adapt those items not included in *The General Book of Discipline*.
- The Judicial Council would continue as the supreme judicial body, with authority over all judicial matters based on the respective connectional conference Books of Discipline. The Judicial Council would consist of two persons elected by each connectional conference.
- Connectional conferences at their discretion could have separate connectional conference judicial courts with authority in rulings related to the connectional conference *Book of Discipline*. Such rulings could be appealed to Judicial Council.
- Justice ministries related to racism and sexism would be organized at the connectional conference level and held accountable by the general church. During the 2021-25 quadrennium, GCORR and GCSRW would assist in the development of principles and benchmarks for connectional conferences to measure

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efforts to combat racism and sexism. Quadrennial reports would be made by each connectional conference to a Standing Committee on Connectional Conferences (see below).

- Central conferences have the choice of becoming their own connectional conference with the same powers as U.S. connectional conferences, or have the option of joining a U.S. connectional conference. U.S. connectional conferences joined by a central conference become a global instead of a U.S. connectional conference. Annual conferences that disagree with the decision of their central conference could vote to join a different connectional conference than their central conference. The central conferences in Africa could decide to unite in forming one African connectional conference (an option that is being discussed currently by African leadership)
- In addition to the shared doctrine and shared services, each connectional conference has its own structure, agencies, and method of financing its ministry and the shared services, as well as support for bishops and annual conferences outside the U.S.
- Each connectional conference has its own policies regarding LGBTQ weddings and ordination.
- Each connectional conference sets its own standards for ministerial credentialing and list of approved schools/seminaries.
- Jurisdictional conferences would have the first level vote regarding connectional conference affiliation. Annual conferences that disagree with the decision of their jurisdiction may decide to affiliate with a different connectional conference. No local church is required to take a vote unless it decides to join a different connectional conference than its annual conference.
- Jurisdictional property would belong to the connectional conference chosen by the jurisdiction for affiliation. Church-owned or church-related entities could change their affiliation to a different connectional conference, to multiple connectional conferences, or to no connectional conference based on the bylaws governing each institution.
- When the connectional conferences are organized and put into effect, jurisdictions and central conferences would cease to exist, unless a connectional conference decides to include a mid-level judicatory in its structure. In that case, it would be encouraged to consult with other connectional conferences to use a different name than jurisdiction or central conference for such a mid-level judicatory.
- Central conferences would be authorized to elect bishops in 2020, as scheduled, unless they determine otherwise. Jurisdictions and any central conferences not electing bishops in 2020 would have the mandatory retirement age of bishops waived until 2022 in order to avoid a potential mismatch in the number of bishops for each branch.
- The blanket tax exemption (501(c)3) would move to each connectional conference, filed with the assistance of GCFA. GCFA is being asked to provide an estimate for legal costs of implementing this plan and a plan for funding such costs.
- A Standing Committee on Connectional Conferences would be established by the 2020 General Conference to help the Council of Bishops facilitate cross-connectional conference connections and cooperative ministry. Legislation for this would be written by the Transition Team and submitted for the 2020 General Conference.
- General Conference 2024 would be postponed to 2025 to allow time for the transition. This would disconnect succeeding General Conferences from the U.S. election cycle.

A CONVERSATION WITHIN THE COMMISSION ON A WAY FORWARD: THE TRADITIONALIST PLAN

Important Note:

The request to include a full Traditionalist Model was received by the Commission on a Way Forward just prior to its last meeting, which began on May 14, 2018. Members of the Commission on a Way Forward registered concern that the time available did not allow for the full conciliar process utilized for the other two plans offered by the Commission on a Way Forward. The One Church Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan both received intensive and comprehensive participation from the Commission and the Council of Bishops over an extended period of time. While there was some support within both the Commission and the Council of Bishops for a Traditionalist Model, the support was modest enough in both groups to discontinue the Commission's earlier work on this model. In order to serve the May, 2018 request from the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward resubmits the sketch sent to the Council of Bishops in November, 2017 as our work on the Traditionalist Model along with the history of this work and its implications for various bodies in The United Methodist Church.

History of Traditionalist Plan:

- The Commission on a Way Forward developed a sketch of a Traditional Model that was submitted with the sketches of the One Church Model and the Multi-Branch plan in November, 2017
- It was reported to the Commission on a Way Forward that the Council of Bishops did not vote on or express any preference on the models but when asked which model(s) the Commission should develop, both the One-Church sketch and the Multi-Branch sketch were the focus.
- The One Church sketch and the Multi-Branch sketch were each developed into full plans by the Commission on a Way Forward for consideration by the Council of Bishops for their February, 2018 meeting. The Multi-Branch sketch later was titled the Connectional Conference Plan.
- At the April 29 - May 4, 2018 meeting of the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward was asked to provide a Traditional Plan. The Commission on a Way Forward was asked to develop this plan by the end of its May 14-16 meeting.

Summary of the Traditionalist Plan (as presented to the November Council of Bishops Meeting):

Primary Action: Accountability to the current *Book of Discipline* language

Disciplinary Language and Implications:

- Broaden the definition of self-avowed practicing homosexual to include persons living in a same-sex marriage or civil union or persons who publicly state that they are practicing homosexuals.
- Mandate that any just resolution shall include a commitment not to repeat the offense.
- Require every annual conference to certify that they will uphold, enforce, and maintain the *Discipline's* standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination.
- Annual conferences that did not so certify would be encouraged to form something similar to an "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church." As of 2021, annual conferences who could not so certify could no longer use the United Methodist name and logo, and they could no longer receive any funds from The United Methodist Church.
- Require bishops (active and retired) to certify that they will uphold, enforce, and maintain the *Discipline's* standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination. Active bishops who did not so certify would not be eligible to receive compensation for expenses as of 2021, and would be encouraged to join the "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church" formed by the above annual conferences.

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- Local churches that disagreed with their annual conference's decision to not enforce the Discipline's standards could vote to remain with the UMC.
- Local churches that disagreed with their annual conference's decision to enforce the Discipline's standards could vote to withdraw from the UMC and unite with the "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church."
- Clergy who could not maintain the *Discipline's* standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination would be encouraged to join the "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church."

The effects of the Traditionalist Plan on each segment of The United Methodist Church

Local Church:

- Local churches would not be required to vote.
- Local churches that disagreed with their annual conference's decision to not enforce the *Discipline's* standards could vote to remain with the UMC.
- Local churches that disagreed with their annual conference's decision to enforce the *Discipline's* standards could vote to withdraw from the UMC and unite with the "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church."

Clergy:

- Clergy who could not maintain the *Discipline's* standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination would be encouraged to join the "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church."
- Mandate that any just resolution shall include a commitment not to repeat the offense.
- Clergy would surrender their credentials if found guilty of breaking provisions of the Book of Discipline related to same-gender marriage.
- The expectation is that clergy who cannot conform to the provisions of the *Book of Discipline* related their identity as self-avowed, practicing homosexuals or the performance of same-sex weddings would be expected to leave. The process of leaving would have to be developed in accordance to the Constitution.

Annual Conferences:

- Require every annual conference to certify that they will uphold, enforce, and maintain the *Discipline's* standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination.
- Annual conferences that did not so certify would be encouraged to form something similar to an "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church." As of 2021, annual conferences who could not so certify could no longer use the United Methodist name and logo, and they could no longer receive any funds from The United Methodist Church.

Bishops:

- Require bishops (active and retired) to certify that they will uphold, enforce, and maintain the *Discipline's* standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination. Active bishops who did not so certify would not be eligible to receive compensation for expenses as of 2021, and would be encouraged to join the "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church" formed by the above annual conferences.