

UMAction

Briefing



Some Liberal United Methodist Conferences, Leaders Explore Leaving the UMC

In recent months, prominent liberal United Methodist leaders and liberal-dominated annual conferences have begun seriously planning for the possibility of leaving the denomination. Such actions and statements come explicitly in reaction to the specially called February 2019 General Conference's adoption of the Traditional Plan, which maintains the longstanding bans our governing UMC *Book of Discipline* has on same-sex union services and "self-avowed practicing homosexual" clergy, while strengthening enforcement mechanisms for these and other standards for clergy conduct.

At recent annual conference sessions across the USA, at least ten of our denomination's most overwhelmingly liberal-dominated conferences voted to adopt various motions that in different ways explore the possibilities for "a new expression of Methodism" for liberals dissatisfied with the policies of the UMC. These conferences include New England, Minnesota, Northern Illinois, and all seven annual

conferences in the notoriously radicalized Western Jurisdiction. Northern Illinois Bishop **Sally Dyck** characterized the task force created by her conference's action as seeking "to find a workable plan going forward for those of us who cannot remain in The United Methodist Church under the Traditional Plan." In a report on similar resolutions, the Pacific-Northwest Conference's official news service paraphrased **Katie Ladd**, chair of the Pacific-Northwest Conference Order of Elders, as saying that "our denomination is in de facto schism," and

that "[i]t's difficult to know where the lines of division will fall, but in the not-too-distant future there will be at least two Methodisms."

Partnered lesbian activist **Karen Oliveto**, whose occupancy of the bishop's office in the Denver-based Mountain Sky Conference remains contested, has gone so far as to work with her team in that annual conference to produce and distribute a brochure openly saying that if next year's UMC General Conference does not go their way, they "intend to create a new Methodist connection."

A summit held in May by *UMForward*, an unofficial United Methodist LGBTQ advocacy group, made clear that some of the UMC's most prominent LGBTQ liberationist leaders and allies are increasingly willing to leave.

Task forces have been launched to research the legal and financial ramifications of separation.

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Delegate Dorothee Benz calls out from the stage during the closing moments of the 2019 United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis after she and other delegates walked onto the stage in protest. (Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.)

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Filipino Lay Leaders Affirm Traditional Values

In response to recent controversies, a group of United Methodist lay leaders in the Philippines have recently declared their support for traditional biblical values on the definition of marriage.

Overall, United Methodists in the Philippines tend to be more traditionalist on such issues than American United Methodists, but less overwhelmingly traditionalist than our denomination's members in Africa.

At the 2019 General Conference, Filipino delegates faced strong pressures to abandon traditional standards and support the misleadingly named "One Church Plan" (OCP).

downplaying the severely negative effects the OCP would have had for Filipino United Methodism.

However, now laypeople in the Cavite Annual Conference, one of those administered by Bishop Francisco, are rising up with a different, much clearer perspective.

A grassroots movement has produced a statement that says it has been endorsed by the lay leaders of every congregation in that annual conference.

Their statement affirms several key values: the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman, "shared

fidelity" in marriage, the long-standing standard in our denomination's Social Principles that homosexual practice is "incompatible with Christian teaching" (which the OCP would have deleted), the sacred worth of ALL people, and the need to share "the Word of God with all people." It also decries hate and violence.

The statement also repeatedly promotes the unity of United Methodism, opposing "any move to dissolve the Church or promote the fragmentation of our denomination." American readers may hear this differently than the original Filipino audience. A perhaps key context is that in the aftermath of the 2019 General Conference, some liberal Filipino United Methodist leaders have reportedly promoted the fragmenta-

tion of United Methodism, suggesting Filipino United Methodism leave our denomination to become an autonomous new denomination. This is evidently not the desire of these lay leaders within Bishop Francisco's region.

Their statement concludes: "By the power of the Holy Spirit, we continue to be 'One with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at His heavenly banquet.'" ✝



Delegates from the Philippines and Southeast Asia pray during a day of prayer at the 2019 United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis. (Photo by Kathleen Barry, UMNS.)

Such pressures reportedly included Filipino delegates being told that they had better support liberalizing church standards because of American financial support, as well as liberal Filipino along with American bishops coming to directly lobby Filipino delegates between votes.

Bishop **Ciriaco Q. Francisco** of the Manila Episcopal Area was known as an OCP supporter, and even did a short video in which he offered some rather confusing spin about the OCP somehow being helpful for the Philippines, while



Photo credit: Pixabay.com

Liberal United Methodist Leaders: ‘We Cannot Affiliate’ with Traditional Believers, Want to Drive Them Out

In a remarkably quick turn from their recent “unity, unity” rhetoric, a notable group of liberal United Methodist leaders, from Alaska to Florida to Germany, has declared in no uncertain terms that they “cannot” remain in the same church with Christians who support the traditional, biblical standards of the United Methodist Church’s *Book of Discipline*.

In the last year, “Mainstream UMC” emerged as the major factional caucus (other than the Council of Bishops) pushing the misleadingly named “One Church Plan” to liberalize church standards on marriage and ordination.

In a May 15 email, Mainstream UMC’s Advisory Board asked for feedback on what its supporters wanted in “a new Methodism.” In one question, the Board made clear that from now on, “we **cannot affiliate with those** who espouse the mean-spirited views... that are embodied in the Traditional Plan” (emphasis added).

The language of that message continued this group’s habit of harshly mischaracterizing the Traditional Plan, which was supported by a majority of General Conference delegates. But in any case, it is a stunning admission to hear these liberal leaders now declare that they most emphatically do NOT want to remain in the same church with those who want our church to maintain and actually enforce our longstanding prohibitions of clergy performing same-sex union ceremonies or being sexually active outside of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

This statement was not signed only by Mainstream UMC’s often vitriolic director, **Mark Holland**, but by the group’s Advisory Board, which includes United Methodist leaders from across the United States and even in Germany, including **Jay Brim** (Chancellor for the Rio Texas Conference of Bishop **Robert Schnase**) and **Cynthia Weems** (dean of the cabinet in the Florida Conference of Bishop **Ken Carter**).

Another recent manifesto of United Methodists opposing the UMC *Discipline*’s biblical standards is called

“Creating a Future with Hope.” That statement includes a commitment to “seek nothing less than the full repeal of the Traditional Plan” and to “actively resist” its implementation. This would even include repealing provisions of the Traditional Plan that protect victims of abusive clergy in matters not necessarily related to homosexuality. Their statement also demanded removing longstanding traditionalist policies from the UMC *Discipline*, going further than was even proposed by the failed “One Church Plan.”

Before the 2019 General Conference, such activists paid lip service to including theological traditionalists alongside liberals. Now they are more frank in admitting while they “are open to exploring new forms of Methodism,” they are only interested in new forms for “United Methodists who embrace the principles” of church affirmation of homosexual practice.

“Creating a Future with Hope” lists several groups as Principal Signatories, including Mainstream UMC, **Adam Hamilton**’s “Uniting Methodists” caucus, the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), and United Methodists for Kairos Response.

In a separate statement, “On National Convenings & Practical Resistance,” RMN declared “we cannot with integrity continue to partner with an institution explicitly set on harming the most marginalized among us.”

On social media, the Rev. **Matt Miofsky**, a St. Louis large-church pastor who had been a prominent “One Church Plan” supporter, openly admitted that the real goal of calls for liberals to stay and fight within the UMC (heavily pushed by liberal leaders like the Rev. Adam Hamilton) is so that “traditionalists leave,” feeling driven out by liberals’ tactics.

Similarly, in a public declaration co-signed by her extended cabinet, California-Nevada Bishop **Minerva Carcaño**, another strong “One Church Plan” supporter,

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Newly consecrated deaconesses greet the United Methodist Women Assembly 2018 in Columbus, Ohio. (Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS)

UMW Attacks Pro-Life Laws

The United Methodist Women (UMW) published a statement in response to anti-abortion measures signed into law in several states, decrying them as an “attack on women’s reproductive health.”

Once one of the largest women’s organizations in the country, and one that has wielded significant influence within the UMC, the group has experienced rapid decline in recent decades, its liberal agendas needlessly alienating many women in the church. With fewer than 800,000 members in 2017, UMW can no longer claim to include even one quarter of American United Methodist ladies.

Liberal United Methodist Leaders

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said of United Methodist traditional believers, particularly those affiliated with IRD/UMAction and the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA), that “facilitating THEIR exit should be the primary goal” (emphasis original).

“One Church,” indeed.

One is reminded of the warning from the late IRD board member, the Rev. **John Neuhaus**, that in church contexts where Christian orthodoxy is allowed to become optional, it will eventually become prohibited.

For our part, UMAction is determined to do all that we can to prevent the cynical any-means-necessary tactics and heavy-handed bullying of a vocal minority to splinter and drive out our denomination’s faithful global majority. ✚

Although the UMW statement claims that their beliefs are in line with the UMC, it somewhat selectively cites short sections from the UMS Social Principles that can be spun in support of UMW’s broad opposition to efforts to protect unborn children and their mothers from abortion violence. The UMC’s official position on abortion remains not as pro-life as many United Methodists would like it to be. But the UMW statement ignores several of the key life-affirming nuances that have been added to the official UMC position, such as describing abortion as “violent,” calling for lower abortion rates, and opposing abortion being used as a means of birth control, gender selection, or eugenics.

The 2016 General Conference also took the major steps of ordering UMW and our denomination’s D.C. lobby office to end their longstanding support for the extremist Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), and also repealing a decades-old resolution endorsing the notorious *Roe v. Wade* U.S. Supreme Court decision. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: Psalm 139:13-16; Job 31:15.

ACTION: *Talk to women in your congregation about concerns with the far-left partisan politics routinely promoted by UMW. Make sure your pastor knows that the 2016 General Conference added a sub-paragraph 256.7 to the UMC’s governing Book of Discipline to explicitly allow and encourage congregational women’s groups unrelated to United Methodist Women. For guidance on establishing and growing biblically faithful women’s ministries in United Methodist congregations, contact: Renew Network / c/o Good News / P.O. Box 132076 / The Woodlands, TX 77393 / 832-381-0331 / renew@goodnewsmag.org / www.renewnetwork.org*

Liberal Americans Threaten Faithful Overseas United Methodists



United Methodist Bishop Grant Hagiya addresses the Pre-General Conference Briefing in Portland, Ore. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS

In the wake of the 2019 General Conference's adoption of the Traditional Plan, liberal United Methodist leaders have tried to paint this result as somehow illegitimate for our increasingly global denomination, because of estimates that a majority of American delegates voted to liberalize our standards on sexual morality while a stronger majority of those

from overseas supported the Traditional Plan. We soon saw a mood of "It's payback time!"

Ex-evangelical celebrity pastor **Adam Hamilton** gave voice to American liberals now threatening funding to United Methodists in other countries whose delegates were believed to have supported the Traditional Plan. Hamilton phrased this concern as "Why would we support partners that have voted to push us out of the church?" (Here Hamilton disappointingly repeats a frank mischaracterization of the Traditional Plan made by his ally **Mark Holland**.)

Rev. **David Livingston**, a clergy delegate from the Great Plains Conference and outspoken board member of the "Mainstream

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That gathering displayed energy for "creating a new thing," and splitting off from the global UMC, which in their judgment "died" with the passage of the Traditional Plan. A common theme was that to keep their integrity and live out their convictions, these activists must be in a church that is uncompromising in full affirmation of LGBTQ people and practices, with no place for dissent. As one speaker, the Rev. Dr. **Jay Williams** of Boston, put it, "the biggest threat to queer liberation [in the church] actually isn't conservatism. We know where conservatives stand. The biggest threat to queer liberation is centrism and moderation." This group apparently had no interest in liberal proposals like the so-called One Church Plan that even paid lip-service, however insincere and incomplete, to tolerating traditional believers.

United Methodist News Service, reporting on this summit, stated that "A frequent refrain in small-group discussions was a desire to have a radically different structure than the current denomination, leaving behind the current hierarchy of bishops and the clergy appointment system." Task forces have been launched to research the legal and financial ramifications of separation.

One of the most prominent liberal leaders has already left the denomination. Dr. **Dorothee Benz**, a General Conference lay delegate from New York and a founding leader of the sometimes strident Methodists in New Directions (MIND) regional caucus group, was perhaps best known as a liberal speaker and leader of disruptive protests, including interrupting a Council of Bishops meeting with a bullhorn. Before the 2016 General Conference, she repeatedly publicly declared, "Hell, no, we won't go."

But now with the passage of the Traditional Plan, Benz is giving up, after 15 years of struggling to theologically liberalize our denomination. In a June letter to New York Bishop **Thomas Bickerton**, published on social media, Benz accused bishops of leading an institutional idolization of unity that harms LGBTQ people such as herself, saying that they have "perverted the

ideal of unity as to make it synonymous for queer Methodists with injustice." She noted "the energy and time and resources of thousands" of liberal United Methodists then "being poured into electing 2020 General Conference delegates," but described hopes of that gathering reversing our denomination's orthodox direction as "delusional." For her part, she "can no longer participate in this charade," and is done with our denomination.

In response to Benz's letter, **Chett Pritchett**, who was until 2016 the national director of the liberal Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) caucus, posted a comment: "Welcome to the club." Pritchett has admittedly left the UMC and organized religion altogether.

Prominent liberal activist **Will Green** even asked his long-radicalized New England Conference to "[b]oycott General Conference 2020...by refusing to send delegates," as this amounts to "participating in a system that rejects the gospel of Jesus Christ, rejects the spirit of a Wesleyan social witness and rejects a commonly held understanding of basic decency that affirms discrimination is wrong." Bishop **Sudarshana Devadhar** ruled Green's motion out of order. ✝

FOR REFLECTION: *Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 5:3-13; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.*

ACTION: *Write to the delegates from your annual conference and respectfully urge them to adopt generous policies to allow creation of a new Methodist denomination for those annual conferences and congregations who are unwilling to live according to the standards of the United Methodist Church's Book of Discipline. This would be preferable to continuing and magnifying our present conflicts and rule-breaking, while our denomination keeps bleeding U.S. members. For contact information, please email umaction@their.org with "WHO ARE MY DELEGATES?" in the Subject line.*

Liberal Americans Threaten Faithful Overseas United Methodists

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UMC” caucus, issued “A Case for Divesting from Africa.” Noting his annual conference’s partnerships supporting United Methodists in Nigeria and Zimbabwe, he asked “does it really seem unreasonable to redirect our funds and mission efforts to other places where we can actually have a partnership?”—stressing the importance of not reducing overall mission giving.

In the California-Pacific Conference (Cal-Pac), Bishop **Grant Hagiya** and conference council on finance and administration president **Howard Hudson** have taken dramatic steps to assist congregations in withholding support for the global church, while minimizing the extent to which such withholding reduces money for Cal-Pac leaders.

In a letter sent to all Cal-Pac congregations, Hagiya and Hudson affirmed withholding apportionments as “an important act of resistance” to the decisions of the 2019 General Conference. “To that end,” their letter explained that they are setting up an alternative World Service Fund and alternative General Administration Fund, through which congregations can redirect efforts from our denomination’s current global funding structure to ministries that meet the Cal-Pac leadership’s litmus tests for theologically liberal, LGBTQIA liberationist values.

This Cal-Pac policy is of doubtful legitimacy within our church law. But under leaders like Hagiya, the increasingly schismatic U.S. Western Jurisdiction has long disregarded our church law.

Such statements and actions reveal an extremely colonial-like attitude towards poorer United Methodists in Africa, the Philippines, and Eastern Europe. They are welcome to be part of our denomination, but their delegates should not have the same freedom to vote their conscience as Americans. Otherwise, liberal, wealthier, and overwhelmingly white Americans are willing to use their money as a weapon against poorer parts of the church.

At February’s special General Conference, the Rev. Dr. **Jerry Kulah**, a prominent UMC leader in Liberia (West Africa) memorably declared that he and his fellow Africans would “never, ever trade Jesus and the truth of the Bible for money.” ✝

FOR REFLECTION: Hebrews 13:16.

ACTION: *In response to such threats against faithful non-American United Methodists, our friends in the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA) have set up a special Fund to support faithful United Methodist ministries outside of the USA, including those hurt by recent liberal withholding. WCA promises that all designated donations will directly support such ministry projects, with no part of these donations being diverted for administrative expenses. You can simply go to www.wesleyancovenant.org/give/ and be sure to select the designation “Central Conference Ministry Fund.”*

UMAction Briefing

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

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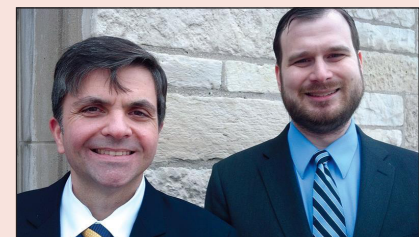
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