

# UMAction

## Briefing



## Comparing the Plans Before the 2019 General Conference

**E**ight hundred and sixty-four delegates from around the world are soon convening in St. Louis, Missouri for a specially called, February 23–26, 2019, session of the United Methodist Church’s governing General Conference. The sole focus is seeking resolution of our denomination’s worsening internal tensions over sexual morality and accountability.

The Commission on a Way Forward report includes three options:

- **The One Church Plan (OCP)**, heavily pushed by liberal caucus groups and bishops, would change the UMC’s definition of marriage to potentially include same-sex couples, allow “self-avowed practicing homosexual” clergy, and, in countries whose governments define marriage as including same-sex couples, remove our *Book of Discipline*’s longstanding ban on same-sex union ceremonies. There would initially be some limited ability to re-impose the ordination restriction in conservative annual conferences. This plan also includes some vague

### A brief examination of the plans submitted to the ‘Commission on a Way Forward’ based on Methodism’s core values

language about how local congregations can neither be forbidden nor forced to host same-sex unions and how clergy can neither be forbidden nor forced to perform such ceremonies.

- **The Connectional Conference Plan (CCP)** would divide our denomination’s annual conferences and congregations into semi-autonomous, sometimes geographically overlapping new sub-denominations called Connectional Conferences, each with its own standards on sexual morality.
- **The Modified Traditional Plan**, supported by UMAction and other renewal groups, would maintain the UMC *Discipline*’s present biblical standards on sexuality, add new policies to ensure consistent enforcement of these standards, and offer gracious exit options for congregations and annual conferences whose members felt they could not live with the UMC’s approach to such matters. “Modified” refers to some amendments renewal groups are supporting, in response to concerns raised by renewal leaders as well as by the UMC Judicial Council.

Two other duly submitted plans are worth highlighting:

- **The Simple Plan**, submitted by a group called the “Queer Clergy Caucus,” would remove all restrictive teaching and policies about

February 2019

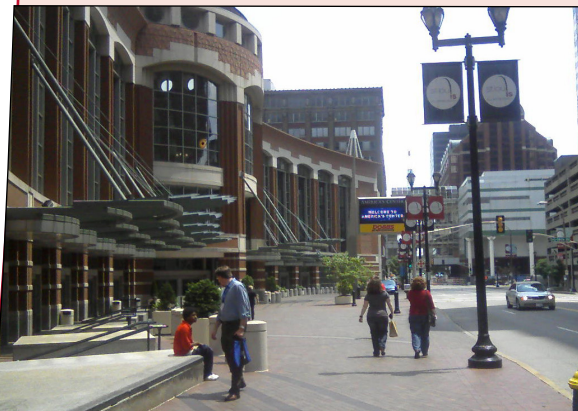
**Special Pre-General Conference Issue**

**Inside:**

Lesbian Activist ‘Bishop’ Faces New Heresy Complaint ..... 4

Ties Increase Between United Methodist Women Leaders and LGBTQ Caucus..... 5

Western Jurisdiction Leaders Promote ‘One Church Plan’ ..... 5



The 2019 special session of the General Conference will be held in The Dome, part of the America’s Center Convention Complex in St. Louis, Missouri. (Photo: Wikimedia.org)

See Comparing the Plans, page 2

## Comparing the Plans *continued from page 1*

- homosexual practice from the *Discipline*, would also remove some of the *Discipline*'s teachings and policies against adultery and premarital sex, and makes no provision for local or regional variation.
- **Dissolution of the UMC** is a pair of petitions that would dissolve the UMC to make way for the creation of two or more brand-new denominations, with differing standards on marriage.

Both the CCP and Dissolution Plan include constitutional amendments, which need the support of two-thirds of General Conference delegates plus two-thirds of subsequent votes by members of annual conferences around the world, a rather high bar.

There are a variety of core values that many have said that they want the 2019 General Conference to advance. Let's see how the plans compare on each.

**Biblical faithfulness.** For many of us, this value trumps all others. The Modified Traditional Plan is the only plan that would have the UMC maintain its official affirmation of biblical standards for sexual self-control. The Dissolution Plan would make the UMC's standards a moot point by abolishing the UMC. The other three plans can be understood as existing on a spectrum of officially allowing homosexually active clergy and same-sex unions in the UMC, with the Simple Plan going the farthest, while only the CCP would provide firm, non-temporary conscience protections. There has been some disagreement among traditionalists over whether the degree of separation the CCP would bring between those new UMC connectional conferences that allow same-sex unions and those that prohibit them would be a strong enough firewall to be acceptable.

**Wesleyan tradition.** By redefining marriage and authorizing blessings of homosexual practice (in somewhat different ways), the Simple Plan and OCP, as well as arguably the CCP, would contradict the high view of Scripture taught in the Methodist Articles of Religion and the Evangelical United Brethren Confession of Faith, as well as John Wesley's teachings about marriage and homosexuality in his Standard Sermons and *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*. These four docu-

ments are listed by the UMC *Discipline* as the historic, official, core doctrine of our denomination.

**Unity of the UMC.** Central to the marketing of the OCP, including the name, are dubious claims that it will somehow preserve the unity of the UMC. But when other large, U.S.-based denominations have liberalized on homosexuality in similar ways to the OCP, they have split, with many congregations leaving and many others seeing an exodus of members. There is no reason to expect different results in the UMC. We could expect a much greater split in the UMC under the OCP, given



Worship at Temple Emmanuel UMC in Man, Côte d'Ivoire. Decisions made in St. Louis will have major impacts on how many funds or people are left for our denomination's global mission. (Photo: Mike DuBose, UMNS)

our large non-American membership and evidence that our American membership is more conservative than that of the other large U.S.-based denominations that split over such matters. And the UMC's unique system of bishops appointing pastors means that under the OCP, the **ONLY** way a congregation could ensure a bishop would never impose on them a pastor who was homosexually active or known to perform same-sex unions, and the **ONLY** way pastors could ensure they would

not be mistreated by their bishops for refusing to perform such ceremonies, would be to leave the UMC. In contrast, the Modified Traditional Plan would keep a much larger portion of current United Methodists within the UMC.

**Unity in Diversity.** The Simple Plan or OCP would create new crises of conscience for traditionalists, which would result in an effective purge of traditionalists from key leadership positions, and in the continual shrinking of spaces in which traditionalist United Methodists would be tolerated. So these plans would quickly make those who remained in the UMC, especially clergy, largely uniform in their values on homosexuality.

The Modified Traditional Plan would impose no fundamentally new moral standards beyond what clergy have already vowed to uphold. As long as liberal clergy agreed to honor our rules against same-sex unions, some may still voluntarily choose to leave the UMC, but none would be forcibly kicked out solely on the basis of their beliefs.

*See Comparing the Plans, page 3*



## Comparing the Plans

*continued from page 2*

If one's highest value is having a unified UMC with clear, protected space for contrasting approaches to same-sex unions, then the CCP does that more than any other plan. If that would be a good thing is another question.

**Mission: reaching new people for Christ.** The long-term futures under the CCP and Dissolution Plan are difficult to predict. Passing the OCP or Simple Plan would drive away huge portions of non-American United Methodists and cripple our global denomination's ability to grow outside of the Western world. Within the USA, denominations that similarly liberalized have seen devastating losses from which they have never recovered. The only growing denominations in America are several with clear, traditionalist standards on sexual morality. There are even indications that some socially liberal Millennials and members of the LGBTQ community prefer churches with traditional biblical values over spiritually moribund, LGBTQ-affirming churches.

**Local and regional conflict.** Imposing the fiercest General Conference debates on the regional and local levels, by requiring members of congregations and annual conferences to take a clear moral stance on homosexuality, could be very divisive.

Under the CCP, each U.S. jurisdiction and central conference would have to vote on its stance, then many annual conferences would vote on whether or not to agree with their jurisdiction or central conference. Voting would only happen in congregations if a group of members pushed to vote to switch to an annual conference with different sexuality standards. Similar voting would be likely under the Dissolution Plan.

Under the Modified Traditional Plan, each annual conference must take a one-time vote on whether or not it will follow our *Discipline's* standards. This is NOT the same as voting on if they agree with these standards. Afterwards, the only need for annual conference voting would be if a liberal conference voted to leave the UMC. Likely only a small minority of congregations would have a membership-wide vote, and this would be limited to decisions of either a congregation leaving the UMC over sexuality matters or a congregation wanting to remain UMC after its liberal annual conference decided to leave the UMC.

Under the OCP, decisions to forbid or officially welcome homosexually active clergy would be made at the annual conference level. Anxiety and mistrust over such choices may be increased by how the OCP requires that laypeople be largely excluded from such decisions. Congregations would need to take a majority vote of all members before they could host same-sex union ceremonies. With ongoing pressure campaigns against

any "pockets of discrimination," under the OCP we could expect every UMC congregation eventually to be forced to take such a divisive vote.

**Future conflict.** No plan could definitively end all conflict and controversy. The CCP or Dissolution Plan would both effectively "front-load" the tough decisions, by forcing the main difficult conversations and votes within the next few years, after which there would be enough sorting into more like-minded camps that, supporters of these plans hope, conflict would dramatically fade. Key supporters of the OCP have made clear that they see it as only a first step, and would intend to keep fighting to make the UMC more thoroughly LGBTQ-affirming, even after they got their way in St. Louis. Reports of conservative congregations or annual conferences rejecting a partnered gay pastor or refusing to host a same-sex wedding would create targets for campaigns of public shaming and heavy-handed pressure. So the OCP would bring a new level of continued conflict

---

**Key supporters of the OCP have made clear that they see it as only the first step, and would intend to keep fighting to make the UMC more thoroughly LGBTQ-affirming, even after they got their way in St. Louis.**

---

at the General Conference, annual conference, and local-church levels. Under the Modified Traditional Plan, some of our present conflicts would continue for a time. But we hope the intensity would fade, as passing this plan would make clear the UMC's future direction, so that some of those unwilling to honor our moral standards would leave for new denominations, the new accountability policies

would make these standards much harder to defy, and those who continued campaigning to liberalize the UMC found support for their cause shrinking among remaining United Methodists.

It is also worth highlighting how both the OCP and Simple Plan follow the pattern seen in other mainline denominations whose leaders liberalized church standards on homosexuality and then spent millions of dollars ruthlessly going to secular courts to sue dissenting congregations who tried to leave the denomination. In contrast, the Modified Traditional Plan respects the consciences of dissenters by providing clear, gracious policies through which congregations can leave the UMC and take their property with them, while avoiding costly legal battles, if they declare as a matter of conscience that they can no longer follow United Methodist standards. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: Luke 6:31.**

**ACTION: Time is running out! Contact your conference's delegates to urge them to (1) REGARDLESS of their position on other issues, make a first priority of adopting "gracious exit" options for congregations who cannot live with the sexuality standards decided by this General Conference; and (2) support the Traditional Plan. If you would like contact information, please email [umaction@theird.org](mailto:umaction@theird.org) with "WHO ARE MY DELEGATES?" in the Subject line.**



Active and retired Western Jurisdiction bishops applaud Oliveto, center, in 2016. (Photo: Rev. David Valera, Pacific-Northwest Conference)

## Lesbian Activist ‘Bishop’ Faces New Heresy Complaint

A formal heresy complaint has now been filed with the appropriate church authorities against the Rev. Dr. Karen Oliveto.

Because of her being an openly partnered lesbian, in open defiance of United Methodist rules banning “self-avowed practicing homosexual” clergy, she has been widely regarded as illegitimate since she was elected bishop by the Western Jurisdiction in 2016, and the future of her clergy status remains contested and unclear.

But this new complaint, publicized by the *Christian Post*, is not about sexuality, but rather accuses Oliveto of the arguably more serious charge of heretical false teaching.

In 2017, Oliveto issued a public message undermining the divinity and sinlessness of Jesus Christ. In her own words, Jesus was “as human as you and me,” to the point of his being sinful and having “his bigotries and prejudices,” which he needed another person to teach him to give up in “his conversion,” and so we should not “create an idol out of him.”

The complaint was filed by a pastor in a liberal-dominated Northeastern conference, whose bishop publicly supports Karen Oliveto. The complaint highlights how the low view Oliveto promotes of Jesus Christ contradicts how our denomination’s official doctrine is clear that our triune God is one of infinite “wisdom, justice, goodness and love” and that Jesus is eternally and inseparably one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In other words, UMC doctrine teaches that Jesus is superior to any other

human and that he is NOT the sort of person who would ever have “his bigotries” or any other sins to “convert” away from. And it makes no sense to criticize people for “creating an idol out of” Jesus (i.e., treating him as a god) unless Oliveto does not really believe he is God.

Under the UMC’s governing *Book of Discipline*, clergy can be punished for “dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church,” although this provision has been widely unused.

However, newly enacted provisions in the *Discipline* give the global Council of Bishops some powers to oversee complaints against bishops, including complaints against Oliveto. A key question hanging over the 2019 General Conference is if our bishops can be trusted to hold each other accountable for even the most egregious offenses, or if we need a new system (such as what the Modified Traditional Plan would bring) to hold bishops accountable. ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: 1 John 4:1-6.**

**ACTION: Pray for spiritual protection over the pastor who filed this complaint. Then write to Council of Bishops President Ken Carter and urge him to lead the Council in bringing strong public accountability for Oliveto’s false teachings: Bishop Ken Carter / Florida Conference UMC / 450 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue / Lakeland, FL 33815 / Bishop@flumc.org**



# Ties Increase Between United Methodist Women and LGBTQ Caucus

One of the most well-known national programs of United Methodist Women (UMW) is its approving United Methodist deaconesses and home missionaries. In UMW's words, these are "laywomen and laymen who are called by God to be in a lifetime relationship in The United Methodist Church for engagement with a full-time vocation in ministries of love, justice, and service."

In December, the National Association of Deaconesses and Home Missioners (NADHM), a voluntary association of dues-paying people in this program, chose to formally affiliate with the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), which has long been the main unofficial group opposing the UMC's biblical teaching on sexual morality.



Newly consecrated deaconesses at UMW's 2018 Assembly (Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS)

Overlap between UMW and RMN is sadly not new. National UMW leaders have pushed for church acceptance of homosexual practice. Among those who UMW has commissioned as deaconesses in recent years are an RMN staffer and the lesbian partner of Dr. Karen Oliveto (see "Lesbian Activist 'Bishop' Faces New Heresy Complaint" on page 4).

But this takes things to a new level. By choosing to publicly endorse and affiliate with RMN, these UMW deaconesses and home missionaries are formally supporting and associating themselves with more than changing church teaching on homosexuality. RMN, the group they have now joined, has been notorious for its any-means-necessary tactics, especially in encouraging clergy to betray the covenants they promised God and our church to uphold. We have documented numerous instances of RMN encouraging a broader sexual ethic of "anything goes, as long as it's consensual," explicitly welcoming multiple partners. RMN has also promoted more basic theological radicalism, such as hosting a speaker at its 2013 conference who urged RMN's supporters to "not seek to redeem all scriptural text" but instead "perhaps just rip out and leave those biblical pages suggestive of oppression for the wind and the rain to disintegrate them." ✚

**FOR REFLECTION: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.**

**ACTION: Share your concerns about UMW's growing ties to RMN with your pastor and UMW members in your congregation. Make them aware of how the 2016 General Conference added to the UMC's governing Discipline ¶256.7, which encourages women's groups in local churches other than UMW.**

## Western Jurisdiction Leaders Promote 'One Church Plan'

The leadership of our denomination's Western Jurisdiction is going out of its way to promote the so-called "One Church Plan" (OCP), which would basically remove our denomination's current prohibitions of same-sex weddings and homosexually active clergy.

This UMC region has a long history of radicalism and of illegally disregarding our denomination's governing standards on sexuality. The height of the latter came in 2016, when the Western Jurisdiction voted to elect openly partnered lesbian activist Karen Oliveto as bishop, in open defiance of the UMC *Discipline's* banning "self-avowed practicing homosexual" clergy. Her status remains contested, and many traditionalist United Methodists refuse to recognize her as a legitimate bishop.

In late 2018, the jurisdiction's mission cabinet (which includes

every active and retired bishop in the region, plus others) issued statements declaring their unanimous "commitment to the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the church" and consequent support of the OCP. Similarly, the region's 30 delegates to the February 2019 General Conference released a November statement unanimously supporting the OCP. At the start of 2019, Mainstream UMC, a single-issue, unofficial caucus promoting the OCP, released a separate statement from the Western Jurisdiction's most prominent retired bishop, Melvin Talbert of San Francisco, urging support for the OCP. And at a recent conference of another liberal caucus group, Oliveto spoke at length to promote the OCP. Oliveto acknowledged that the Western

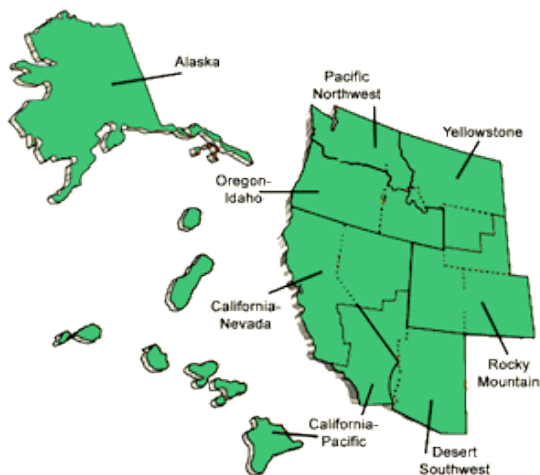
See Western Jurisdiction Leaders Promote OCP, page 6

## Western Jurisdiction Leaders Promote 'One Church Plan'

*continued from page 5*

Jurisdiction now disregards the UMC *Discipline's* standards on homosexual practice, and suggested that this somehow proved that the OCP could work.

But one wonders why the rest of the denomination would want to follow this jurisdiction's lead. It has some unique advantages. It is geographically huge, and encompasses areas of rapid population growth. It is the only one of the five U.S. jurisdictions that pays nothing to support bishops in overseas central conferences, but that instead has its own bishops heavily subsidized by apportionments from the rest of the USA.



Map of the Western Jurisdiction

And yet, under the leadership of the same Western leaders now promoting the OCP, this jurisdiction has not fared well. Despite the great evangelistic opportunities all around, it is home to less than three percent of United Methodists, and has consistently been losing members at a faster rate than other jurisdictions. Its bishops have been notorious for bullying and marginalizing traditionalist pastors. Under Talbert's leadership of the California-Nevada Conference, 68 activist clergy were protected from any accountability for admittedly violating the ban on same-sex weddings in 1999, while a chunk of traditionalist pastors left (some would say, were driven out of) the conference. In more recent years, Talbert has caused disruption elsewhere by performing publicity-stunt same-sex unions in Alabama and North Carolina, enabled by his fellow Western Jurisdiction bishops. As we have previously reported, Oliveto's election helped bring a "financial crisis" to the region where she was imposed. Urging personal loyalty to Oliveto and intimidating remaining traditionalist have become prominent in the Denver-based Mountain Sky Area.

Do we really want our whole denomination to become like the Western Jurisdiction? ❖

**FOR REFLECTION: Matthew 7:13-23.**

## 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 601, Washington, DC 20005-2601

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

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

#### IRD PRESIDENT

Mark Tooley

#### UMACTION DIRECTOR

John Lomperis

#### STEERING COMMITTEE

Sara Anderson	Jane Bonner	William Bonner, Esq.
Dixie Brewster	Mary Byerman	Dr. Janice Crouse
Dan Fuller	Rev. Dr. Philip Hardt	Dr. Richard Hoffman
Joe Kilpatrick	J. Robert Ladd	Rev. Ethan Larson
Ann LaSalle	Charles Miller	Rev. Martin Nicholas
James Ottjes	William Smallwood	Rev. Paul Stallsworth
Helen Rhea Stumbo	Dr. John Stumbo	

#### ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Karl Baumgardner, Esq.	Rev. Bill Bouknight	Rev. Riley Case
Rev. Dr. Ken Collins	Betsy Kersey	Gerald Kersey
Rev. Bob Land	Rev. Bob Parrott	Rev. Dr. Edmund Robb
T. Terrell Sessums	Faye Short	Rev. Donald Wildmon

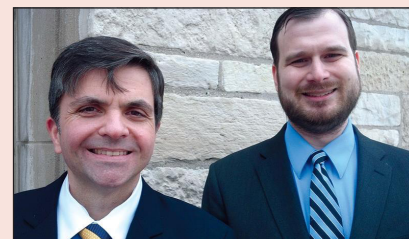
#### UMACTION STAFF

Dan Moran

### Do you receive the UMAction Update E-Newsletter?

If not, just sign on to [www.TheIRD.org](http://www.TheIRD.org) and SUBSCRIBE to this timely and informative e-mail on the latest happenings affecting The United Methodist Church.

UMAction staff regularly travel the country to report the latest developments within the UMC.



IRD President Mark Tooley and UMACTION Director John Lomperis

**Stay in the know! Subscribe today at**  
[www.TheIRD.org](http://www.TheIRD.org)