

UMAction

Briefing

URGENT: Action Needed on UMC Constitutional Amendments

This spring, the sessions of every United Methodist annual conference around the United States will vote on five proposed amendments to our denomination's constitution. These could have VERY MAJOR consequences for such matters in our church as marriage, sexuality, church membership, elections, and accountability.

Every individual minister and layperson voting in the various annual conferences around the world is counted as part of one unified group. This "popular vote" system means that EVERY individual's vote counts equally, no matter how small, large, liberal, or conservative their particular annual conference is.

UMAction urges our readers to consider and widely share the following recommendations:

Proposed Amendment #1: Add new paragraph on "Gender Justice" – UMAction recommends voting NO.

We strongly support this proposal's core values of opposing sexism and affirming that men and women are equally created in God's image. However, women's equality is *already* affirmed clearly and repeatedly elsewhere in our

United Methodist Church's *Book of Discipline*. One particular sentence of this proposal would assert that "The United Methodist Church recognizes it is contrary to Scripture and to logic to say that God is male or female, as maleness and femaleness are characteristics of human bodies and cultures, not characteristics of the divine." While there is much truth to this sentence, it is not carefully worded, and raises serious questions such as whether Jesus Christ's clearly being male somehow negates his also

being God, or if this amendment could be used to spread the practice by some liberal United Methodist pastors of refusing to say "Father God" in worship. We also are concerned about setting a precedent of amending the UMC Constitution, which is already difficult enough to understand, by adding a new paragraph whenever someone has a well-intentioned but poorly worded idea.

Proposed Amendment #2: Establish new constitutional commitments to various forms of inclusiveness and non-discrimination – UMAction STRONGLY recommends voting NO.

Again, we affirm the values of inclusiveness of gender, age, race, and ability—and note that this is already strongly, repeatedly affirmed in our UMC *Discipline*. But we are very concerned about how this proposal was changed at General Conference to commit our church to absolute non-discrimination

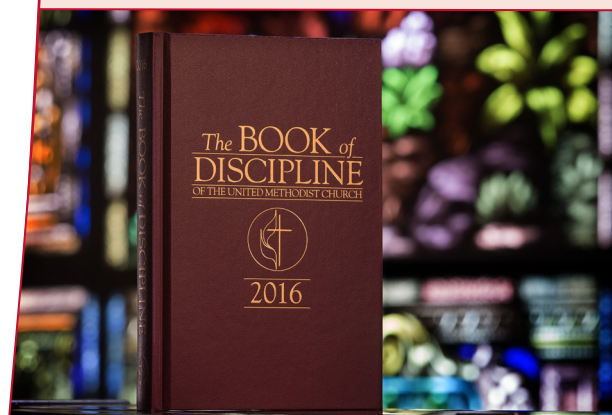
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June 2017

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The Judicial Council at its April meeting faced a petition asking how the election of an openly gay bishop squares with the *Book of Discipline*, the denomination's governing document (Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS)



Bishops Announce Special 2019 General Conference, Stack Sexuality Commission

Members of the Council of Bishops Executive Committee in 2015 (Photo credit: Kay Panovec, United Methodist Communications)

In April, the United Methodist Council of Bishops announced that there will be a specially called session of General Conference to address our church's tensions over sexuality and accountability. General Conference is the supreme governing body of the United Methodist Church and normally meets only once every four years. But in very extraordinary circumstances, the Council of Bishops can schedule a "specially called session." This one will be February 23–26, 2019, in St. Louis, Missouri.

The 2016 General Conference passed a motion charging the Council of Bishops to appoint a special commission to address our disagreements over sexual morality and accountability for clergy who break our biblical policies against same-sex unions. This motion suggested that this commission could bring recommendations to a specially called General Conference session, which it now plans to do.

Time and again, when our bishops have been entrusted with appointing various commissions and other groups, they have chosen to stack the membership in ways that ensure liberal domination. *UMAction* urged our bishops to build trust in this commission by making sure it represented the proportionate geographic membership of our global denomination to reflect the strong majority of United Methodists who demonstrably favor keeping our biblical standards for sexual self-control.

It's not clear how much the appointments to this commission were really that different from our bishops' past liberal stacking of commissions. The official United Methodist News Service ran a commentary claiming that "Africa got a fair share of the 32 seats." Actually African United Methodists, who are overwhelmingly traditionalist on homosexuality, constitute some 40 percent of our denomination's global membership, but

only 22 percent of these commission seats. Meanwhile, the radicalized Western Jurisdiction, in which evangelicals are harshly excluded, is over-represented. A few strong evangelical friends have also been included, along with several very strongly liberal activists. Some of the latter include three openly gay activists. When asked by *UMAction* if our bishops sought to include any ex-gays or individuals who are same-sex-attracted but, out of biblical faithfulness, have committed to lifelong celibacy, Council of Bishops President **Bruce Ough** told us that "there was no intention in the nomination or selection process to include or exclude individuals who had an 'ex-gay' experience as a part of their life testimonies."

The commission has already been meeting for months. It will prepare a final recommendation to be voted on at this special 2019 General Conference. Given the apparently unrepresentative make-up of the commission, there are serious worries that it will be just another imbalanced group pushing an agenda of a "local option" for same-sex unions and disregarding the concerns of traditionalist United Methodists. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: 1 Corinthians 6:9–11.

ACTION: Write to the commission's three moderators and respectfully express your concerns about their need to do more to build trust with more conservative church members:
Bishop Ken Carter / Florida Conference UMC / 450 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue / Lakeland, FL 33815 / Bishop@flumc.org; Bishop Sandra Steiner-Ball / West Virginia Conference UMC / 900 Washington Street E / Charleston, WV 25301 / wvareaumc@aol.com; Bishop David Yemba / Democratic Republic of the Congo / bishopccongo@yahoo.com

American UMC Membership Shifts towards More Conservative Regions

New data reveals continued decline of United Methodism in the United States and Europe, offset by greater growth in Africa and Asia. However, there are great differences in how the decline is distributed within the USA.

In combined lay and clergy membership, the most conservative of our denomination's five U.S. jurisdictions, the South-eastern Jurisdiction, declined by 2.44 percent from 2012 to 2015. While this is nothing to celebrate, it was not as bad as the more moderate South Central Jurisdiction, which in the same period lost 4.09 percent of its people. And that, in turn, was not as bad as the more liberal Northeastern and North Central Jurisdictions, which respectively declined by 5.95 and 7.28 percent. In the worst shape is the notoriously radicalized Western Jurisdiction, which lost 8.93 percent of its clergy and laity.

Even more dramatic differences were seen between the roughly five dozen U.S. annual conferences, from the aggressively liberal Pacific-Northwest Conference, which lost 14.88 percent of its people, to the more orthodox North Carolina

Conference, the only conference to grow during this time (although by less than half of one percent).

With some exceptions, there is an overall trend of more liberalized regions losing people at faster rates than elsewhere. The conferences that have been roughly holding even in numbers are generally more conservative. Strikingly, the nine conferences that lost more than 10 percent of their people in these three years include half of the Western Jurisdiction's eight conferences. Evidently secularized theology, cultural pandering, and shallow rhetoric about "inclusiveness" aren't working.

Thus, within the overall decline of our denomination in the United States, we are seeing a significant shift so that our remaining membership is becoming increasingly concentrated in more traditionalist regions. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: *Mark 4:1-23.*

ACTION: *Pray regularly for God to do a mighty work of revival in our denomination.*

% Change	Annual Conference	Jurisdiction	% Change	Annual Conference	Jurisdiction
-14.88%	Pacific Northwest	Western	-4.51%	USA overall	
-13.71%	Yellowstone	Western	-3.91%	West Virginia	Northeastern
-13.43%	Wisconsin	North Central	-3.78%	California-Nevada	Western
-13.37%	Central Texas	South Central	-3.63%	Greater New Jersey	Northeastern
-11.89%	Desert Southwest	Western	-3.59%	Alabama-West Florida	Southeastern
-11.07%	West Ohio	North Central	-3.45%	Missouri	South Central
-11.02%	West Michigan	North Central	-3.31%	Great Plains*	South Central
-10.76%	Detroit	North Central	-2.92%	Indiana	North Central
-10.27%	Oregon-Idaho	Western	-2.76%	North Alabama	Southeastern
-9.98%	Florida	Southeastern	-2.47%	South Carolina	Southeastern
-9.26%	New York	Northeastern	-2.40%	Memphis	Southeastern
-8.96%	California-Pacific	Western	-2.37%	Arkansas	South Central
-8.53%	Rocky Mountain	Western	-2.16%	Louisiana	South Central
-8.47%	New England	Northeastern	-2.16%	Virginia	Southeastern
-8.23%	Minnesota	North Central	-2.14%	Alaska	Western
-8.07%	Eastern Pennsylvania	Northeastern	-2.13%	Mississippi	Southeastern
-8.01%	Red Bird Missionary	Southeastern	-1.42%	Oklahoma	South Central
-7.21%	Northern Illinois	North Central	-1.40%	Dakotas	North Central
-7.21%	North Texas	South Central	-1.35%	Western North Carolina	Southeastern
-7.10%	South Georgia	Southeastern	-1.22%	Oklahoma Indian	South Central
-6.99%	Rio Texas*	South Central		Missionary	
-6.68%	East Ohio	North Central	-1.13%	Holston	Southeastern
-6.37%	New Mexico	South Central	-0.71%	Texas	South Central
-6.29%	Iowa	North Central	-0.56%	Tennessee	Southeastern
-6.15%	Upper New York	Northeastern	-0.48%	Kentucky	Southeastern
-5.71%	Northwest Texas	South Central	-0.44%	North Georgia	Southeastern
-5.58%	Baltimore-Washington	Northeastern	+0.38%	North Carolina	Southeastern
-5.53%	Peninsula-Delaware	Northeastern			
-5.09%	Western Pennsylvania	Northeastern			
-5.01%	Illinois Great Rivers	North Central			
-4.92%	Susquehanna	Northeastern			

*This conference was created at some point within 2012-2015 by a merger of two or more conferences, so for this chart, 2012 statistics were taken from adding those for the constituent predecessor.

Judicial Council Strengthens Biblical Standards for Who Can Be Clergy, Bishops

At its April session, the United Methodist Church's Judicial Council, our denomination's "supreme court," delivered key victories for biblical accountability by making clear that openly homosexually active individuals cannot be ordained or made bishop in our denomination.

It is essential to understand the wider context: For decades, traditionalist United Methodists have worked hard to make clear in our denomination's church law that openly homosexually active individuals, and others involved in unrepentant sex-

clergy's "genital sexual activity" or gay (even openly gay and partnered) clergy refused to answer such questions, they would continue as United Methodist ministers.

So for many years, liberal United Methodist bishops in a few areas, especially the low-membership U.S. Western Jurisdiction, have been ordaining and effectively preventing any accountability for openly gay clergy who are unwilling to commit to biblical standards for sexual self-control. The move last summer by the Western Jurisdiction to elect partnered lesbian activist Dr. **Karen Oliveto** as bishop grew out of this rebellion, which is widespread in that region. Oliveto has a well-documented history of radicalism, from promoting America's largest abortion provider to rebuking some of Jesus Christ's red-letter teachings to arguing that Paul was wrong to cast a demon out of a slave girl (as reported in Acts 16) to unlovingly demonizing what she has called "the bad churches" who have been unhappy to have her imposed as their bishop, for now.

Thanks to a motion made by delegate and *UMAction* Steering Committee member **Dixie Brewster**, the 2016 South Central Jurisdiction voted to respond to Oliveto's election by asking the Judicial Council to rule on several basic questions related to minimum standards for bishops and other clergy.

In a complex, closely watched 6-3 ruling, the Judicial Council brought us a new day of clarity for our biblical ordination standards. It rejected the laughable arguments presented and unanimously endorsed by active and retired bishops of the Western Jurisdiction that the UMC *Discipline's* aforementioned language about "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" did not forbid clergy from being in same-sex "marriages." Instead, our highest church court closed the major loophole in enforcement that depended on explicitly confessed "genital sexual activity." This ruling now offers two alternative ways clergy can be found guilty of violating this biblical standard of our denomination, with no need for awkward direct questions about genitals. If a United Methodist minister is found to be in a legal same-sex "marriage," that is enough to prove that he or she is a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" and so cannot be ordained, appointed, or made bishop—unless he or she can somehow prove that theirs is a sexless "marriage." Alternatively, the Council ruled more sweepingly that "a partnered homosexual clergy person ... does not meet the minimum standards" for UMC clergy (regardless of whether or not anyone calls the partnership a "marriage").

As expected, the Judicial Council did not immediately remove Oliveto from the bishop's office without further process to review the facts. (Although *UMAction* Director **John Lomperis** submitted extensive legal briefs urging the Judicial



UM Action Steering Committee member Dixie Brewster (right) greets Dr. Karen Oliveto (left) while Pastor Keith Boyette (center), who presented oral arguments for invalidating Oliveto's election, looks on (Photo credit: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service)

ual immorality, cannot become (or if already ordained, remain) United Methodist clergy. This struggle involved hard-fought efforts to make multiple key changes to our denomination's governing *Book of Discipline* and other church-law endeavors during the time between General Conferences. Finally, by 2004, church law at last stated clearly that because of our church's strong belief that "[t]he practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching," being found to be a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" was sufficient grounds for denying ordination or removal from ministry.

But the catch was that the main—and in some cases the only—way to prove that a minister was a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" was for that person to explicitly confess to church officials to being regularly engaged in "genital sexual activity with a person of the same gender." And several liberal churches' officials took advantage of this HUGE loophole, so that as long as relevant church officials avoided asking awkward questions about

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Judicial Council Strengthens Standards for Who Can Be Clergy, Bishops

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Council, among other things, to immediately nullify Oliveto's election, and two of the nine Judicial Council members issued separate opinions indicating their willingness to do this). Because of the strongly established processes in our church law for protecting the rights of the accused, processes that also protect faithful clergy from mistreatment by liberal bishops, the Judicial Council called for a review of Karen Oliveto's standing within the Western Jurisdiction. But the Council made clear that she **MUST** be subjected to this accountability process, and that if this process finds that she is living in a homosexual relationship (as she already publicly admits) she would fail to meet the minimum standards for UMC clergy, let alone bishop.

In two separate cases, the Judicial Council ruled that boards of ordained ministry (the groups in every annual conference that screen ordination candidates) must "conduct a careful and thorough examination and investigation" of ordination candidates to determine their commitment to abstaining from homosexuality or other non-marital sexual activity, and that this can include "reading social media postings of candidates." These

boards may not ignore any statements they find by candidates "who avowed their homosexuality" or otherwise admitted to "any action that violates any portion of church law." These two rulings effectively nullify and replace the statements recently adopted within the New York, Northern Illinois, and other liberal conferences to openly welcome gay ordination candidates.

These landmark rulings are binding on the whole denomination. It would be hard to overstate how major they are for strengthening our denomination's standards and mechanisms for holding clergy accountable to biblical standards for sexual self-control.

In the months ahead, UMAction is committed to doing the long, hard work of ensuring that these standards are followed and enforced. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: *Matthew 7:15-20; Galatians 5:19-26.*

ACTION: *If you learn of violations of these biblical ordination standards by United Methodist clergy or clergy candidates in your area, please contact us to talk about how we can help you bring accountability.*



Members of the 2016-2020 Judicial Council. (From left) Front: Ruben T. Reyes, N. Oswald Tweh Sr., the Rev. Luan-Vu Tran. Back row: Deanell Reece Tacha, Lídia Romão Gulele, the Rev. Øyvind Helliesen, the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, and the Rev. J. Kabamba Kiboko. (Not pictured, Beth Capen) (Photo: Kathleen Barry/United Methodist Communications)

Please recruit other faithful United Methodists from your congregation to go online to endorse the www.StandFirmUMC.org online petition!

Yes, I (we) want to help UMAction inform United Methodists and their families about the urgent need for church reform and faithfulness

Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift of:

☐ \$50 ☐ \$75 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other \$ _____

_____ Please send UMAction Briefing to the United Methodists on the enclosed list of names and addresses.

_____ Please send UMAction Briefing to the names I have marked in the enclosed church directory.

My Name: _____

Address: _____

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Clip and mail to: **UMAction c/o IRD
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Washington, DC 20005-2620**

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Your Opinion, Please!

Which is your preferred path forward?

- An evangelical minority should leave the UMC to form our own denomination.
- The UMC should completely dissolve, through an equitable division of assets, into two or more new denominations.
- The global orthodox majority should require clergy, bishops, and even entire annual conferences to leave if they will not uphold our biblical standards on marriage.
- Something else (please specify)

URGENT: Action Needed

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based on “marital status.” If passed, we expect that some will try to use this amendment to say that our new constitutional commitment to inclusion of all “marital statuses” trumps our biblical policies against same-sex “marriages.” We are also concerned that adding a new constitutional commitment to absolute inclusiveness of “gender”—and putting this in the constitution so that it is very difficult to fix later—could be used to advance transgenderism and claims that there are more than two genders. Furthermore, we note that at General Conference there was very little consideration of how mandating no discrimination anywhere in the church based on “age” would end current mandatory-retirement requirements for bishops and others once they reach a certain age.

If both #1 and #2 are defeated, we are willing and eager to work with people of diverse views to craft a better-worded constitutional amendment affirming women’s equality for the next regular General Conference.

Proposed Amendment #3: Fairness and consistency in delegate elections – UMAction recommends voting YES.

This amendment would promote greater openness and democracy in our denomination’s governance by requiring all delegates to general, jurisdictional, and central conferences to be elected by majority vote and allowing open nominations of candidates for these positions. This is already the practice in some regions of our denomination, but not in others.

Proposed Amendment #4: Central conferences – UMAction recommends voting YES.

This amendment would ensure that the dates of central conference meetings, at which bishops outside of the USA are elected, cannot be manipulated in ways that may influence the results.

Proposed Amendment #5: Accountability for Bishops – UMAction STRONGLY recommends voting YES.

Under the current UMC Constitution (as well as UMC Judicial Council rulings), the global Council of Bishops, of which every United Methodist bishop in the world is a member, has no authority to discipline any of its members for even the most outrageous wrongdoing. Bishops are currently accountable only within their respective regions of the United States or the world. This has led to multiple instances of bishops rather blatantly sinning and their friends in their respective home regions letting them get away with it. This amendment arose in response to a specific case of apparent theft of church funds.

This amendment would provide a desperately needed new level of accountability for bishops, to be used only in those extraordinary cases in which normal accountability processes have failed. ✚

ACTION: *Please share these recommendations with your pastor(s), your congregation’s lay member(s) to annual conference, and all others you know who are going to annual conference this May or June.*

UMAction Briefing

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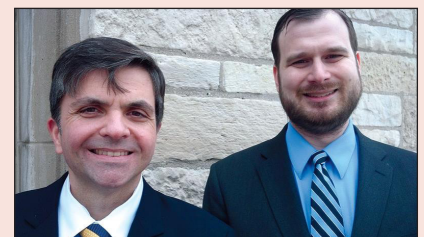
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