

## Commission on a Way Forward Report Overview

The Commission on a Way Forward submitted its full report to the Council of Bishops in July 2018. The following are excerpted details of the three plans covered in the report. The full report is available for download in PDF format at: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/way-forward-report-released-in-all-four-official-languages-of-general-confe>.

### GOALS: DESIGN A WAY FOR BEING CHURCH THAT

- Maximizes UM witness in as many places in world possible.
- Allows for contextualization differentiation as much possible.
- Reflects three key values of mission, space, and unity.
- 32-member Commission on a Way Forward met over 17 months to prepare options and recommendations to Council of Bishops.
- Commission membership broad spectrum of stakeholders across denomination, chaired by 3 bishops.
- GC 2019 receiving all 3 plans considered by Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops, along with an historical narrative of COB's discernment process regarding all 3 plans.
- Values of global church reflected in all 3 plans.
- Majority of the COB recommended One Church Plan as best way forward.

### ONE CHURCH PLAN

- Eliminates *Book of Discipline* language: "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching" and the prohibition against ordained clergy being "self-avowed practicing homosexuals."
- Each annual conference (AC) Board of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session may determine ordination and certification standards, including those related to human sexuality.
- No UM clergy required to celebrate or bless same-sex union, but cannot be prohibited from conducting those ceremonies.
- Clergy who cannot in good conscience continue to serve in AC or church based on standards for ordination regarding LGBTQ persons may seek to transfer.
- Local churches must vote in church conference to allow property to be used for same sex ceremonies.
- Plan ends threat of church trials over same-gender weddings.
- Local churches currently have authority to establish wedding policies. Pastors already discern whom they will or will not marry.
- Minimizes disruption in most local churches, while giving freedom to adopt to minister to LGBTQ community in their context. Provides independence, maintains interdependence, allows contextual ministry.
- Allows clergy to remain or leave church because of Disciplinary language change.
- Vested pension protected at time of departure.
- Allows clergy to transfer to another AC.
- All three plans contain pension fund provisions.
- One Church and Connectional Church plans contain no provisions for churches wanting to change relationship to UMC.
- If GC 2019 passes, One Church Plan effective January 1, 2020.
- Commission on Way Forward recommends church take until 12/31/20 to fully implement.

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## CONNECTIONAL CONFERENCES PLAN

- Would require ACs to vote on significant constitutional changes.
- Replaces five US jurisdictions (NC, NE, SC, SE, W) with three “values-based” connectional conferences: Progressive, Unity, Traditionalist
- Provides both space and connection between parts of church currently in deep conflict.
- Each Connectional Conference would create its own *Book of Discipline* while retaining items “commonly agreed upon by United Methodists.” Each authorized to adopt other items not included in a *General Book of Discipline*.
- Each Connectional Conference and its College of Bishops to provide:
  - Episcopal oversight/accountability.
  - Episcopal elections, assignments, funding.
  - U.S. ACs compensate own bishops, contribute to fund for non-US bishops.
  - Denominational Council of Bishops focus on ecumenical relations & shared learning.
- Each Connectional Conference to have own administration and financing; own policies regarding LGBTQ weddings and ordinations; its own clergy standards.
- Continuing general agencies: Wespath, GCFA, Publishing House, Archives & History, UMCOR and some other parts of GBGM.
- Future structure of other general agencies determined by which connectional conferences choose to participate in them.
- Judicial Council membership include two from each connectional conference.
- Authority over all judicial matters based on respective connectional conferences Discipline.
- Connectional conferences could have separate church courts whose decisions could be appealed to Judicial Council.
- First level of connectional conference affiliation choice made at current jurisdictional conference level.
- ACs that disagree with that decision can choose a different connectional conference.
- No local church vote required, unless their choice is different than their ACs.
- Standing Committee on Connectional Conferences would be established by GC 2020 to assist COB with cross-conference connections and cooperative ministry.

## TRADITIONALIST PLAN

- “Traditionalist Plan” legislation prepared by a few members of Council of Bishops. Not reviewed and approved by Commission on a Way Forward or the Council of Bishops.
- Legislation provides way for churches and annual conferences that disagree with strict enforcement to establish self-governing or “affiliated autonomous or concordant” churches.
- Traditionalist Plan would affirm current Disciplinary language and add provisions for swift and strict enforcement.
- Broadens definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” to include:
  - Anyone living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union, or
  - Anyone who publicly states that he or she is a homosexual.
- Sets minimum penalties and quicker expulsion after violation conviction.
- Bishops and annual conferences required to certify that they would uphold, enforce and maintain Disciplinary standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination.
- Bishops who will not certify will not be eligible for compensation or expenses after 2021 and would be urged to join one of the self-governing churches.
- Prevents bishops from consecrating, ordaining or commissioning “self-avowed homosexual.”

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- Status review of bishops who will not certify they will uphold Discipline through newly created COB “Council Relations Committee,” with possible action.
- Strict timeline for new provisions for handling complaints. Dismissing complaints now more difficult.
- Require just resolution of clergy complaints to contain commitment to not repeat offense.
- Every AC required to certify they would maintain bans.
  - ACs that didn’t would be encouraged to form self-governing bodies.
- Current general agencies continued. Could negotiate services with churches and ACs that leave the UMC.
- AC Board of Ordained Ministry to conduct examination to ascertain whether a candidate is a practicing homosexual, including review of social media.
- Recognizes that “because of the current deep conflict over The UMC’s position on marriage and sexuality” a church or AC may want to form a self-governing church.
- Timeline for AC vote to implement plan by January 1, 2021.
- Allows congregations who disagree with AC decision to not certify compliance to remain with UMC.
- Allows choice to remain in UMC for congregations who do not agree with AC decision to not certify resulting in them joining affiliated autonomous or concordant church.
- Groups of 50 or more churches could form new denomination.
- Encourages clergy who could not maintain Disciplinary provisions on LGBTQ ordination or marriage to leave UMC and join an affiliated autonomous or concordant church.