



## Bishop's Spouse 'Comes Out' as Transgendered Minister

**O**n last Fall's "National Coming Out Day," the United Methodist Church's Baltimore-Washington Conference announced that one of its ministers, **Michael Johnson**, was "coming out" as transgendered. Rev. Johnson is the longtime husband of Bishop **Peggy Johnson**, who oversaw the Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences from 2008 until her September 1 retirement. After the bishop's retirement, her husband "decided that I would now live openly as Mary Johnson."

**Currently, the UMC's governing Book of Discipline does not address transgenderism.**

It is precisely *because of* Christian compassion that we should question how Baltimore-Washington officials and liberal caucus activists have celebrated Michael/Mary's "story of transitioning to trans woman."

We have seen no one dispute that Michael/Mary has XY chromosomes and is otherwise biologically male. He is father of two sons with his wife of several decades.

If a mental illness led a person to declare something clearly inaccurate about another objective physical reality—such as one's height, age, or which century he inhabited—he would obviously need psychological help.

But liberal United Methodist enthusiasm for Michael Johnson's transgenderism pushes him (and others with similar struggles) in the opposite direction from Christian counseling to find peace and help him accept his God-given male body.

Bishop Johnson now describes her spouse as a woman and recalls buying him "a pair of bright pink tights." Both Johnsons celebrated Michael/Mary beginning hormone replacement therapy. This involves artificially receiving estrogen to undergo physical changes to appear more feminine, including growth of breasts and reduction of facial hair.

Bishop Johnson used this opportunity to affirm the ministry of "a number of United Methodist pastors who are either trans women, trans men, gender fluid, non-binary, or gender non-conforming."

Currently, the UMC's governing *Book of Discipline* does not explicitly address transgenderism.

Leading voices for the post-separation United Methodist Church (psUMC) vehemently insist theirs will be a fully LGBTQ-affirming denomination. So the psUMC will increasingly celebrate transgendered pastors and even bishops, and have no place for dissenting congregations. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION:** *Genesis 1:27; Isaiah 45:9-12; Romans 9:20-21.*

**ACTION:** *Pray for the Johnson family.*

## Christmas 2021

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Bishop Peggy Johnson and her husband, Michael, in 2017. Michael has now come out as a transgendered United Methodist minister. (Photo: Eastern Pennsylvania Conference)

## UMAction Sets Record Straight on Capitol Hill

For years, IRD/UMAction has protested how official United Methodist agencies lobby for partisan, left-wing political causes, often misrepresenting our denomination's official positions and the actual views of most United Methodists.

Last Fall, UMAction wrote to leaders of both parties in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to set the record straight. The body of our letter is below:

*I write on behalf of the Steering Committee of United Methodist Action, with members from California to Florida. We are concerned leaders and clergy in America's second-largest Protestant denomination, The United Methodist Church (UMC).*

*As issues are debated in Washington, there can be confusion about where our diverse denomination and its members stand. You may be lobbied by various individuals and groups invoking*

*cited official UMC positions, this has been done in misleading or highly selective ways.*

*Please note these important official positions of The United Methodist Church, adopted by our General Conference (the one group who speaks for our denomination):*

- “We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman” and teach that “sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage” (UMC Social Principles ¶161 C, G);
- Though not as unambiguously pro-life as a great many United Methodists would like, our official position does state, “We mourn and are committed to promoting the diminishment of high abortion rates” and “we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child” (Social Principles ¶161K);
- Our church “opposes assisted suicide and euthanasia” (Social Principles ¶161O);
- We “call upon all governments to reduce budget deficits and to live within their means” (Social Principles ¶163M); and
- “All nations have the right to secure their borders,” while we also want humane treatment of migrants (UMC Resolution #3281: “Welcoming the Migrant to the U.S.”).

*The above list is not comprehensive of all relevant UMC social stances. Rather, our sharing the above list reflects our desire to respectfully make you aware of official positions of our denomination which are too often ignored by groups supposedly representing us when they lobby you.*

*Some Methodist-related groups lobbying Congress on various issues are extremely left-wing, partisan, and NOT representative of the official positions of our denomination, nor of the majority of our members.*

*The 2020 Cooperative Election Study found that 43% of American United Methodists are politically conservative, while only 22% are politically liberal, with over twice as many identifying as very conservative than as very liberal.*

*We hope that you and your staff will keep these realities in mind as you hear from other Methodist-related groups.*

*With prayers and gratitude for your public service,*

*John Lomperis, M.Div.*

*Director of UMAction, a program of the Institute on Religion & Democracy*



A 2019 LGBTQ activist rally outside the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill. Church bureaucrats in this building have often given misleading impressions on who speaks for United Methodists. (Photo: sg.news.yahoo.com)

*the name of our denomination. Some of these groups are headquartered in the United Methodist Building, located next to the Supreme Court.*

*But NONE of these people truly represent our denomination. ¶507.1 of the UMC's governing Book of Discipline makes clear: "No person, no paper, no organization, has the authority to speak officially for The United Methodist Church, this right having been reserved exclusively to the General Conference." The General Conference, in which I and several on United Methodist Action's Steering Committee are voting delegates, is the UMC's highest governing assembly. Often when Methodist-related lobbying has even*





Questions remain about whether the United Methodist General Conference can go forward as planned Aug. 29–Sept. 7, whether in Minneapolis or online. (Images: Krivit Photography/Meet Minneapolis, Kathryn Price/United Methodist CoUM Split Communications, Laurens Glass/UMNS)

## Bishops Should Let Church Split Proceed

**A**s of this writing, the Commission on the General Conference *is still* preparing for the delayed 2020 General Conference as an in-person meeting August 29–September 7, 2022, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. If this Commission proceeds, neither bishops nor any other group can stop it. The commission is expected to make a final decision in early 2022 on whether or not to postpone General Conference again, in light of ongoing pandemic concerns.

For United Methodism’s main factions to separate relatively amicably, the General Conference must adopt the “Protocol on Reconciliation and Grace through Separation” peace treaty. Current laws are not adequate. The Protocol remains widely supported by leaders of every main faction.

Further delaying General Conference imposes growing tensions and unsustainable losses on all sides.

But there are also problems with a nine-day in-person meeting. It would force 862 delegates to extensively debate hundreds of petitions, many on highly charged controversies, that would ultimately affect only one denomination emerging from the split. Why spend so much time, money, and emotional energy on business that, soon after adopting the Protocol, will be irrelevant

to hundreds of delegates going into a different denomination?

There is a better alternative. The Council of Bishops can schedule a specially called General Conference anytime, limiting the agenda to only the Protocol and perhaps a couple other truly urgent matters. The best way may be a distributed hybrid session across a couple days, in which U.S. delegates meet at U.S. locations, and delegates from other countries fly to a limited number of regional sites with reliable high-speed internet access, with all delegates connecting simultaneously via teleconferencing technology.

The needed costs of ensuring participation and reliable internet access over two or three days would be *much* less than the \$12 million needed for a 9-day physical meeting with all delegates. If done well, the number of African delegates unable to participate would likely be fewer than the 31 who were unable to participate in the 2019 General Conference, primarily due to visa issues.

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The logistical challenges are no longer insurmountable. Most U.S. annual conferences and several jurisdictions have now met in hybrid or virtual formats. Other large denominations—including the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ—have within the last two years convened in virtual or hybrid formats.

This path would save millions of church dollars, facilitate full enfranchisement, and allow all factions to move forward after decades of conflict. ✚

**ACTION:** *Contact your bishop and urge for the Council of Bishops to use its authority under Paragraph 14 of the UMC Book of Discipline to call for*

*a special General Conference session, held in a virtual or hybrid format, to have a chance to adopt the Protocol. Contact information for all bishops can be found at: [www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/bishops](http://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/bishops)*

# Beyond Gay Weddings: The Post-Split UMC's Sexual Revolution

As our denomination prepares to split into the traditional Global Methodist Church (GMC) and the liberalized post-separation United Methodist Church (psUMC), there is universal agreement that the former will continue the UMC's historic, still-official bans on same-sex weddings and partnered gay clergy, while the latter will repeal these rules.

But these two denominations will have major differences on other sexual matters. Many crusading for gay weddings more broadly reject the ethic that sex is only for marriage. Such radicalism has been restrained so far by traditionalists. But after the split the brakes will be removed in the psUMC.

Common pro-homosexuality arguments have implications for other areas of sexual morality: The church has no business criticizing sexual relationships between consenting adults. Difficult biblical moral teachings can be conveniently placed in a "bucket" of Bible verses that supposedly never reflected God's heart. Polls show that the church's values are out of step with secular American culture, especially among younger adults.

According to such logic, shouldn't the church follow the polls by also approving premarital sex and pornography?

A recent sermon by the Rev. **Doug Damron** of West Ohio, a prominent leader and co-founder of the "United Methodist Centrist Movement," offered a preview of the psUMC's future. In acknowledging the impending split, in which the psUMC will "construct something brand new," he called for the psUMC to "speak into existence a church which fully welcomes, includes, affirms not only God's beloved gay and lesbian ones, but a host of other folks who have found the door of the church closed to them: trans folks, bi folks, **kink folks**, **poly folk**, gender-fluid folk, and others" (emphasis added).

"Poly" is slang for "polyamorous," meaning those who have multiple concurrent sexual partners. Activists like Damron have consistently used language such as "fully including" groups of people to mean affirming their distinctive *practices* at all levels of denominational leadership.

Damron is *not* just a fringe outlier.

At the 2019 General Conference, nearly 40 percent of delegates voted for the "Simple Plan," which would have, among other things, removed "not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage" from the list of offenses for which clergy can be disciplined.

At the 2016 North Central Jurisdictional Conference, mega-church Pastor **Mike Slaughter** and others connected to Damron's group pushed a statement, supported by over 45 percent of delegates, essentially opposing church trials over *any* "human sexuality" matters. The debate made clear that this would include adultery and sexual harassment.

At the 2008 General Conference, 45 percent of delegates supported a motion to rewrite our denomination's foundational statement on sexual morality by, among other things, omitting explicit teaching that sex is only for marriage.

After traditionalists leave for the GMC, liberal leaders of the psUMC will easily achieve strong majorities in repeats of such votes.

Over the years, other liberal United Methodist leaders have repeatedly expressed radically permissive attitudes:

- Last spring, the Liberation Project offered its vision of sexual morality for the psUMC, which included an openly casual attitude towards sex outside of marriage, with one pastor sharing, "I date all across the gender spectrum."



Prominent "centrist" leader Doug Damron offers a radical new vision for sexual morality in the post-separation United Methodist Church (Photo: YouTube screen capture)

- In 2018, prominent campus minister **Roger Wolsey** published an extended argument for church acceptance of pre-marital sex, defiantly declaring that as a divorcé, he "jolly well will have sex with a future lover prior to getting married again some day," and expressing some in-principle openness to "a mature Christian couple allowing each other to have occasional sexual explorations with other people."
- The influential Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSa) caucus published a column by a United Methodist minister declaring that it was "ridiculous in 2016" that "being a person who is sexually active while single is against the rules."
- In 2009, the liberal-dominated, apportionment-funded UMC General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) published a guest column by radical Unitarian Universalist sexologist **Debra Haffner** promoting her ethic of how someone can have "a moral, ethical sexual relationship" outside of marriage.
- The Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) has long been the main unofficial caucus pushing for United Methodist same-sex weddings. It has also promoted other forms of sexual radicalism, perhaps most notoriously when RMN co-published an issue of the now-defunct *Open Hands* magazine that openly celebrated bisexual threesomes and group sex parties.

See Post-Split UMC Sexual Revolution on page 6



## William J. ‘Billy’ Abraham, 1947–2021

In October, our denomination suffered a tremendous loss with the unexpected death of the Rev. Dr. **William J. Abraham**. The prominent United Methodist theological professor had recently become founding director of the new Wesley House of



Studies at Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary. He was a prolific writer (authoring or editing over two dozen books), a passionate supporter of global missions, and a tireless, courageous voice for Christian orthodoxy with Wesleyan distinctives. We at IRD/UMAction were privileged to count him as a friend.

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1947, Abraham graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary in 1973. He taught around the world and was a fixture at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University as its Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies. He received the Perkins Faculty Achievement Award in 2018.

Abraham uniquely revived a thoughtful Methodist political theology rooted in a Wesleyan Christian Realism. A native of

Northern Ireland, he was familiar with social disorder and terrorism, which informed his commitment to government as God’s ordained instrument for justice, order, and protecting the innocent. “If terrorists come knocking down my door, I want to have soldiers and a helicopter nearby,” he wrote in his 2013 *Shaking Hands with the Devil: The Intersection of Terrorism and Theology*, which he also discussed at IRD’s 2013 Annual Diane Knippers Lecture.

Abraham rejected pacifism. “By rejecting all use of lethal force, we are bereft of crucial resources in protecting innocent people from deadly attack,” he wrote. “It requires a very special kind of intellectual malfunction and self-deception to sustain pacifism over time.” Commending the Just War tradition, Abraham noted:

*“Love is not just a matter of refraining from violence but of doing all we can to help our neighbors. It is one thing to refuse to engage in violence when we ourselves are attacked; it is another to refuse to use violence to protect other people who are unjustly attacked. Standing aside and letting others kill innocent civilians is refusing to take responsibility for helping other people.”*

He was skeptical of ordained denominational leaders (as opposed to informed Christian laity with relevant vocations) delving too deeply into specific political debates:

*“If they outstay their welcome, they tend to become a pretentious nuisance, reduced to becoming talking heads that are ineffective and mostly do more harm than good. There are few sights more pathetic than church leaders putting their political underwear on display in public. ... They misread their vocation when they set themselves up as political activists and proxy-agents of the state. When they engage in pavement politics they are often the dupes of their own self-importance.”*

His thoughtful voice is already missed. ✝

**FOR REFLECTION: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14.**

**ACTION: Consider reading a book by this great scholar.**

## United Methodist Women Opposes Texas Pro-life Law

The national headquarters of United Methodist Women (UMW) has publicly denounced the new Texas Heartbeat Act, which effectively bans most abortions after six weeks, when the baby’s heartbeat can be detected. A recent poll showed slightly more American likely voters favoring than opposing such a pro-life law. Texas also increased state funding for its Alternatives to Abortion program to support pregnant women in need.

UMW’s press release euphemistically supported the violent killing of developing pre-born children, with beating hearts, as a “health care need.”

UMW selectively quoted from the UMC’s official Social Principles’ paragraph on abortion, which is admittedly ambig-

uous and includes one sentence “support[ing] the legal option of abortion” in unspecified “tragic conflicts of life with life.” But UMW conveniently ignored more life-affirming statements in the same Social Principles, whose values are clearly promoted by the Texas law, including:

- “We are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child.”
- “We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection or eugenics.”

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## UMW Opposes Texas Pro-life Law

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- “We mourn and are committed to promoting the diminishment of high abortion rates.”
- We urge support for crisis pregnancy centers “that compassionately help women find feasible alternatives to abortion.”

In 2018, the liberal General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) declared its desire to delete these four phrases, and other life-affirming language, from the Social Principles. After the split, they will face little remaining resistance, while the Global Methodist Church will likely adopt an unambiguously pro-life stance. ✝

**FOR REFLECTION:** *Luke 1:39-44.*

**ACTION:** *Ensure your local UMW chapter knows about UMW's pro-abortion-rights and other leftist political activism. Encourage redirecting funding and affiliation.*



Pastors from First United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, don costumes from *The Handmaid's Tale* in protest of Texas' heartbeat law banning most abortions (Photo: First Church UMC/TikTok)

## Post-Split UMC Sexual Revolution

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The Global Methodist Church will continue the UMC's current traditional standards on sexual morality, and its clergy will uphold these values much more consistently.

Those considering the psUMC should be prepared for a denomination with liberal morals on far more than gay rites. While sex-is-for-marriage standards may remain “on paper” for a time, they will not be consistently upheld in practice. The psUMC can expect louder calls for affirming “poly,” “kink,” and other non-traditional sexualities, increasingly casual attitudes about pornography, fewer and fewer single pastors willing to model and teach pre-marital chastity, and more pastors appointed over congregations who are homosexually partnered or who “date all across the gender spectrum.” ✝

**FOR REFLECTION:** *Consider Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 5 to the first church to ever take a “Reconciling” stance towards sexual sin, that “a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough.”*

# UMAction Briefing

*A newsletter for United Methodists working for Scripture-based renewal and reform in our denomination*

## The Institute on Religion & Democracy

1023 15th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005-2629

202.682.4131 • [umaction@TheIRD.org](mailto:umaction@TheIRD.org)

[www.TheIRD.org](http://www.TheIRD.org)

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### UMACTION DIRECTOR

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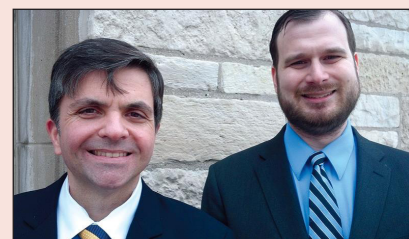
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