

**General Conference Listening Session
Sun Prairie United Methodist Church
Thursday, October 25, 2018
7:00 pm**

Delegation Present: Sam Royappa, Amanda Stein, Lisa King, Steve Zekoff,
Jenny Arneson (recorder)

138 Present

Jenny welcomed folks and told about hospitality available.

Sam offered prayer and introductions

Presentation of Three Plans (A handout provided information on the three plans)

History (Sam Royappa)

-1968, Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren Church merged. 1972, language came into the Book of Discipline about human sexuality.

-The Council of Bishops appointed the Commission on the Way Forward following the directive of the 2016 General Conference. 32-member Commission met nine times over two years. They studied Scripture and formed the three plans that will come to the 2019 Special General Conference.

-48 petitions have been submitted that cover the three plans in addition to many other petitions.

-Judicial Council is meeting currently in Sweden to look at the Constitutionality of the 48 petitions and to see if they are in 'harmony' with the purpose and call of this specially called General Conference.

One Church Plan (Sam Royappa)

-Key element: Removing the restrictive language about human sexuality in the Book of Discipline.

-Implications: Freedom and space for clergy to choose to officiate at same-sex weddings; local churches have the freedom to have same-sex weddings in their churches. Boards of Ordain Ministry may choose to ordain LGBTQ persons. Central Conferences would have the freedom to choose their context of how they are in ministry to LGBTQ persons.

-Council of Bishops believes the Unity of the church will be preserved with this plan. This plan has the shortest period to be implemented.

Connectional Conference Plan (Lisa King)

-Most complex of the three plans and will take the longest to implement and with the most Constitutional changes to the UMC Constitution.

-Five Jurisdictions would go away and be replaced with Conferences of Progressive, Unity and Traditionalist.

-Provides space and connection between parts of the church currently in deep conflict.

-Each Connectional Conference would create its own Book of Discipline.

Traditionalist Plan (Amanda Stein)

-Enforcement, consequences of those clergy and churches acting outside the language of the Book of Discipline.

Listening Session Based on Four Prepared Questions

(Facilitated by Amanda and Sam; Steve was asked to help answer questions)

What questions do you have concerning each of the plans?

-What's the likelihood that GC2019 will not approve any of the plans?

It is a possibility that the plans will be voted down.

-How hopeful are you that they will come away from GC2019 with something?

Hopeful and prayerful that something will come out of GC2019.

-How much do people know about the lobbying (ie. From fraction groups; special interest groups) that has been going on over time. How much voice will they have to make changes on the floor of GC2019?

Among the voting delegates, people are part of many different groups. Only people who are seated delegates will be allowed to speak on the floor of GC.

There will be power groups and backroom conversations going on as there is at any GC.

Plenary session will decide what will be before the GC; go into legislative sessions to perfect language and make changes; come back to plenary to vote.

-What was the makeup of the 32-member Commission on the Way Forward. How many were LGBTQ?

The Commission had worldwide membership and approximately five from the LGBTQ community.

-Is it likely that there will be a gracious exit plan for congregations to leave with their assets and their buildings?

An exit plan may come through petitions, but was not part of the Commission's work.

One person commented that whatever plan passes, people will leave the church.

-Will the word 'practicing homosexual' be dropped from the Traditionalist Plan?

For me the three plans don't work; is there hope that there will be other viable plans to will come before GC2019?

Petitions and legislation needs to be sorted out by the Judicial Council before GC. Do not know what other petitions or legislation may be ruled 'in harmony' with the purpose of the GC. Legislation may come from the floor of GC and will need to be ruled 'in harmony' to be talked about.

-How long would the protections be in place for clergy or churches who do not want to perform same-sex weddings? Would it only hold until GC2020? Would churches be dropping the name UM?

Those opting out of doing same-sex marriages would remain going forward. Change of church names is already happening; Some churches are dropping the UM name.

-What plan was supported by the Council of Bishops and how many supported that plan?

Council of Bishops supported the One Church Plan.

Traditionalist Plan gained momentum and was added by Judicial Council ruling after 17 petitions were submitted.

One person believed the Council of Bishops cut off conversation on the Traditionalists Plan and they did not have time to fully look at it.

-How is the Wisconsin Delegation going about choosing how to vote at GC?

Wisconsin's Delegations have a long history that we never block vote. Will many of us vote the same way? Probably. We have not talked as a delegation about what all this means. We have focused our attention on these listening sessions. We are getting together after these listening sessions and will talk about what we have learned and what is best for the church. We are elected by you to use our best judgement to vote our consciences. Delegation has been together for four years. We are close and model our commitment to work in the best interest of the body of Christ.

-How have other denominations handled this issue?

Things are made more difficult because of the worldwide nature of the UMC. The global reach is a challenge and a blessing of The UMC. 45% UM members outside the U.S.; 55% members in the U.S.

-What difference does it make to the voting at GC with the growing numbers of UM churches outside the U.S.?

It makes a big difference. The UMC outside the U.S. is traditionally more conservative and block votes.

-Is it only these three choices or can plans be joined?

Legislation can be put forward and many things change at GC.

Which plan resonates most closely with your hope/vision for the future of our denomination?

-I love the institution of the church and that is why I serve it as a clergy person. I grieve how we cannot figure out how to make decisions. I have the privilege to be a white heterosexual male and no one is telling me I can't be in the church. I grieve that we can spend this many resources to categorically discriminate against one group of people. 'Gracious exit' is tricky language. The people leaving should not be expected to leave the UMC graciously.

-The Traditionalist Plan has the greatest hope for me and the future of the church. My fear is that we will adopt the One Church Plan and we will continue to hear that the UMC does not believe anything or that United Methodists can believe whatever they want.

-We have had this theme of open hearts, open doors, and open minds. It is time to live it and adopt the One Church Plan.

-The One Church Plan resonates with me and the church I serve.

-I speak as an advocate of the LGBTQ community within the UMC. I am glad to see the restrictive language be taken out of the Book of Discipline. The One Church Plan has my support.

-I love the diversity within our church. I love hearing people disagree with me. My hope is whatever you do as delegates, it will keep all the voices together. The One Church Plan is the closest to keeping us unified.

Where do you find the greatest hope/promise for the future of our denomination?

-I work with people who experience the call to ministry. I hear hundreds of stories as to how people experience a call to serve God and that will continue. God is still calling people to serve the church. God will continue to be at work in the hearts and lives of people despite what happens at GC2019 and that gives me hope. People will still come to know the word of Jesus Christ.

-God chooses everyone. We don't get to choose.

-I have the honor to work with youth in our church. They are now seeing that the church may not accept them. I try to explain that God is with them, but it is scary for our youth with what is happening in the UMC.

Where do you feel the greatest concern/fear/anxiety about the future of our denomination?

-We have about five people who would love to join our church, but they have seen our denominational struggles and cannot see why we are in so much conflict over this.

Sam offered Three core values of The UMC and invited folks to reflect upon them:

Mission: Whatever happens at GC2019, the mission of the UMC will continue.

Space: How do we create space for all people?

Unity: The unity of the global church.

Steve closed us in prayer at 8:30 pm.