

UMAction

Briefing



Yet Another Gay Activist United Methodist Bishop

Under the new normal, a second openly partnered, gay activist bishop, **Cedric Bridgeforth**, was elected in United Methodism’s Western Jurisdiction, and a third came historically close to being elected in the Northeast, openly breaking church law banning “self-avowed, practicing homosexual” clergy. Bridgeforth, who appeared at the jurisdiction with his husband **Christopher Hucks-Ortiz**, joins openly partnered lesbian Bishop **Karen Oliveto**, elected in 2016. Two of the West’s five bishops are now gay and non-celibate.

Although badly outvoted, UMAction led the way in organizing traditionalist delegates to do what we could.

The Fall 2022 jurisdictional conferences in five locales throughout U.S. United Methodism evinced the ongoing liberal takeover of the denomination, as traditional congregations exit before the 2023 deadline. All 13 newly elected bishops are liberal and oppose United Methodism’s official teachings about marriage and sex. Some are quite open about their theological radicalism.

Newly elected Bishop **Kennetha Bigham-Tsai** in the North Central Jurisdiction recently declared, “It is not important that we agree on who Christ is.” She also said: “God became flesh, but not particular flesh. There’s no particularity around that. God became incarnate in a culture, but not one culture.” Newly elected Western Jurisdiction Bishop **Dottie Escobedo-Frank** openly says that she “calls for heretics ... to lead the church forward.” The formerly conservative-leaning Southeastern Jurisdiction elected liberal leader **Tom Berlin** as bishop. At the 2019 General Conference, Berlin infamously characterized the denomination upholding traditional Christian values on marriage and sex as a sickening “virus” like Ebola.

All five jurisdictional conferences across America adopted resolutions calling for effectively purging conservatives from denominational leadership (under the misleading pretext of denominational loyalty) and pushing immediate, *de facto* policy changes to disregard United Methodist law prohibiting same-sex weddings.

As summarized by United Methodist News Service (UMNS), all five jurisdictions “approved similarly worded resolutions that aspire to a future United Methodist Church where LGBTQ people ‘will be

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Christmas 2022

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Cedric Bridgeforth addresses delegates shortly after his Nov. 4 election at Christ United Methodist Church in Salt Lake City as the first openly gay man to be elected bishop. At left is his husband, Christopher Hucks-Ortiz. The vote comes six years after the Western Jurisdiction elected the denomination’s first openly lesbian bishop, Karen Oliveto. (Photo: Patrick Scriven / UMNS)

Exiting Virginia Church Shows the Way

The United Methodist Virginia Annual Conference approved the exit of 10 traditional churches from the liberalizing denomination on Saturday, October 29, with reportedly 125 more planning to leave soon. Presumably, many more will join that number before next year's final deadline. Virginia has 1,121 UMC churches, which means that so far 12 percent of Virginia churches are exiting due to United Methodism's global schism. The percentage of congregations disaffiliating in other conferences is already much higher.

One church approved for exit is Crums Church in rural northern Virginia in Clarke County between Berryville and Winchester. It's a beautiful white clapboard church whose history dates to 1792.

Crums Church has about 100 worshippers on Sunday. That number previously would have deemed it a small- to medi-

former more popular, including 8–15 children in worship, and another 5 or 6 in the nursery.

After United Methodism's governing General Conference was again postponed in March, Virginia Bishop **Sharma Lewis** announced a pathway for churches to depart under *United Methodist Book of Discipline* Paragraph 2553, which requires payment of two years of apportionments and pension liabilities. This amount for Crums Church was nearly \$160,000. Graves recounted to us how the church had six congregational meetings to discuss exit, with about 30 people attending the early meetings, and from the beginning there was wide agreement. The church council was unanimous for exit, and the congregational vote was 81 percent. Fifty-six church members voted for exit and 13 against. Discipline Paragraph 2553, the main congregational exit ramp, requires a two-thirds congregational vote for exit.

Graves recounted that a couple of opponents thought that Crums Church would be homophobic by exiting. A few thought the church should wait and hope for a better financial offer. And a few thought Crums could continue as a traditional church even in a liberalizing denomination. Several church members had been involved in splits of other denominations, such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and they shared how their congregations had survived.

Since Crums Church's exit vote, one church member has stopped attending, and four additional people have started regularly attending. There was a "sense of angst" before the vote, Graves noted, but now there is a sense of relief and looking forward. The church will wait another six months before deciding whether to affiliate with a denomination like the Global Methodist Church.

Graves said he has only heard from a few other local churches interested in their exit process. He is surprised how little many clergy know about the logistics of exit. Even though church attendance for most United Methodist congregations has plummeted, and the denomination expects dramatic spending cuts, including church closures, Graves said most clergy seem comfortable and unaware. He speculated that many congregations don't have the energy to escape their rut, and confronting the current schism is too much for them. His church's exit was fairly smooth and concluded amicably but consumed time and energy, he admitted. Graves is grateful to serve his current congregation and anticipates a bright future.

Churches that wish to follow the example of Crums Church need to act quickly. All church exits take months and must be approved by their local annual conference by the end of 2023, after which the door closes. The Council of Bishops resolved at its Summer 2022 meeting not to allow extensions of Paragraph 2553 after its official December 31, 2023, expiration date. Council President **Thomas Bickerton** has claimed that the 2024 General Conference is unlikely to approve any new exit ramps and said he is ready for United Methodism to "pivot" to its new future. 🌱



Crums United Methodist Church is among the first Virginia congregations to depart the denomination. (Photo: Crums Church)

um-sized rural church. But with the ongoing collapse of United Methodist participation accelerating since the pandemic, Crums Church is now the fourth-largest in attendance in its Shenandoah River District of 156 churches. Even in suburban Northern Virginia, many United Methodist churches that once had hundreds of worshippers now have only a few dozen, especially after prolonged pandemic closures.

Before the pandemic, Crums Church had about 80 regular worshippers. But it reopened in June 2020 for outdoor worship, far earlier than many other United Methodist churches. **David Graves**, the pastor since 2019, estimates that 90 percent of the pre-pandemic worshippers have returned, with additions. Crums has two worship services, contemporary and traditional, with the

Low-Interest Loans for Church Exits

At this writing, over 1,100 United Methodist churches have voted to exit the denomination. Several thousand more likely will do the same before next year's deadline. But many struggle with the exit fee, which minimally is two years of apportionments plus pension liabilities, and sometimes involves additional costs. Often the total is five or six times annual apportionments.

The Wesleyan Investment Foundation (WIF), the lending foundation for The Wesleyan Church, is offering loans to exiting United Methodist congregations. Churches are not expected to join The Wesleyan Church. WIF is the second-largest denominational loan fund in the country, with \$1.5 billion in assets, working with over 12 U.S. denominations, granting loans in the thousands of dollars and in the tens of millions.

WIF is offering a 5.5 percent interest rate up to 20 years, but is also offering seven- and ten-year loans, and a flat origination fee of \$500. It takes a first mortgage on church property as collateral. The loans have no prepayment penalty. An appraisal is

not necessary for loans under \$250,000, with a rate lock for three years for 5.5 percent. Loans can be for up to 80 percent of property value, and debt-to-income ratio less than three-to-one. For example, if the church budget is \$50,000 a year, a loan could be up to \$150,000, with title insurance.

Loans require an authorizing resolution from the congregation and/or the church council, and annual conference approval. The church would be responsible for local legal representation for the disaffiliation agreements, the real estate deed, and documentation

filing. Existing church debt would be refinanced into the WIF loan. ✚

ACTION: To explore the possibility of your church securing such a loan in order to pay disaffiliation fees, contact Norwood Davis of WIF at norwood@wifonline.com.



The Wesleyan Investment Foundation is an Indiana nonprofit corporation organized and operating exclusively for charitable and religious purposes as a tax exempt IRS 501(c)(3) entity. (Photo: WIF)

Complaint Filed Against Western Bishops

As noted by United Methodist News Service, prominent South Carolina United Methodist pastor **Tim McClendon** of St. John's Church in Aiken has "filed a complaint against all Western Jurisdiction bishops, accusing them of violating church law with the consecration of the denomination's second openly gay and married bishop." The 2019 General Conference added a new policy to Paragraph 415.6 of the UMC's governing *Book of Discipline*: "Bishops are prohibited from consecrating bishops who are self-avowed practicing homosexuals, even if they have been duly elected by the jurisdictional or central conference." After Bridgeforth's election (see "Yet Another Gay Activist Bishop," page 1), the Western bishops disregarded this requirement and consecrated him as a new bishop anyway.

McClendon has posted the complaint online at www.wj.complaint.com and invited other United Methodists to sign on.

He was quickly joined by over 550 United Methodists from around the world.

"I contend that the action and/or inaction of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops has caused significant harm," McClendon's complaint said, before listing ways he sees the consecration undermining his and other United Methodists' ministry. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: *Luke 14:25-35.*

ACTION: We will need others like McClendon willing to stand up and file complaints against liberal clergy leaders harmfully breaking the rules, especially in areas whose leaders are blocking congregations from exiting. If you are willing to do this, and are prepared for backlash against yourself and an untrustworthy process, please email JLOMPERIS@theird.org with "FILING COMPLAINTS" as the subject line.

Africans Condemn Election of Gay Bishop

“We are highly disappointed by the blatant breaking of our denominational rules with impunity,” declared the African Initiative in response to the U.S. election of another gay bishop. “This is an open defiance to our own rules, with the acquiescence of the Council of Bishops. We expect our episcopal leaders to hold one another accountable to lead the UMC consistent with our current denominational *Book of Discipline*. Unfortunately, this is not the case. We are deeply concerned that the UMC in America, in particular the global UMC in general, is rapidly returning to the days of the Judges, ‘In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit’ (Judges 17:6 NIV).”

Seven million United Methodists reside in Africa, where the denomination is growing at an annual rate of 400,000, while the U.S. church in 2020 had 6.3 million and was declining

by 200,000 annually. United Methodism once had 11 million in the U.S.

“We shudder at the thought of the space being promised to traditionalists in the so called ‘Big Tent’ church being pitched in the rhetoric of the future UMC (post-separation UMC) by the powers that be,”



Cedrick Bridgeforth, a United Methodist elder in the California-Pacific Conference, embraces his husband, Christopher Hucks-Ortiz, after his Nov. 4 election to the episcopacy by the Western Jurisdiction at Christ United Methodist Church in Salt Lake City. (Photo: Patrick Scriven / UMC Western Jurisdiction)

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protected, affirmed, and empowered’ including as laity, as ordained clergy, in the episcopacy and on denominational boards.”

UMNS also admitted that none of the 13 new bishops “identify with The United Methodist Church’s traditionalist wing that has sought to maintain and enforce” church policy on marriage and sexuality. And, “A number of traditionalists expect the elections and resolutions to hasten theological conservatives’ move to the exits.”

‘Queer’ Victories

The Reconciling Ministries Network celebrated how the Western Jurisdiction “passed legislation that creates an LGBTQ+ caucus with a budget and a seat in Western Jurisdiction leadership.” The North Central Jurisdiction forcibly subjected all delegates present to an extended re-education session on “heterosexism” and “transphobia,” which was an extraordinarily heavy-handed mix of one-sided stage presentations and managed small-group discussions. A stage presentation from a transgender activist called for UMC leaders to “queer up this kingdom” while suggesting that non-trans-affirming church folk were “abusers” whom they should “fight.” There were two other stage presentations from openly partnered lesbian clergywomen. Throughout, organizers and speakers treated it as obvious that the *Discipline’s* biblical standards are unambiguously evil, and that you are not really loving and compassionate if you do not fully embrace LGBTQIA+ liberationist ideology. Those who choose to stay UMC can expect to be targeted for future similar re-education efforts.

UMAction at Jurisdictional Conferences

Although badly outvoted, UMAction led the way in organizing traditionalist delegates to do what we could. We had an impact in pressing bishop candidates to commit to fair treatment of theological traditionalists in this season of congregational disaffiliations and supporting relatively more fair-minded candidates.

In the Northeastern Jurisdiction, UMAction Steering Committee members **Dan Fuller**, **Krystl Gauld**, and **Rich Hoffman** were key traditionalist delegates. Northeastern traditionalist delegates were able to help block the election of another openly partnered gay bishop candidate (who on one ballot came within 20 votes of being elected), and helped a theologically orthodox candidate come tantalizingly close to being elected (peaking at 49-percent support).

In the North Central Jurisdiction, UMAction director **John Lomperis** led fellow traditionalist delegates, and prepared and submitted a legal challenge to the resolution adopted in all five jurisdictions calling for disregarding the UMC *Discipline’s* moral standards against same-sex unions.

In the South Central Jurisdiction, UMAction Steering Committee member **Dixie Brewster** submitted a similar legal challenge. This resulted in an extended performance of other delegates shaming Dixie for defending biblical standards in both the 2022 and 2016 South Central Jurisdictional Conference. This and other incidents sent the clear message: *Those who defend the UMC’s biblical values must be shamed and silenced, while those who break the rules are to be rewarded and celebrated.* ✝

ACTION: Talk to other United Methodists within and beyond your congregation about the urgency of getting out of an increasingly dysfunctional and unfaithful denomination before it’s too late.

UMAction Declares Our Hopes, Plans, and Values Now

In October, IRD's United Methodist Action Steering Committee unanimously adopted the following statement, to publicly re-affirm our longstanding values and clarify our mission and vision for this transitional season.

UMAction's Hopes and Plans for Faithful United Methodists in This Season

We are longtime, devoted lay and clergy members of The United Methodist Church (UMC) who have sought to remain faithful to God and to our vows to the church. We are committed to the UMC's historic, traditional doctrinal and moral standards. The New Testament and church history teach us that in every age and culture, the church of Jesus Christ is called to work to both advance the Kingdom of God beyond our walls and also to "contend for the faith" within (Jude 3).

UMAction has worked for many years to help renew and reform the UMC. Sadly, however, recent escalations of unfaithfulness by denominational leadership have forced our denomination to this present point of division. In this context, we celebrate the launch of the Global Methodist Church. We enthusiastically support the GMC's mission and efforts to "make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly."

We recognize that as the United Methodist Church's leadership is rapidly becoming more liberal, the GMC is now becoming the denomination for a growing number of United Methodists who have remained loyal to the historic biblical, Wesleyan doctrinal and moral standards of The United Methodist Church. We hope that a great portion of the UMC will eventually be able to join the GMC. We call on our supporters to help us in doing what we can to strategically empower congregations who feel "trapped" in an increasingly dysfunctional UMC.

In this season of separation, we strongly support the right of every conference, congregation, and campus ministry to make their own fair, free, and informed decisions on whether the Global Methodist Church, the post-separation United Methodist Church, or becoming an independent church would be best for its future. We protest the heavy-handed and bullying ways in which many bishops and other United Methodist officials have recently imposed needless barriers and intimidation against freedom of speech and freedom of choice.

In faithfulness to our vows as members of The United Methodist Church, in recognition of the fact that our loyalty to Christ and the Kingdom of God must ultimately transcend any one denom-

ination, and driven by love for our Lord and all those created in His image, we will continue promoting these values within and through the UMC as long as it remains our church, and we will continue to promote these values for the Global Methodist Church:

1. All clergy and missionaries must actually believe and teach the Trinitarian doctrine, high view of Scriptural authority, miraculous birth and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the urgent importance of salvation in Jesus Christ taught in the Doctrinal Standards of the *Methodist Articles of Religion* and E.U.B. [Evangelical United Brethren] *Confession of Faith*. There must be accountability for those clergy, especially bishops, who

abuse their offices to spread false teaching directly contrary to our core doctrine. Greater care must be taken to prevent those who do not believe such basic Christian doctrines from being made clergy in the first place. Furthermore, those in teaching positions in our church have a responsibility to promote a renewed "Wesleyan literacy" of deeper familiarity with our great spiritual heritage.

2. Those in denominational leadership must recover the ethos of humble servant leadership, looking to the self-sacrificial example of early Methodist leaders. Bishops should be term limited.

3. Our congregations shall recognize the sacred responsibilities of lay people and the covenantal nature of church membership. We must equip and empower laity to use their gifts as partners with clergy in ministry and leadership.

4. We seek to be a more authentically global church, united in doctrine and morals across every region. Denominational leadership should be composed of faithful men and women

who reflect our denomination's global and ethnic diversity. Denominational policies and decisions shall be made in fair, democratic, and transparent ways.

5. We shall be an ethnically and culturally diverse church that stands firmly against racial or tribal bigotries. We must approach such matters with the recognition that when any one part of the body of Christ suffers, all suffer together with it (1 Corinthians 12:26) and that there is no room for any racism between repentant sinners at the foot of the Cross.

6. Any official denominational schools must be unapologetically Christian institutions and must be meaningfully accountable to the church and our doctrinal and moral standards.

7. Denominational agencies and structures must become more transparent, responsive, efficient, lean, and consistently accountable to, and supportive of, our church's biblical doctrinal and moral standards.

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UMAction articulates its enduring values and shifted priorities for a new season. (Bottom picture credit: Kathleen Barry / UM Communications)

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8. Our denomination shall uphold and teach the historic Christian values of marriage and sexual morality as clearly taught in Scripture: fidelity within the covenant of lifelong marriage between one man and one woman, and celibacy in singleness. Denominational agency staff shall personally adhere to this and other basic Christian standards required of our clergy. We must pursue compassionate ministry with people experiencing same-sex attraction or gender confusion, while upholding God's compassionate boundaries for His good gift of sexuality.

9. The church should be clearly pro-life, affirming the value of ALL people as bearers of God's image from the moment of conception, defending those vulnerable to abortion, assisted suicide, or euthanasia, and compassionately supporting mothers facing unplanned pregnancies.

10. Our denomination's official public witness on social issues shall be fundamentally reconstituted to become more limited, humble, nuanced, biblically shaped, theologically grounded, morally consistent, and globally informed. Church leaders at all levels shall avoid mimicking the political partisanship and divisive rhetoric of secular political lobbies. Official church resources must not be used to promote the personal political biases of denominational staff. The church must recognize that most political disagreements amount to differing prudential judgments on the best means to advance commonly held values, and that faithful Christians can and do disagree about such matters.

We invite you to join us in promoting these values, goals, and commitments. ✝

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the Africans lamented. "As shepherds of God's flock entrusted to their care, we expect Bishops within the UMC to uphold the virtue of accountability. Amidst the uncertainty of UMC's future in Africa, we encourage our own African bishops to step forward and add their voices of disapproval of the breaking of our denominational rules in broad daylight with impunity. Kindly remember that not doing anything about the ongoing violations of our church's doctrines and moral standards is actually doing something, and your silence implies your complicity."

The Africans promised: "We are fervently praying for sanity to prevail within the United Methodist Church. While the *Book of Discipline* has not yet changed, we expect our Bishops to lead the efforts toward ensuring that every faithful United Methodist remain law abiding. Our leaders must avoid selective applications of rules governing the UMC to disenfranchise majority membership of the church. Such action breeds a state of anarchy within the church, and makes the UMC an unhealthy Institution to belong." ✝

UMAction Briefing

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

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IRD President Mark Tooley and
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