

The General Conference, which is the only decision-making body of The United Methodist Church, will have a specially called General Conference, February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. The special worldwide gathering will be limited to acting on a report by Council of Bishops, based on the proposals from the Commission on the Way Forward. The 32-member Commission, appointed by the bishops, was charged with finding ways for the denomination to stay together despite deep differences around homosexuality.

The recommendation that the Bishops will offer for consideration at the Special General Conference is called the One-Church Plan. This plan removes the restrictive language about sexuality in the Book of Discipline and leaves decision-making around being in ministry with LGBTQ persons in the hands of the Annual Conferences and local churches and individual pastors.

More information about the work of the Commission on the Way Forward and the upcoming special General Conference can be found at www.umc.org.

Below is a petition that the SPUMC Reconciling Team submitting to the Special General Conference.

Petition Submitted to the Special General Conference:

The Reconciling Ministries Team of the Sun Prairie United Methodist Church, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, wishes to present this petition to the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church as it explores human sexuality in the worldwide United Methodist Church.

As a faith community, who has intentionally named itself as a Reconciling congregation, we are at the center of a larger community. We swing our welcome wide, inviting and receiving those who desire to live reconciled to God and desire to extend that reconciling spirit to all people.

We believe all people are worthy of God's love and grace without regard to sexuality. Therefore, we request that the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference declare it to be the policy of The United Methodist Church that all people including members of the LGBTQ community are welcome in our Church denomination without restriction. To make this policy operative, we ask for the removal of the restrictive language from The Book of Discipline, related to paragraphs:

161 G: Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous heterosexual marriage.

~~The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.~~

304.3: ~~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 United Methodist Church.~~

~~341.6: Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.~~

We support and welcome the One Church Plan recommended by the Council of Bishops. We understand the diversity of the global denomination on the matter of homosexuality. Therefore, we ask that on matters of human sexuality the local churches be allowed to determine their own practices and policies.

It seems to us that it is much less about being in full agreement on the hard issues that divide us and much more about how we are able to talk about those hard issues with wisdom, recognizing that people are in different places based on their ways of interpreting Scripture, or their experiences, or the traditions from which they have come, or the ways they have learned to reason and make sense of things.

As a Reconciling congregation, we do not lose heart in seeking unity, knowing that unity does not mean uniformity or agreement. Instead, unity brings us to a higher, more Christ-centered place and purpose.

As we offer Christ to a world in need of reconciliation, we find ourselves at the table of hope and we invite all God's people to join us there.