

**Will there be another vote on this topic in 2020?**

Most likely, yes. General conference is the only body that can speak for the denomination or change legislation. If there are legislative pieces sent to general conference, it will indeed be discussed again. It would follow the same format as all general conferences in that it would first be in legislative committee and then, if passed, go to plenary. One general conference cannot bind another general conference.

**Can the decision be reversed?**

It could be reversed at any general conference or if the Judicial Council deems any parts of the decision unconstitutional.

**Tell us more about the April Judicial Council meeting.**

The Judicial Council is the highest judicial body or “court” in the UMC and operates like the Supreme Court. Nine members are elected by General Conference. The Judicial Council determines the constitutionality of acts or proposed acts of the General Conference. Prior to the special-called 2019 General Conference the judicial council ruled on the three plans that came from the Commission on A Way Forward. Some parts of those plans were ruled unconstitutional. Amendments were made at the special-called GC but time did not allow for the plans to be fully changed and amended. The Traditional Plan was passed and through a majority vote was referred to Judicial Council for a ruling. Although the Traditional Plan was passed as a bundle, each petition will be reviewed by the JC. They will meet April 23-26. Any petitions that the Judicial Council rules as constitutional will be implemented in January 2020.

**Will the traditional plan be completely nullified if parts are unconstitutional?**

Only the parts that are ruled constitutional will be implemented in January of 2020.

**If the Judicial Council rules parts of the Traditional Plan UNconstitutional what will become of those parts?**

Those parts will not be upheld by Bishops and annual conferences and will not go into effect in January of 2020.

**Are there any new requirements placed on the Alabama - West Florida Annual conference in order to comply with any of the recently adopted legislation? What are they?**

No. We are simply called to follow the *Book of Discipline*. There were no amendments passed that would require a vote of the annual conference.

**Did anything about the Traditional Plan change the church position that we consider LGBTQ persons people of sacred worth and welcome them in our churches?**

No, our social principles still state this belief and we affirm this stance. It states, “We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God,” and that all persons need the ministry of the church. There is space for all people in the life of the church. The decision-making process was hurtful. Several in the room may be feeling that hurt and in the period of Lent perhaps we should consider give up discussing General Conference.

**Can you explain the exit plan that was passed?**

An amended exit plan (referred to as Taylor) for churches passed but it may or may not be constitutional. We will know more in April. It would allow for local churches to exit with their property and assets if 2/3 of the members vote to do so and they care for pension liabilities.

**Can you speak to the pension/Wespath plan that was passed first?**

Exiting churches must pay their fair share of pension liability. Exiting clergy retain their pension but it is converted to limit further liability to the conference. The Wespath Website has a tremendous Q and A section as a result of GC2019. Visit [www.wespath.org](http://www.wespath.org) and click on Wespath FAQ's: General Conference 2019. A pastor's pension cannot be taken from them. What you have earned is yours.

**Will we take a vote at annual conference to support or not support what happened at general conference?**

No. The general conference speaks for the United Methodist Church, including each annual conference through delegate representation. No amendments came from the general conference that require a vote of the annual conferences. The Annual Conference session is designed to perform the business of each annual conference and celebrate ministry. Any discussion about our conference voting would be ruled out of order.

**Within AWF, what congregations and clergy are currently members of the WCA? Can you speak to what you anticipate coming from their meeting the week after Easter?**

That is something the annual conference does not keep track of. The WCA is an independent organization and is not an official part of the UMC. Reconciling Ministries is another group with a different perspective. We have people from this conference involved in both but I would not be able to speak to that. I also would not be able to anticipate their discussions at the next meeting as I don't keep track of those meetings. Throughout my ministry I have not been a part of any independent group. I minister to all people.

**A lot of time and money was spent on the Commission on a Way Forward and the Special General Conference, only to end up as divided, if not more so, than before, and we will have another General Conference next year. What steps would you and/or the Bishops be willing to take to try and avoid an outcome as divisive as the one we just experienced?**

At the conclusion of General Council, the Council of Bishops met and I assure you nobody wants to repeat what we just had. We are going to have to work together on how we will move forward and it's evident we will have to move forward in different ways. How are we going to work together to give everyone the space or decision to be the pastor in the church God is calling them to be? The proposed Connectional Church Plan was complicated but is really where we are today. In St. Louis, we were not a very good witness to the world. When we gather in Minnesota in 2020, how will we be the church? There are people in every church that have differing opinions on the issue. People have said that this is an 1844 moment which is when the church split over slavery. We are still living in this tension. I am passionate about the least, lost and the lonely and want to help people work through pain and division.

**Is there a method to separate the North American church from the global denomination? Has thought been given to this?**

There has been talk for years about making the North American Conference another central conference where they can amend the Discipline. The Connectional Conference Plan made provisions for this idea. It could gain traction going into 2020 although it was extremely complex. The UMC outside of the US are divided into Central conferences, Europe, Asia, Africa, etc. So, do we need to create another central conference in the US?

**It seems that the global church, which is gaining membership (and delegates), is extremely conservative. I'm worried this could impact women in ministry and potentially reverse that progress we have made.**

There are many United Methodist women in other countries who have leadership roles such as a district superintendent and, of course, active clergy. They play a vital role in ministry and I don't foresee this being an issue. Many African delegates are women. My sense of the global church is that placing women in ministry is a real emphasis.

**Do you think the United States UMC is in a different place than the global church?**

The topic of human sexuality is much more of a reality in the US and other areas as opposed to Africa. Our cultures, in many ways, are vastly different. I could not speculate on vote counts between the US and global church but there is more progression, in general, in the US. One thing I would like us to learn from the global church is that they are making disciples. They are growing and we are not.

**How will future General Conferences handle the growth from outside of the US?**

Any specific comments on this would be speculation. It will continue to be a challenge for general conferences to acknowledge. Our delegation could speak better to this since they are the voting members representing our annual conference.

**Since the differences within the denomination are essentially irreconcilable; what are the chances that the General Conference of 2020 would divide the church into two denominations (one progressive and one orthodox)?**

Any comments on this would be speculation. A lot of time and effort was spent on this question prior to 2019 and here we all are. Does the possibility exist? Yes. But if we spent as much time talking and writing about ministry and leading souls to Jesus, we'd be in a much better place.

**I'm concerned about people leaving the United Methodist Church. What we can do?**

I share your concern. I would encourage people not to leave based on emotion at this moment. This is where the local church is vital to sustaining and supporting our members. A local United Methodist Church has a wonderful opportunity to be visible and active in their respective local communities and simply "do ministry." This topic is one part of our bigger membership vows. It is imperative that our clergy have strong relationships with members to navigate these waters. If we will focus more on our mission as opposed to one specific topic, it will enable us to walk through these storms together. There is no perfect denomination and no perfect church. Each

one has their own issues and usually if it's not this, it's something else. As I said in the Lenten challenge, talk to one another, listen to one another, step outside of your comfort zones. When I go and pray with people from other nations, it is a little bit uncomfortable, but when the holy spirit moves I feel blessed. Think about our response to Hurricane Michael and the recent Lee County tornadoes: where would we be without our connection.?

### **What efforts are being made to heal the divide?**

I think this speaks well to the last question. If we can change our focus for now, we can allow our hearts to see the numerous things our UM churches do each day to impact lives. First, time does heal. Second, my focus is on how I can be a Bishop to all people and keep our conference united. I have two clergy meetings this weekend to talk more about that. I want to hear from our clergy who are on the front lines of ministry about how I can walk with them and help them in this journey. To simply answer your question, we must love more. We have 40 days leading to Easter, and it's a good time to focus on Christ. Christ is the healer for our hearts, souls, and minds.

### **How can we make places for LGBTQ persons in our churches and communities?**

Our social principles remind us that we welcome all into our churches. I think it's important now, more than ever, that this message is clearly communicated at the local church level. Whether you agree with the lifestyle or not, it is not our place to filter church attendees or members. Phrases like "In Christ I love you" and "Jesus does not reject you" are helpful. If you have a strong LGBTQ presence in your congregation, it might be helpful to offer a meeting to discuss this with this community to hear how they are feeling (whether it is Church and Society or another group).

### **Is the Alabama-West Florida Conference going to abide and honor the vote of the delegates to uphold the Traditional Plan, which includes affirming scripture that marriage is between one man and woman and not ordaining LGBTQ clergy?**

I have taken two vows as an elder and a Bishop that I will uphold the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. I have and will uphold the discipline now and in the years to come.

### **What happens if those in our connection do not follow the direction of the General Conference? For instance, a female Elder (self-avowed and is married to a female) was elected as a Bishop in the Western Jurisdiction. According to our Discipline, she should not be serving in any capacity as an Elder and is now elected as a Bishop. No one has done anything about this. Some Boards of Ministry in some of our conference have vowed to not vet candidates for ministry regarding the qualification as prescribed in the Discipline.**

The Western Jurisdiction is responsible for electing their Bishops. The only thing I have control over is the AWF Conference and I am now the president of the College of Bishops (SEJ). Jurisdictions elect bishops and discipline bishops. Perhaps we can be a light to the rest of the denomination.

### **Under the Traditional Plan, can a celibate self-avowed homosexual be ordained in the UMC?**

Yes, because they are not practicing.

**Under the Traditional Plan, is there any limitation on self-avowed homosexuals serving in non-ordained leadership positions in a UMC congregation?**

No. Anyone in their local church may serve in a leadership capacity.

**Do you agree with and support the current exclusion and restrictive language of LGBTQ from ordination and appointment based ONLY on the fact that the couple is not heterosexual? Will you support future actions to make the UMC truly inclusive and full acceptance of the LGBTQ community?**

As your Bishop, it is my role to be a bishop to all people. In this conference we have various theological perspectives. I don't have a vote at general conference so I would direct your question to the ten delegates that did. At annual conference we will also be voting on new delegates, four clergy and four laity. I do not feel it is my role to endorse a specific plan. As soon as I do that, I will have divided our conference and sides would then be taken. When we go down roads of trying to legislate human emotion, it's a slippery slope and is divisive.

**Can you speak to the rumors that members of the US delegation engaged in bribery by purchasing votes from African and Russian delegates?**

The General Conference Committee on Ethics [announced it found no evidence to substantiate a delegate's allegation of bribery](#); A delegate raised a concern regarding an alleged violation of the Rules of Order of the General Conference and moved to refer it directly to the Committee on Ethics. It was referred by a one-fifth vote of the body. The Committee on Ethics brought in several people for conversation. At this time, the committee is unable to substantiate the allegation. One of the African Bishops shared that they get \$200 per diem and the average wage is \$30 a month. They are going to try to hold on to that money and take it back home and they will look everywhere they can to find people who will feed them for free. Nobody buys their votes.

**How should clergy respond when parishioners ask if we are not a church of Closed Minds, Closed Hearts, and Closed Doors?**

I can understand how some would feel this way. Through the ministry we do on a daily basis, I think we can prove that we are open. Not only to people but open to the spirit moving in us to further our walk with Christ. As I've mentioned, our social principles support that we are, indeed, open to all peoples.

**Does the Methodist Church still condemn sinful behavior?**

Each of us sin, probably on a daily basis. I would encourage those focused on sin to look within and see how they can be a better Christian. I would encourage you to focus on your own spiritual journey vs someone else's.

**Will a new Book of Discipline be printed?**

No, an addendum will be distributed since we are quickly approaching General conference 2020.