

Special General Conference – February 23-26, 2019

Background: Currently, the denomination's stance on homosexuality includes bans on same-sex unions and the ordination of "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy. In recent years, a number of United Methodists have publicly defied those prohibitions while other church members have threatened to bolt unless those rules are enforced.

The One Church Plan honors the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church and that no annual conferences, bishops, congregations or pastors are "compelled to act contrary to their convictions."

Key issues of the legislation include eliminating the Book of Discipline language, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." Also deleted is the requirement that ordained clergy not be "self-avowed practicing homosexuals." Each annual conference board of ordained ministry and clergy session may determine standards for ordination or certification, including standards related to human sexuality.

Where laws in civil society define marriage as union between two adults, no United Methodist elder or deacon is required to celebrate or bless a same-sex union. But a clergy person cannot be prohibited from performing same-sex marriages, unions or blessings.

Clergy who cannot in good conscience continue to serve in a conference or church based on the standards for ordination regarding homosexuals may seek to transfer. All clergy with security of appointment shall continue under appointment by the bishop of the annual conference.

Local church members can decide what is best for their congregational and missional context related to same-sex marriage on church property. Local churches must vote — in a church conference open to all members — to allow their property to be used for a same-sex ceremony.

The Connectional Conference Plan allows churches, clergy and bishops to join a non-geographic body based on belief. It is the plan that came out of the commission that was set up by the bishops in 2016 to help us move forward. Unfortunately, this plan requires so many amendments to the United Methodist constitution, it will likely not move forward at the conference.

The Traditionalist Plan seeks to strengthen and enforce the rules against LGBTQ clergy and Reconciling churches. Progressive conferences, such as ours which covers the northern half of California and most of Nevada, would be invited or forced to leave if we refuse to certify that we would enforce the strengthened rules. This plan is mean-spirited, punitive, and does not reflect the love of God. Unfortunately, it has support, which is why we are in this position as a denomination in the first place.

The Simple Plan removes restrictions against same-sex unions and ordination of gay clergy without forcing the hand of those who are still wrestling with the idea of the full inclusion of LGBTQAI+ persons in the church. It was added by petition and there has not been much time to promote it. It's based on our Wesleyan teachings (*UM General Rules*), "First Do No Harm..."

The Modified Traditional Plan is a revision of the Traditional Plan, which the Judicial Council found had several petitions that would need to be changed to avoid violating the church constitution.

	One Church Plan	Connectional Conference Plan	Traditionalist Plan
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One Church Plan takes a relational and compatibilist approach to unity. The restrictions underlying current conflicts are deemed “non-essential matters” over which we can agree to disagree, and thus are removed from the Book of Discipline. This plan emphasizes our external mission by removing internal conflict. No change to structure of UMC. No division of the UMC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectional Conference Plan creates new structures to provide space between those who disagree about Christian ethics regarding same sex marriage and suitability for ordained ministry. Three overlapping “Connectional Conferences” defined by rules concerning same sex marriage will replace today’s five Jurisdictional Conferences defined by distinct geography. These Connectional Conferences would be separate legal entities (501(c)3 organizations) but deemed part of one UMC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditionalist Plan retains, strengthens and enforces current prohibitions on same sex marriage and gay ordination. This plan both invites and forces Annual Conferences who are progressive on matters of same sex marriage to leave the UMC to create new denomination. This plan allows other Annual Conferences and/or Local Churches to leave and create new denomination(s) for any reason. These new “Self-Governing Methodist Churches” would be eligible for concordat relationship and token representation at General Conference.
Rules regarding ministry with and by married gay persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removes language stating that “practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” While this statement is removed, it is not replaced with any specific affirmation. Neutralizes language in Social Principles concerning civil marriage such that the UMC globally neither prohibits nor affirms same sex marriage. Removes prohibitions against ceremonies celebrating civil unions or same sex marriage. Removes prohibition against gay ordination. Rules may be set by Boards of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session suitable to each Annual Conference. Our standard of Christian sexual ethics calling for “celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage” will be applied equally to gay and straight clergy. <u>Intends no more trials.</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each of the three new Connectional Conferences would make their own rules in this area (as well as certain other administrative areas). It is expected that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Conference similar to the new Traditionalist Plan, Unifying Conference would be similar to the new One Church Plan, and Progressive Plan would provide full affirmation of married gay Christians. Rules and trials would remain a possibility, but a sorting process would place Annual Conferences (ACs), Local Churches (LCs), Bishops and Clergy into a Connectional Conference that matches their belief and thus <u>intends to reduce the number of trials</u> vs. our current situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The UMC would continue to proclaim that “practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” Current definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” would be further detailed so as to tighten up enforcement. Minimum penalties established for pastors to be suspended for one year on first violation and expulsion for a second violation. Accountability for bishops would move from regional Jurisdictional College of Bishops to new global structures to enforce uniformity. Annual Conference (by vote), Bishops and members of Boards of Ordained Ministry would all certify that they support and enforce these rules relating to same sex marriage and gay ordination. Taken together, these rules will <u>increase the number of trials.</u>
Freedom of Conscience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where legal civilly, UMC pastors would be allowed but not forced to celebrate civil unions or to conduct same sex wedding services. Annual Conference processes and bishops may ordain qualified gay candidates, but no one is forced to do so. Annual Conferences (i.e., equal lay and clergy voices) may make an advisory statement to inform any such new policies. Adds new provisions to protect freedom of conscience for United Methodists and to bar interference by bishops and district superintendents in the decisions of clergy and local congregations. Provides that same sex weddings will not be celebrated in church buildings unless the local congregation has voted for it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is expected that freedom of conscience (specific to same sex marriage and gay ordination) would apply primarily to the Unifying Conference. In other words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Connectional Conference would strictly enforce rules against same sex marriage and gay ordination (similar to the new Traditionalist Plan), Unifying Connectional Conference would operate very similar to the new One Church Model with explicit guarantees for freedom of conscience. Progressive Connectional Conference would expect that all annual conferences would willingly ordain qualified gay candidates, that all pastors would be expected to conduct gay weddings for qualified couples (i.e., on same basis as straight weddings), and that all local churches would willing host gay weddings (i.e., on same basis as straight weddings). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Conference (by vote), Bishops and members of Boards of Ordained Ministry will be required to certify that they support and enforce these rules relating to same sex marriage and gay ordination. Annual Conference must certify that Bishop and Boards of Ordained Ministry are following through. Bishops who dissent or who fail to lead their Annual Conference (AC) to follow through may be reported for disciplinary proceedings. General Conference on Finance and Administration (GCFA) to track and enforce this requirement on Annual Conferences including withholding funds and barring use of UMC name and cross-and-flame logo.
Impact on Central Conferences outside of USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change regarding same sex marriage or ordination is forced on a Central Conference by this legislation. No change in practice is expected in Africa, Philippines or Eastern Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Conferences will have to vote and they may either (a) convert to a geographic Connectional Conference (new name, but all current rules in effect) or (b) join one of the ideologically-defined Connectional Conferences (Traditional, Unifying or Progressive) arising from the US context. This legislation does create new options for individual Annual Conferences or even Local Churches to opt out of the choice made by their Central Conference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change regarding to same sex marriage or ordination is forced on a Central Conference by this legislation. Structure remains the same. Annual Conferences, Bishops and Boards of Ordain Ministry have the same obligation to certify as described above for Jurisdictional Conferences. This legislation creates new options for individual Annual Conferences or even Local Churches to opt out of the choice made by Central Conference.
Impact on Annual Conferences (AC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change to structure. Boards of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session of each Annual Conference would have option but no requirement to address standards for ordained ministry of qualified married gay candidates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This plan envisions three annual conferences – one per connectional conference – overlaying all US geography. Borders would be re-mapped for full coverage.. Annual Conferences would have the option of agreeing or disagreeing with the alignment of their former Jurisdictional Conference with a specific new Connectional Conference. It is anticipated that most annual conferences would opt to join the Unifying Conference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change to structure; however, it is anticipated that 10 or more Annual Conferences would either opt out or be forced out of the UMC. It is further anticipated that each Annual Conference would need to cope with some number of Local Churches opting out the AC’s alignment – some churches would opt to go back to the UMC and others would opt to leave altogether to join a new Self-Governing Methodist Church.

Impact on Local Churches (LC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local church is not required to vote. If a local church wanted to host gay weddings, its church conference would need to take action before the first ceremony. Local leaders have maximum flexibility to discern need and timing for such action. Local Church Staff Parish Relations Committee may communicate their congregation's preferences for appointments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Church will be given formal voting process by which they may dissent from their Annual Conference's chosen alignment and then chose a different Connectional Conference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Churches may acquiesce to their Annual Conference's decision to remain or leave the UMC, and they may majority-vote to remain UMC if their AC leaves. Any group of 50 or more Local Churches may form a new Self-Governing Methodist Church and remain quasi-connected via agency partnerships and concordat representation at General Conference.
Impact on General Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change to the UMC's current of connectional ministry via general boards and agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This plan assumes the various Connectional Conferences have different levels of support – and in some cases no support – for specific general agencies. When these conferences are formed, they will discern which agencies to support. This will mean different levels of general church apportionments for each connectional conference. This plan is written so that certain agencies will be supported equally by all the US-based connectional conferences: Wespath, GCFA, Archives and History, UMCOM and some to-be-determined parts of General Board of Global Missions. This plan assumes that certain agencies and funds may not be supported by all Connectional Conferences' apportionment giving: General Board of Church & Society, Discipleship Ministries, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Ministerial Education Fund, Black College Fund, and Africa University Fund., This plan eliminates GCORR and GCSRW. However, these would be continued through 2025 to assist the three Connectional Conferences in creating some other approach to fulfilling the UMC's historic commitment to racial and gender equity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change to the UMC's current of connectional ministry via general boards and agencies. <p><i>[Note: Loss of Annual Conferences and Local Churches would reduce connectional giving substantially and thus sharply decrease connectional ministries provided through our General Agencies. However, it is difficult to predict how this loss which is a feature of the Traditionalist Plan would compare to whatever loss may be an unintended by-product of the other two plans or how it would compare to a negative reaction if no changes are made at GC2019. Whatever loss there may be in terms of general agency outputs will be even greater assuming that connectional support for the Episcopal Fund remains constant.]</i></p>
Impact on Bishops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change forced on bishops. Their conscience rights are protected. It could be awkward for a bishop assigned to an Annual Conference that doesn't share the opinion of the assigned annual conference, so this will be a factor in episcopal assignments. An extra bishop will be provided for the ordination service if needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bishops will need to select which Connectional Conference to join. There could be mismatch between number of episcopal areas in a Connectional Conference and the number of bishops choosing to affiliate with it. There could be ideological mismatch between some individual bishops and their currently assigned episcopal area. Primary accountability of bishops will be lodged in ideologically-defined Connectional Conferences' Colleges of Bishops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bishops will be required to certify they support and will uphold the current restrictive language and prohibitions in the Book of Discipline. Bishops will lose some flexibility they currently have in settling disputes within their episcopal area via the Just Resolution process. Accountability of bishops will be partially globalized instead of the currently all regionalized process. Bishops may be forced into early retirement or placed in involuntary leave.
Impact on Clergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change in practices forced on clergy. Their conscience rights are protected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clergy will need to select which Connectional Conference to join. There could be mismatch between number of local charges in a Connectional Conference and the number of clergy choosing to affiliate with it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clergy persons will be required to uphold the current restrictive language and prohibitions in the Book of Discipline, and they will face more certain disciplinary actions if they are unwilling to do so. More trials.
Decisioning Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GC2019 majority vote to remove restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GC2019 two-thirds vote to modify UMC conferencing structure (General Conf) AC2019 two-thirds vote to modify UMC conferencing structure (Annual Conf) JC2020 majority vote to align with one of three new conferences (Jurisd Conf) AC2020 majority vote to align with same or different conference LC2020 majority vote to align with same or different conference (Local Chrch Conf) CC2022 votes on new adaptable Books of Discipline (Connectional Conf) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GC2019 majority vote to add these additional rules AC2019 majority votes to certify upholding all rules related to homosexuality JC2020 votes to remap territory to cover departing annual conferences Possible AC2019 votes to leave UMC Possible Local Church (LC) votes in 2019 or 2020 to leave UMC
Beginning of new era	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final decision Feb 2019 Effective date for new rules Jan 2021 (after cooling off period). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final decision for change by March 2020 Realignment decisions 2021-2022 Organizing new Connectional Conferences Fall 2022 New cycle for quadrennial General Conferences 2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final decision Feb 2019 Effective date Feb 2019; and GCFA enforcement begins Jan 2021 Enforcement towards uniformity 2021-2023 First General Conference with new concordat reps 2024