

# UMAction

## Briefing



## General Conference Rejects Same-Sex Marriage, Strengthens Accountability

**T**he February 23–26 United Methodist General Conference session in St. Louis rejected the “One Church Plan” to liberalize church sexuality teaching through a local option, by a vote of 449 to 374 (54.6 to 45.4 percent). It instead approved the Traditional Plan, tightening enforcement of the church’s sexuality teaching, by 438 to 384 (53.3 to 46.7 percent).

It was a decisive and, to many, a shocking defeat for U.S. bishops and the forces of institutional liberalism in U.S. United Methodism, which pushed hard for the One Church Plan.

Here is what WAS passed in the Traditional Plan that the Judicial Council has already ruled constitutional, which should soon become church law:

[Petition #90032](#) clarifies the definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” as anyone “living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil

union,” or “who publicly states that she or he is a practicing homosexual,” making the church’s ban on partnered gay clergy simpler to enforce.

[Petition #90044](#) limits bishops’ ability to dismiss complaints against clergy accused of wrongdoing.

[Petitions #90045 and #90046](#) (at least in part) reform the “just resolution” process (the UMC equivalent of out-of-court settlements) that had been abused by liberal bishops in recent years.

[Petition #90042](#) requires mandatory penalties for clergy found in a church trial to have violated the church covenant against performing pastorally harmful same-sex union

ceremonies. For a first offense, ministers must face a minimum penalty of a one-year suspension, while for any subsequent offence, they must be permanently removed from ministry.

[Petition #90047](#) establishes a church right of appeal to avoid nullification by juries unwilling to abide church law.

[Petition #90043](#) explicitly requires district committees on ministry and boards of ordained ministry to conduct a “full examination and thorough inquiry” into every ministry candidate’s compliance with church standards, forbids them from recommending any candidate who does

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## Spring 2019

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UM Action Director John Lomperis of the Indiana Conference addresses the 2019 United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis (Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS)

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# Filipino United Methodists Backed Traditional Plan

*Luther Oconer of United Methodist United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, shared these remarks with delegates from the Philippines at a February 22, 2019, dinner in St. Louis, helping prompt the majority of Filipinos, with other international delegates, to support the Traditional Plan.*

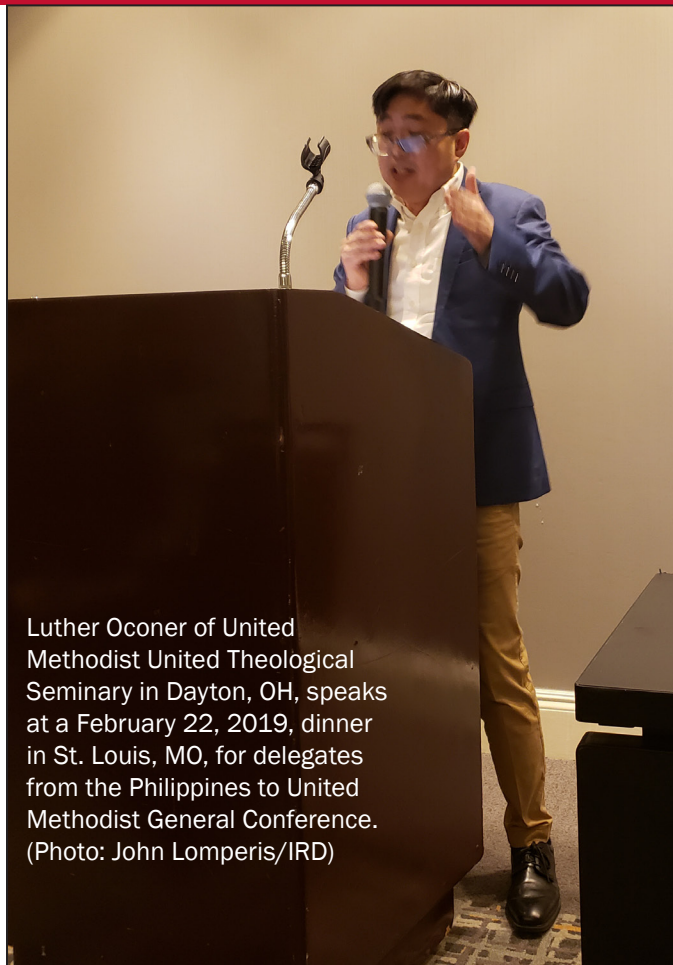
**J**ohn Wesley understood the connection between unity and holiness when he organized the first Methodist societies (fellowships) in England. Wesley, in fact, called them “United Societies” and the only requirement to join them was the desire “to flee from the wrath to come,” a phrase he used to mean conviction of sin and a desire to be saved from it.

The activities in these “united societies”—the class meetings, the bands, and various ministries to the poor—were all meant to help those who were convinced of sin overcome their sinful nature and grow in holiness. The first Methodists pursued holiness through practices of disciplined obedience and preached it with great optimism. They saw great potential in people, in who they could become by abiding in obedience to Jesus through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

Correspondingly, Bishops **Francis Asbury** and **Thomas Coke** captured the relationship between holiness and unity for American Methodism when they remarked in the *Journal* of 1796: “Our grand object is to raise and preserve a holy and united people. Holiness is our aim; and we pay no regard to numbers, but in proportion as they possess the genuine principles of vital religion.” For these two pioneering bishops and for American Methodists, holiness and unity went together.



(L-R) IRD Communications Manager Jeff Walton, UM Action Director John Lomperis, IRD President Mark Tooley, UMAction Steering Committee Chair Martin Nicholas, and UM Action Research Assistant Dan Moran at the conclusion of the United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis, MO, February 27, 2019 (Photo: IRD)



Luther Oconer of United Methodist United Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH, speaks at a February 22, 2019, dinner in St. Louis, MO, for delegates from the Philippines to United Methodist General Conference. (Photo: John Lomperis/IRD)

The Methodist Church in the Philippines in the decades prior to World War II thrived under the same spirit. Filipino Methodist preachers and American missionaries promoted holiness through revival meetings or what they called “*culto ng pagbabagongbuhay*” (life-changing meetings) or “*culto Pentecostal*” (Pentecostal meetings). It was not uncommon to see people in these gatherings so convicted of sin that they gave up cockfighting, drinking, or surrendered their cigarettes and *buyo* (betel-nut chewing) at the altar. In some instances, couples living together outside of wedlock would get married as a result. For this reason, Methodism experienced phenomenal growth during this period since these transformations testified to its ability to bring change or re-order people’s lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fast-forward to today, given the logic of Jesus’ prayer in John 17, given Paul, Wesley, Asbury, Coke, and the history of Filipino Methodism, it seems almost inconceivable that we find ourselves divided over same-sex marriage and the ordination of clergy in same-sex relationships. But here we are.

Practice follows doctrine. Practices around sex and marriage stem from what we believe about our Creator, the created goodness of female and male, the command to be fruitful and multiply, marriage as a sanctifying ordinance, and, perhaps most significantly, the power of the new birth and the work of the Holy Spirit to change our inclinations and give us new hearts. For “having once been slaves to sin,” as Paul wrote, “[we can]

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## Methodist Lobby Chief Slams Church on Sexuality Vote

**A**fter the historic vote by United Methodism's General Conference, the head of the denomination's Washington, D.C.-based lobby office denounced the church's teaching about sexuality.

“The 2019 General Conference brought unbearable pain to the body of Christ,” the Rev. Dr. [Susan Henry-Crowe](#), general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) wrote in high dudgeon. “The delegates’ resistance to hear and honor the presence and voices of LGBTQIA people has created a wound. The wound may one day be healed by the grace of God, but the scar left behind will be visible forever.”

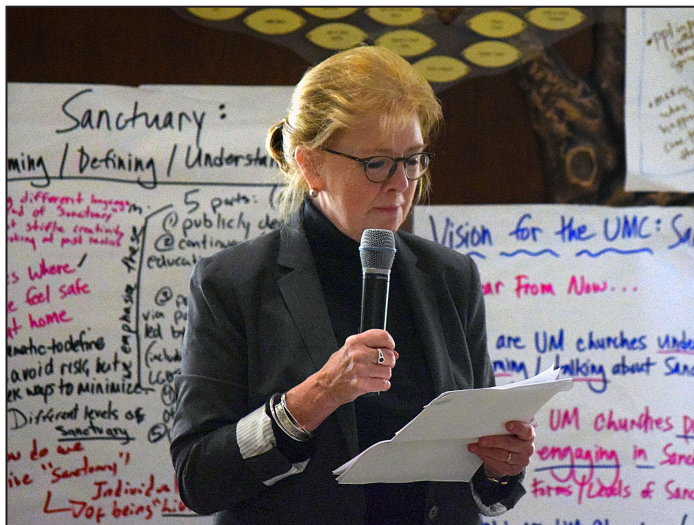
Based on Capitol Hill, the lobby office has long disregarded the church's teaching about sexuality.

“The 2019 General Conference chose to further deepen the divide in The United Methodist Church,” excoriated Henry-Crowe. “The plan adopted by a slim majority is punitive, contrary to the Wesleyan heritage, and in clear violation of the mandate given to us in 1 Corinthians 12.”

Henry-Crowe has been the agency's top executive since 2014.

Writing that moments “that broke the heart of God” occurred at General Conference, Henry-Crowe was defiant, focusing upon the agency’s “work for LGBTQIA equality”:

“We will seek justice for LGBTQIA migrants. We will seek to end conversion therapy, the dangerous and discredited idea




The Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe is general secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society.

that you can change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. We will work to ensure that no one is fired from their job or prevented from access to housing because they are LGBTQIA. We will work to end hate crimes against LGBTQIA people, especially LGBTQIA people of color. We will seek a climate in which LGBTQIA children are protected and enabled to live full and flourishing lives.

“Whatever comes next for The United Methodist Church, I am steadfast in my belief that the General Conference cannot release us from our responsibility to love and care for a world groaning for justice,” Henry-Crowe wrote.

General Conference is the only body that speaks for the entirety of the 12.6 million-member global church. Since 1972, the body has upheld language in the denomination's *Book of Discipline* that regards the practice of homosexuality as "incompatible with Christian teaching."

Henry-Crowe, in contrast, wrote to persons identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA) telling them “your relationships are sacred and holy.” 

**ACTION:** Write to the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe to respectfully ask her to support efforts by the General Conference to uphold the church's teaching about sexuality: [GBCS / 100 Maryland Avenue NE / Washington, DC 20002 / shenrycrowe@umc-gbcs.org](mailto:shenrycrowe@umc-gbcs.org)


## Filipino United Methodists Backed Traditional Plan

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become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which [we] were entrusted" (Romans 6:17).

I encourage you, therefore, to support the Modified Traditional Plan (MTP) because it is our best chance of having a UMC that pursues unity and holiness at the same time. The MTP also addresses the problem of governance in the UMC in the U.S. while allowing for a graceful exit to those who according to their conscience cannot keep our covenant. We can no longer let people, who by their disobedience, make a mockery of our *Book of Discipline* and doctrinal standards, which we all have agreed to uphold. It is unfortunate that those who have

been called to defend the faith have done very little to fulfill that role. If this issue on governance is not addressed, there is simply no telling when these acts of disobedience will end.

Friends, God has placed upon your shoulders in the next three days the opportunity to change the course of our denomination. May your votes allow for unity and holiness to come together again among the people called United Methodists. For it is the necessary condition that will bring forth a new Pentecost in our beloved UMC so that it can once again “spread scriptural holiness over the land.” May God bless us all! Thank you. 

# LGBTQI Delegates Threatened General Conference ‘Shut Down’

A group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) delegates and activists threatened but failed to shut down General Conference if their agenda failed, as it did. Unprecedented security that prevented non-delegates from entering the floor helped prevent disruptions. Instead, after the Traditional Plan was approved, mild demonstrations occurred off the floor.

Asked at a rally in St. Louis before the conference began if the Traditional Plan could pass, **Alex da Silva Souto** vowed, “We’ll shut it down.”

Souto, senior pastor at New Milford United Methodist Church in Connecticut, spoke February 22 on a panel of LGBTQI delegates to General Conference titled “Conversation at the Crossroads.”

Several panelists voiced support for “The Simple Plan,” deleting almost all UMC standards on sexuality (including teaching against extra-marital sex), while some grudgingly supported the “One Church Plan” as an interim measure. Panelists indicated that disruptive actions were a possibility as the conference began legislative work on Sunday.

“Nothing is off the table at this point,” noted Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Delegate **Jen Ilho**, expressing concerns the OCP could be “co-opted” by unfriendly amendments.

As for a modified version of the Traditional Plan, Ilho assessed it as “Frankly Dreadful” while another delegate dubbed it “Evil.”

New York Annual Conference Delegate **Dorothee Benz** called for a “refusal to be complicit in unjust structures.”

“We are going to own our own agency in this and refuse complicity,” Benz declared of the legislative process, which several panelists dismissed as “unjust structures.” Instead, Benz called on those gathered in the standing-room-only Holiday Inn conference room to go about “creating a different reality. That is what has gotten us to this point and what will bring us home.”

The panel, which was convened by the Queer Clergy Caucus, insisted that the Simple Plan was not a radical plan, and that it and the OCP had been mischaracterized and misunderstood.

“They [central conference delegates] have been told that a vote for the One Church Plan or the Simple Plan is a vote for homosexuality, and that is not true,” asserted New York Annual Conference reserve delegate **Karen Prudente**. “Missionaries really pounded in a colonial mentality that we [persons of Asian ancestry] then spread throughout the world.”



A group of LGBTQI delegates to the United Methodist General Conference speak at a panel the evening of February 22, 2019, at the St. Louis Holiday Inn (Photo: Jeff Walton / IRD)

Panelists were also clear about those who opposed their proposals. While acknowledging that some in the UMC held traditionalist views that they were working through, “I think there are a bunch of evil folks in the church who are into the pain thing,” assessed Dr. **Randall Miller**. Miller chairs the task force through which the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) is proposing a comprehensive rewrite of our denomination’s “Social Principles.”

Asked about the Wesleyan Covenant Association, which advocates for a version of the Traditional Plan, Benz was dismissive: “If they want to leave, don’t let the door hit you on the way out.”

“I wouldn’t spend too much time worrying about them leaving,” Miller added. The former Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) executive advocates forming a commission that will “charge a high price” for those traditionalists who may seek to leave the denomination. “You’re not going to leave us with all the bills.”

“Some friends genuinely grieve that we cannot all be together; I’m no longer one of them,” Miller announced. “There is no evidence that the WCA is leaving. God, let us savor the fact that we are in control of one teeny tiny thing: the trust clause.”

“That’s the key. We have to be solidly behind stopping any sort of gracious exit, because that’s the only reason some of those folks haven’t left,” asserted Ilho. “Let there be no exit plan beyond what is currently in the *Discipline*, or, make it as difficult as possible so that they don’t leave and leave their debts behind.” ✚



# African United Methodists Won't Trade Bible for Dollars

**J**erry Kulah, Dean of Gbarnga School of Theology in Liberia, electrified an evangelical breakfast at the General Conference by insisting Africans would not let liberal American promises of financial support compromise their commitment to the Bible.

“One plan invites the people called United Methodists to take a road in opposition to the Bible and two thousand years

*Holy Scriptures, our primary authority for faith and Christian living.*

*However, we extend grace to all people because we all know we are sinners in need of God's redeeming. We know how critical and life changing God's grace has been in our own lives.*

*We warmly welcome all people to our churches; we long to be in fellowship with them, to pray with them, to weep with them, and to experience the joy of transformation with them.*

*Friends, please hear me, we Africans are not afraid of our sisters and brothers who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, questioning, or queer. We love them and we hope the best for them. But we know of no compelling arguments for forsaking our church's understanding of Scripture and the teachings of the church universal.*

*And then please hear me when I say as graciously as I can: we Africans are not children in need of Western enlightenment when it comes to the church's sexual ethics. We do not need to hear a progressive U.S. bishop lecture us about our need to “grow up.”*

*Let me assure you, we Africans, whether we have liked it or not, have had to engage in this debate for many years now. We stand with the global church, not a culturally liberal, church elite, in the U.S.*

*We stand with our Filipino friends! We stand with our sisters and brothers in Europe and Russia! And yes, we stand with our allies in America.*

*We stand with farmers in Zambia, tech workers in Nairobi, Sunday School teachers in Nigeria, biblical scholars in Liberia, pastors in the Congo, United Methodist Women in Cote d'Ivoire, and thousands of other United Methodists all across Africa who have heard no compelling reasons for changing our sexual ethics, our teachings on marriage, and our ordination standards!*

*We are grounded in God's Word and the gracious and clear teachings of our church. On that we will not yield! We will not take a road that leads us from the truth! We will take the road that leads to the making of disciples of Jesus Christ for transformation of the world!*

And Kulah noted:

*Unfortunately, some United Methodists in the U.S. have the very faulty assumption that all Africans are concerned about is*



The Rev. Jerry Kulah makes his case for the Modified Traditional Plan during a Feb. 23 breakfast hosted by Good News, an unofficial traditional caucus of The United Methodist Church. The breakfast drew an overflow crowd to a St. Louis hotel on the opening day of the 2019 General Conference. (Photo: Steve Beard/Good News).

of Christian teachings,” Kulah warned. “Going down that road would divide the church. Those advocating for the One Church Plan would have us take that road.”

“Another road invites us to reaffirm Christian teachings rooted in Scripture and the church's rich traditions. It says, ‘All persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God,’ that ‘All persons need the ministry of the Church,’ and that ‘We affirm that God's grace is available to all.’ It grounds our sexual ethics in Scripture when it says, the UM Church does ‘not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers [it] incompatible with Christian teaching.’”

Kulah was clear:

*While “we commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons,” we do not celebrate same-sex marriages or ordain for ministry people who self-avow as practicing homosexuals. These practices do not conform to the authentic teaching of the*

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## General Conference

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not meet church standards, and requires bishops to prevent candidates who obviously violate church standards from being approved in clergy session.

Petition #90036 establishes bishops' duty to refuse to ordain or commission clergy candidates if these candidates are openly gay and prohibits openly gay candidates from becoming bishops even if elected by their jurisdiction.

Petition #90037 requires all annual conference board of ordained ministry members to be willing to uphold all ordination standards, as certified by appointing bishops. This petition was amended to address earlier objections from the Judicial Council.

A petition allowing congregations to leave United Methodism if disagreeing with church policy on sexuality was approved, but the Judicial Council earlier judged it unconstitutional. It may have to be fixed at the 2020 General Conference.

Petitions were also approved to help ensure the financial viability of pensions for retired clergy, including by requiring relevant fair-share payments from any congregations that leave the UMC. ✚

## African United Methodists

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*U.S. financial support. Well, I am sure, being sinners like all of you, some Africans are fixated on money.*

*But with all due respect, a fixation on money seems more of an American problem than an African one. We get by on far less than most Americans do; we know how to do it. I'm not so sure you do. So if anyone is so naïve or condescending as to think we would sell our birthright in Jesus Christ for American dollars, then they simply do not know us.*

*We are seriously joyful in following Jesus Christ and God's holy Word to us in the Bible. And in truth, we think many people in the U.S. and in parts of Europe could learn a great deal from us. The UM churches, pastors and lay people who partner with us acknowledge as much.*

*Please understand me when I say the vast majority of African United Methodists will never, ever trade Jesus and the truth of the Bible for money.*

Kulah concluded:

*Friends, not too long ago my country was ravaged by a terrible civil war. And then we faced the outbreak of the Ebola virus. We are keenly familiar with hardship and sorrow, but Jesus has led us through every trial. So nothing that happens over the next few days will deter us from following Him, and Him alone.*

*We will persevere in the race before us. We will remain steadfast and faithful. And some day we will wear the victor's crown of glory with our King Jesus! Come walk with us! ✚*

# UMAction Briefing

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

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