

## What's Going on in the UMC?

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### **The UMC and Social Values:**

- The United Methodist Church has, as part of our DNA, a strong sense of social justice. Early Methodists, including our founder, John Wesley, had a special concern for the poor and those on the fringe of society
- This historic concern for social issues is still evident in our *Book of Discipline* (the book that contains the "Church Law" that governs our church), in a section entitled *Our Social Principles*. The Social Principles address a wide variety of issues, including: the environment, health care, war, the death penalty, gambling, education, politics, human sexuality, and many other aspects of our life together in society.
- Visit <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/social-principles-social-creed> for more information about our Social Principles.
- The Social Principles are not "binding," i.e., you do not have to agree to the Social Principles to be a member of the UMC. However, they are official statements of our church's position on these social issues.
- The Social Principles, and any part of the *Book of Discipline*, can only be changed through a vote taken at [General Conference](#). This representative body of the UMC meets every four years and this is the only time the *BOD* can be amended.

### **The UMC and Homosexuality:**

- Current statements from the Social Principles in the *Book of Discipline* regarding homosexuality include:
  - We affirm that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons.
  - ...sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.
  - We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.
  - The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. This language was first added to the *Book of Discipline* in 1972. You can read a history of the General Conference's stance on homosexuality [here](#). (This article was prepared in advance of GC2016.)

- We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.
- We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.
  - This section of the *Book of Discipline* can be found here: <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-nurturing-community#human-sexuality>
- Regarding Qualifications for Ordination, the *Book of Discipline* states:
  - While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the UMC.
    - “Self-avowed practicing homosexual” was previously understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual. Now that same-sex marriage is legal in the U.S, entering into a same-sex marriage also qualifies one as a “self-avowed practicing homosexual.”

### **General Conference and the Issue of Homosexuality:**

- The topic of homosexuality has been a dominant and polarizing factor at General Conference, every four years, for recent memory.
  - There is a slideshow on the top of this web page (click on the arrows on the right of the top picture) giving a timeline of the history of this topic: <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/gc2016-tackling-44-year-stance-on-homosexuality>
- While there has been a shift in our U.S. society to make different expressions of gender and sexuality more acceptable (i.e. 2015 Supreme Court ruling to allow for same-sex civil marriages, reality show about transgender teen, Gay/Straight Alliance clubs at area high schools, etc.), this shift is not a world-wide phenomenon. The UMC is a global church, with over 30% of delegates to the 2016 General Conference coming from Africa, a continent that is unyielding in its stance against same-sex marriages and homosexual practices.
- See this article about the UMC in Africa: <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/africans-poised-for-clout-at-gc2016>

- The Southeastern Jurisdiction, with over 2.7 million members, is the largest of five jurisdictions of the UMC located in the U.S. (We are in the South Central Jurisdiction, with approx. 1.6 million members.) The Southeastern Jurisdiction has particularly strong ties to the UMC churches in Africa, which is very evident in the voting patterns at General Conference. You can see a map of the U.S. Jurisdictions, [here](#).
- At General Conference in 2016 it was evident that, once again, this dominant topic would overshadow any other work the Conference needed to address and prohibit us from having a fruitful, missional conference. A decision was made to: 1) table all petitions related to the issue of human sexuality, and 2) ask the [Council of Bishops](#) (comprised of all active and retired UMC bishops) to convene a special group charged with the task of finding a way for our denomination to be able to effectively function. The expectation was that we would “hit the pause button” on the issue of homosexuality, then reconvene in 2019 (one year before the next scheduled GC) to vote on the commission’s recommendations.
- The Commission on a Way Forward faithfully met to discern possibilities for the future of the UMC. You can read more about their work here: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward>
  - One member of our Conference, Rev. Casey Orr (a young adult clergywoman who is a deacon on staff at FUMC Fort Worth), served on the 32-member commission
- The Council of Bishops has set a date for a called session of General Conference, to be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis.

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### **Bishop Karen Oliveto:**

- Following General Conference every four years, each Jurisdiction holds a Jurisdictional Conference. The most significant task of the Jurisdictional Conference is the election of bishops for the Annual Conferences included in that jurisdiction.
- In July of 2016, Rev. Karen Oliveto, the pastor of Glide Memorial UMC in San Francisco, the fifth largest UMC in the U.S., was elected Bishop by the Western Jurisdictional Conference. She was elected by a vote of 88-0. You can learn more about Bishop Oliveto here: <http://www.umc.org/bishops/bishop-karen-oliveto>.
- The South Central Jurisdiction, which was meeting at the time of Bishop Oliveto’s election, voted to request that the Judicial Council of the UMC (our version of the Supreme Court) review whether or not this election and subsequent consecration is in violation of church law. Bishop Oliveto is in a same-sex marriage.

- In April, the Judicial Council decided that Bishop Oliveto’s consecration is not in alignment with church law. However, according to our polity, the consequences for this infraction need to be determined by the College of Bishops in her home jurisdiction (i.e. the bishops - current and retired - from each conference in the Western Jurisdiction). She therefore remains a Bishop in good standing with the UMC until further administrative review steps are taken. You can read more about this here:  
<http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/ruling-greeted-with-confusion-hope>

*Since General Conference 2016, two movements have emerged within the UMC, in anticipation of receiving the report from the Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops.*

### **The Wesleyan Covenant Association:**

- In October of 2016, an inaugural meeting was held for the Wesleyan Covenant Association.
- The WCA has established itself as a group of Methodists who are committed to upholding views and practices that they describe as “Wesleyan” and “orthodox.” Dr. Jeff Greenway describes the association as “a movement of like-minded, warm-hearted, Jesus loving, Wesleyan, evangelical, orthodox, and covenant-keeping Christians who are connected together in mission.”
- Their website invites “those [individuals and churches] who are committed to a high view of Scripture, Wesleyan vitality, orthodox theology and Holy Spirit empowerment” to join this organization, which requires dues (\$100/individuals or \$1.50 per member/churches)
- The WCA is organizing in advance of the report of the Commission on a Way Forward and the 2019 called session of General Conference to be in position to respond with unity to the proposals of the committee.
- The newly-elected President of the WCA is Keith Boyette, who served as legal counsel for Dixie Brewster in the recent Judicial Council hearings related to Bishop Oliveto. Dixie Brewster is a lay member from the Texas Annual Conference who called for the vote by the South Central Jurisdiction to protest the election of Bishop Oliveto last July.
- The WCA expresses their hope that the UMC can remain united and vibrant. However, they are clear that this will require adherence to a unified understanding of our covenantal relationship, particularly as it concerns our church’s sexual ethics.
- A [regional gathering for WCA](#) will be held in Oklahoma, May 3-6, 2019.

## Uniting Methodists

- From [their website](#): “Uniting Methodists is a movement of Christ-centered, hope-filled, United Methodists, uniting in Christ to make disciples for the transformation of the world. We challenge in love that which divides and we offer to all people God’s saving grace that transforms the world.”
- Uniting Methodists affirm that, “Faithful United Methodist Christians who love God and follow Jesus hold differing views concerning same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy.”
- The movement desires to find a way forward that will keep the UMC intact, and will neither compel nor prohibit clergy to perform same-sex unions and will neither compel nor prohibit conferences from ordaining LGBTQ persons.
- A [Uniting Methodist Conference](#) is scheduled in Dallas, at Lover’s Lane UMC, July 16-18, 2019.

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## Will the UMC split?

- There is not a certain answer to this question; however, it is hoped that this question will not come to a head before the called session of GC in February of 2019.
- There are many consequences to a split. Two of the most significant have to do with property (which includes not only physical land/buildings, but also endowments) and pension.
  - Per our *Book of Discipline*, the local church does not own the church building; rather, it is held in trust for the denomination. If the UMC splits, it is not a simple matter of each church deciding what path to choose. The building does not belong to the church. (You can read more about this at this blog post here: <https://milewis.wordpress.com/2014/03/28/united-methodist-trust-clause/>)
  - UMC pensions are managed by Wespath, a not-for-profit administrative agency of the UMC. Wespath is the largest faith-based pension fund in the U.S. and ranks among the top 100 pension plans in the country. UMC clergy participate in a retirement program that includes a defined-benefits pension plan. Restructuring these assets to accommodate a church schism would be very challenging.

## What Can We Do?

- You can follow UMC news in a daily or weekly digest form by signing up here: <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/umns-subscription-form>
- You can pray for the United Methodist Church:
  - For all who feel unwelcome and hurt by the church's current stance;
  - For all who feel threatened by the possibility that this stance will change;
  - For all who do not know the love of Jesus Christ who see internal strife in the UMC as an example of what is "wrong" about Christianity;
  - For the delegates to GC 2016, who will meet in February of 2019 to vote on how our church will seek a way forward. (Our CTC delegation members can be found [here](#).)
  - For our bishops, district superintendents, clergy and lay leaders, who seek to provide leadership for the local churches, agencies and boards, and conferences during this uncertain time;
  - For Arlington Heights UMC, that we may remain faithful to our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, using the gifts and inspiration God gives us to do the tasks that God places before us.