



Pensions, Traditional Plan Top Priority Votes

By United Methodist News Service

Petitions meant to address pensions and the Traditional Plan topped the list of priorities for what General Conference delegates will work on in their legislative committee.

This was a key vote as delegates to the denomination's top lawmaking assembly try to set the direction in The United Methodist Church's longtime debate over homosexuality.

By 56 votes, the Traditional Plan topped the One Church Plan, supported by a majority of the bishops.

The vote started mid-afternoon of a day that began with a sermon by Bishop Kenneth H. Carter in which he asked delegates to make every effort to make unity "your passionate concern."

Following worship, delegates heard the presentation of the Commission on a Way Forward's report.

The priority voting took about an hour and the results were announced by the Rev. Gary Graves, secretary of the General Conference. The totals showed that the Traditional Plan was second behind pensions, and the One Church Plan was fifth behind legislation that deals with disaffiliating churches.

The Traditional Plan would strengthen restrictions against officiating at same-gender unions and being

"self-avowed practicing" gay clergy. The One Church Plan would leave questions of same-sex weddings up to individual clergy and congregations.

"We're very happy the Traditional Plan received the majority of the votes," said the Rev. Rob Renfroe, president of the unofficial advocacy group Good News, which has championed the legislation.

Bishop Carter said the Feb. 24 vote is "very early in the process" and the work is in the hands of the delegates.

"The Commission on the General Conference was wise in developing a process for this special session: We are a church on four continents, we speak multiple languages and we live in diverse cultures. And we bring all of this to the complex relationships between LGBTQ identity, the unity of the church and our interpretation of scripture. The prioritization process helps us to focus," Carter, who also leads the Florida Conference, said.

"I don't think it is appropriate to comment on how the delegates are voting. Bishops have been clear that we are serving the delegations to do their best work ...," he said. "I respect the delegates; the church has authorized them to do this important work."

Moving forward, he said the delegates will begin to reflect on this work, and this will take legislative form over the next two days.

Agenda for Monday, February 25

8:00 – 8:20 A.M.

Worship

8:20 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.

Morning Session 1

Break

Morning Session 2

12:30 – 1:30 P.M.

Lunch

1:30 – 6:30 P.M.

Afternoon Session 1

Break

Afternoon Session 2

Worship

6:30 P.M.

Adjournment

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Bishop Julius C. Trimble, who leads the Indiana Conference, said his word to his people is: “Hold on and keep doing ministry the way you’re doing now.

“There’s more to come. Let’s not put a period on it yet.”

During the priority process, delegates ranked legislation either as high or low priority. Some of the 23 legislative packages involve multiple petitions; others were petitions that can stand alone. Each petition changes part of the Book of Discipline, the denomination’s governing document.

The rankings were displayed after all the plans and petitions had received a vote. More than 820 of 864 delegates from around the world were voting.

Legislation recommended by Wespith Benefits and Investments, the denomination’s pension agency, topped the final tally with 518 high-priority votes.

Those two petitions deal with how to handle the pension liabilities of departing churches and the accrued benefits of departing clergy.

The Traditional Plan received 459 votes.

The next highest vote getters were two different plans for how exiting congregations could leave with their property, with 412 and 406 votes respectively.

The One Church Plan received 403 high-priority votes.

The Simple Plan, which would eliminate all restrictive Disciplinary language related to homosexuality, received 153 high-priority votes.

The Connectional Conference Plan, which would restructure the church around theological lines, drew 102 votes.

Before voting even began, delegates learned that the two petitions that are part of the Modified Traditional Plan would first go to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters. The permanent committee

continued on page 355

Errata

On page 274 of the Saturday, February 23 edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*, after “**Close Debate (Previous Question)**” delete the second occurrence of the phrase “After there have been at least”.

See the Editor’s note on page 356 for Errata and additional information about the delegate list printed in the Sunday, February 24 edition.

Court Rules Two GC2019 Petitions Unconstitutional

By Linda Bloom

Feb. 23, 2019 | ST. LOUIS (UMNS)

Two General Conference 2019 petitions related to potential plans for the future of The United Methodist Church have been declared unconstitutional by the denomination's top court.

The decision was in response to a petition for a declaratory decision received by the United Methodist Judicial Council on February 22 from the Council of Bishops.

Petition 90052 is unconstitutional, the court said in Decision 1375, "because it infringes upon the right of the annual conference to vote on all matters relating to the character and conference relations of its clergy members," as provided under Paragraph 33 of the constitution.

A second petition, Petition 90078, is unconstitutional because it would create a global episcopacy committee, the decision said. That petition is part of the Modified Traditional Plan.

Petition 90052 would add language eliminating "the entire supervisory response process" for complaints related to violations of the denomination's prohibitions against homosexuality and the creation of a special

committee on investigation to handle judicial complaints. The prohibitions against being a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" or performing same-sex marriage or union celebrations are found in Paragraph 2702.1(b).

But the council said that both Judicial Council Decision 1296 and Paragraph 33 "clearly stipulate" that the committee on investigation for such complaints resides with an annual conference.

"By removing this body from the annual conference and placing it under the authority of the General Conference and Colleges of Bishops, Petition 90052 infringes upon the constitutional right of an annual conference, particularly of the clergy and lay members of the committee on investigation, to vote on all matters relating to the character and conference relations of its clergy members, and is, therefore, unconstitutional."

Creating a global episcopacy committee through Petition 90078 to handle requests for "transfers of bishops across jurisdictional or central conference lines" also is problematic, Judicial Council said.

While the constitution permits transfers of bishops from one jurisdiction to another under specific conditions, "there is no parallel provision for transfers of bishops along central conference lines," the decision said. "It is beyond General Conference's power to fill this gap.

"Absent clear grant of constitutional authority, transfers from one central conference to another central conference and from a jurisdictional conference to a central conference are constitutionally prohibited. The creation of the global episcopacy committee would also blur the lines between the responsibilities of the jurisdictional committees on episcopacy and those of the central conferences."

The ruling also noted that the *Book of Discipline* stipulates "that the complaint process against bishops is handled by the jurisdictional conference and the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy." Placing that responsibility under a global episcopacy committee would be unconstitutional, the council said.



Members of the Judicial Council during the Feb. 23 morning of prayer at the 2019 Special Session of the United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis. Photo by Kathleen Barry, UMNS.

Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church

Decision No. 1375

IN RE: Petition for Declaratory Decision from the Council of Bishops regarding the constitutionality of legislative Petitions 90052 and 90078.

Digest of Case

Petition 90052 is unconstitutional because it infringes upon the right of the Annual Conference to vote on all matters relating to the character and conference relations of its clergy members under ¶ 33 of the Constitution. Petition 90078 is unconstitutional because the creation of a Global Episcopacy Committee violates ¶¶ 49 and 50 of the Constitution.

Statement of Facts

On February 22, 2019, the Council of Bishops [hereinafter Petitioner] submitted a request to determine the constitutionality of legislative Petitions 90052 and 90078, printed in the *Advance Daily Christian Advocate* on pp. 197 and 211, respectively. The Petitioner, Lonnie Brooks, Rev. Keith D. Boyette and Mary Daffin, on behalf of Rev. Maxie Dunnam, filed briefs as Interested Parties. Thomas Starnes submitted an *amicus* brief on behalf of a group of Chancellors.

Jurisdiction

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction pursuant to ¶ 2609.2 of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016* [hereinafter *The Discipline*]. Petitioner has standing to file this request for Declaratory Decision under the same provision.

Analysis and Rationale

1. Constitutionality of Petition 90052

Legislative Petition 90052 seeks to amend ¶¶ 362 and 2702 by adding language that eliminates the entire supervisory response process “if the complaint alleges the respondent is in violation of any provision of ¶ 2702.1(b)” and creates “a special committee on investigation elected by each General Conference at its regular session” to handle judicial complaints. Under this proposal, each College of Bishops will nominate four clergypersons who are not bishops and four professing members. “From this pool of candidates the General Conference shall elect four clergy members in full connection and three professing members to serve

as members of the special committee on investigation.” [underlines omitted]

In JCD 1296, the Judicial Council ruled that the General Conference could not abolish the Committee on Investigation without violating a clergyperson’s right to fair and due process. Importantly, it held that the “action of the 2012 General Conference to delete the role of the Committee on Investigation for clergy members of an annual conference is unconstitutional.” [emphasis added]

Under ¶ 33 of the Constitution, the

annual conference is the basic body in the Church and as such shall have reserved to it the right to vote . . . on all matters relating to the character and conference relations of its clergy members . . . with the exception that the lay members may not vote on matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy except that the lay members of the conference board of ordained ministry and the committee on investigation may vote on matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy . . . [emphasis added]

Both JCD 1296 and ¶ 33 clearly stipulate that the Committee on Investigation is elected *by and for* members of *an annual conference*. By removing this body from the annual conference and placing it under the authority of the General Conference and Colleges of Bishops, Petition 90052 infringes upon the constitutional right of an annual conference, particularly of the clergy and lay members of the Committee on Investigation, to vote on all matters relating to the character and conference relations of its clergy members, and is, therefore, unconstitutional.

2. Constitutionality of Petition 90078

By amending ¶ 512, Petition 90078 seeks to create a Global Episcopacy Committee to handle (1) requests for “transfers of bishops across jurisdictional or central conference lines” [emphasis in original] and (2) the complaint process for “any complaints filed against bishops who are alleged to have not fulfilled their commitment under ¶ 2801.7a or who are alleged to have committed one of the chargeable offenses under ¶ 2702.1a-b.”

The Constitution, in ¶ 49, permits transfers of bishops “from one jurisdiction to another jurisdiction” under specific conditions, the fourth of which is:

(4) All such transfers shall require the approval by a majority vote of the members present and voting

of the jurisdictional committees on episcopacy of the jurisdictions that are involved. [emphases added]

There is no parallel provision for transfers of bishops along *central conference* lines. It is beyond General Conference's power to fill this gap. Absent clear grant of constitutional authority, transfers from one central conference to another central conference and from a jurisdictional conference to a central conference are constitutionally prohibited. The creation of the Global Episcopacy Committee would also blur the lines between the responsibilities of the jurisdictional committees on episcopacy and those of the central conferences.

Paragraph 50 of the Constitution reads in relevant part:

The jurisdictional conference shall elect a standing committee on episcopacy to consist of one clergy and one lay delegate from each annual conference, on nomination of the annual conference delegation. The committee shall review the work of the bishops, pass on their character and official administration, and report to the jurisdictional conference its findings for such action as the conference may deem appropriate within its constitutional warrant of power. [emphases added]

The General Conference enacted enabling legislation in ¶ 413, which outlines the process for handling complaints against bishops. Paragraphs ¶¶ 50 and 413 unmistakably stipulate that the complaint process is handled by the jurisdictional conference *and* the jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy. By removing this process from the jurisdictional conference and jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and placing it under the Global Episcopacy Committee, Petition 90078 directly violates ¶ 50 and is unconstitutional.

Ruling

Petition 90052 is unconstitutional because it infringes upon the right of the Annual Conference to vote on all matters relating to the character and conference relations of its clergy members under ¶ 33 of the Constitution. Petition 90078 is unconstitutional because the creation of a Global Episcopacy Committee violates ¶¶ 49 and 50 of the Constitution.

February 23, 2019

Ruben Reyes was absent.

Warren Plowden, first lay alternate, participated in this decision.

Advance Legislative Research Panel Members

George Anding
Evelynn S. Caterson
Kay Gaffney Crowe
John A. Kauerauf
Pamela Liston
Rich Marsh
Tom Stanton

Legislative Committee Officers

Chair: Joseph Harris, Oklahoma
Vice Chair: Betty Kazadi Musau
Secretary: Carlene Fogle-Miller, Florida

Plan and Petition Prioritization Results

Title	Petition Number(s)	ADCA Pg Number(s)	Number High	Percent High
Wespath Recommendations - Pension Liabilities and CRSP Amendment - Par. 1504	90016-90017	168-169	518	63.56%
Traditional Plan (Except 90041, 90048)	90032-90040, 90042-90047	182-186, 190-194	459	55.57%
Disaffiliation - Taylor - NEW Par. 2553	90066	205	412	50.06%
Disaffiliation - Boyette - NEW Par. 2549	90059	201	406	49.51%
One Church Plan (Except 90015)	90001-90014	164-168	403	48.67%
Disaffiliation - Ottjes - NEW Par. 2548	90058	201	395	48.41%
Retain Paragraph 161.G	90062	202	214	26.13%
A Simple Plan	90068-90075	207-210	153	18.68%
A Traditional Way Forward with Enhanced Enforcement	90052	197	148	18.03%
A Graceful Exit as a Way Forward	90051	197	133	16.24%
Inclusiveness	90082	223	107	12.94%
Human Sexuality	90083	223	104	12.73%
Inclusiveness	90087	231	104	12.70%
Connectional Conference Plan (Except 90018)	90019-90031	170-182	102	12.44%
Abeyance of Trust Clause Enforcement	90056	200	99	12.03%
Marriage	90067	206	87	10.64%
Chargeable Offenses	90088	231	87	10.57%
Definition of Gender	90057	200	70	8.54%
Interpretation of Fidelity in Marriage for Deacons	90077	210	69	8.42%
Fully Inclusive Way Forward	90090-90092	233	67	8.18%
Replace Paragraph 161.G	90055	199	64	7.79%
One New Discipline Plan	90084	223	61	7.42%
Sexual Practices	90089	232	45	5.47%

Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church

Decision No. 1370

IN RE: Petition for Declaratory Decision from the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters regarding the constitutionality, meaning, application, and effect of ¶ 408.1(b) in relation to ¶¶ 30, 542.2, 543.17, and 2201.2 of *The Book of Discipline 2016*.

Petitioner has standing to file a request “on matters relating to or affecting the work of such body” under ¶ 2610.2(c).

Digest of Case

The role and function of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters under

¶ 2201.2 is to review all legislative petitions and resolutions relating to central conferences and to recommend them directly to the General Conference for enactment. The action of the General Conference in the adoption Calendar Item 218 without a report from the Petitioner was null and void. We do not reach the question of the constitutionality of ¶ 408.1(b) as adopted by the 2016 General Conference.

Statement of Facts

On July 28, 2017, the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters (the “Petitioner”) filed a Petition for Declaratory Decision on the following questions:

1. Is ¶ 408.1b of the 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline in conflict with ¶ 30, ¶ 542.2, ¶ 543.17 and ¶ 2201.2, thus making ¶ 408.1b unconstitutional? Further,

2. What is the understanding of the role and function of The Standing Committee on Central Conference matters in relationship to the review and recommendation of legislation related to the Central Conferences?

Since it missed the deadline for inclusion in the October 2017 Docket, this Petition was deferred first to the October 2018 meeting due to the cancellation of the April 2018 meeting and then to the February 2019 Special Session of the Judicial Council.

Jurisdiction

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction pursuant to ¶ 2610.1 of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016* [hereinafter *The Discipline*] As “any body created or authorized by the General Conference,”

Analysis and Rationale

1. Role and Function of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters

The General Conference defined the organization, role, and function of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters [hereinafter Petitioner] in ¶¶ 2201.1-5. It created the Petitioner to “serve as the coordinating body to study the structure and supervision of The United Methodist Church in its work outside the United States and its territories and its relationships to other Church bodies” ¶ 2201.1.

Relevant here is § 2, which reads in part:

The standing committee shall meet at least twice within the quadrennium in order to review, consider, and develop resolutions and petitions related to central conferences It shall review and prepare such recommendations as it considers necessary for presentation directly to the General Conference. The committee shall submit its report and recommendations in accordance with the timelines governing general agencies for submission of petitions and resolutions. *All resolutions and petitions related to central conferences presented to the General Conference shall be referred to the committee for consideration, and the committee shall report its recommendations directly to the General Conference.*

¶ 2201.2. [emphasis added]

The General Conference intended that *all* pieces of legislation relating to central conferences be referred to, reviewed, and reported by Petitioner directly to the General Conference for consideration and action. Under ¶ 2201.2, Petitioner is in charge of the legislative process as far as central conference matters are concerned. In other words, to be enacted by the General Conference, a petition or resolution must first go through Petitioner’s vetting process. It is undisputed that the 2016 General Conference approved Petition No. 60974-MH-408-1b as Calendar Item 218 without the consideration of or input by Petitioner. Consequently, absent Petitioner’s review and recommendation, General Conference could not

enact 408.1(b) without violating its own policy in ¶ 2201.2. The adoption of Calendar Item 218 was null and void. ¶ 408.1(b) of the *The Discipline, 2012* is revived.

2. Constitutionality of ¶ 408.1(b)

Having held that the action of the General Conference in adopting Calendar Item 218 was null and void, there is no need for the Judicial Council to consider whether or not ¶ 408.1(b) is unconstitutional.¹

Ruling

The role and function of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters under ¶ 2201.2 is to review all legislative petitions and resolutions relating to central conferences and to recommend them directly to the General Conference for enactment. The action of the General Conference in the adoption Calendar Item 218 without a report from the Petitioner was null and void. We do not reach the question of the constitutionality of ¶ 408.1(b) as adopted by the 2016 General Conference.

February 21, 2019

Beth Capen participated in discussion.

Kent Fulton, second lay alternate, was seated and voting when the decision was adopted.

Ruben Reyes was absent.

Warren Plowden, first lay alternate, participated in this decision.

Endnotes

¹ We are guided by our avoidance in undertaking a constitutional question by the oft-quoted language of Justice Louis B. Brandeis in his concurring opinion in *Ashwander v. Tennessee Valley Authority*, 297 U.S. 288 (1936):

Considerations of propriety, as well as long-established practice, demand that we refrain from passing upon the constitutionality of an act of Congress unless obliged to do so in the proper performance of our judicial function, when the question is raised by a party whose interests entitle him to raise it. *Blair v. United States*, 250 U.S. 273, 279, 39 S. Ct. 468, 470.

[...]

The Court will not pass upon a constitutional question although properly presented by the record, if there is also present some other ground upon which the case may be disposed of. This rule has found most varied application. Thus, if a case can be decided on either of two grounds, one involving a constitutional question, the other a question of statutory construction or general law, the Court will decide only the latter. *Siler v. Louisville & Nashville R. Co.*, 213 U.S. 175, 191, 29 S.Ct. 451; *Light v. United States*, 220 U.S. 523, 538, 31 S.Ct. 485.

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women Monitoring Report

We've only just begun what will be a very short time together, and most of our time has been spent in worship and formal presentations, so your opportunities to self-monitor during discussion and debate are yet to come. Even so, the monitors have some interesting observations to share based on our first sessions.

First, we want to commend the parliamentarian, Leonard Young, for both his use of inclusive language generally, and his self-awareness in correcting himself when realizing he could be even more inclusive. Dr. Young's inclusive language was clear in his repeated references to people as "he or she," great to hear, but even though not universal, not exceptional. Even better, there were a few times when he self-corrected for inclusiveness in a way that WAS more unusual. One monitor was especially struck by Dr. Young's realization that his use of an athletic reference might not have made sense to those who live outside the United States. His exact words were not noticed, but we did notice that when the delegates didn't react as he expected, he seemed to realize that his illustration wasn't understood by everyone as he had intended. He then noted that, and went on to describe the point in other ways. Dr. Young provided a lovely example of how one CAN be self-aware, by noting the reactions of others and correcting oneself in the moment. We noted that Dr. Young identified as NOT a United Methodist, but we hope he'd like to reconsider that! Thank you, Dr. Young.

Second, we want to celebrate the musicians, led by Raymond Trapp from Brooklyn, NYC. They are wonderfully diverse in multiple ways, and we also appreciate

the way they seem to intentionally share in the leadership so that Raymond isn't always at the forefront. Clearly, no one is "only" a back-up singer in the group. Also, we noticed the use of inclusive language in some of the songs—"Yes God is!" Nicely done! Thanks!

Third, we loved the Native American blessing in the opening worship in two languages and by a man and a woman together. Their words reflected their own gender diversity, referring to "Earth Mother," as well as "Grandmother of the South," in addition to "Grandfather of the East." It was so beautiful to hear liturgical leaders using female gendered references in worship. And beyond that one element, the entire opening worship was marked by wonderful diversity. The monitors noted that each person represented a different gender/racial/ethnic mix—not a single one the same as another. It truly was a sign of the diversity of our great Church. Thank you so much for a great start to the day.

Once we got to business, we noticed that the Commission on the Way Forward report was presented by a nice diversity of their membership. After that, though, there were mostly white male speakers. This is when the hard work begins. Let us make sure all the voices of the Church are heard, even when not scripted as for worship and formal reports. Be ready to step up and represent, everyone!

By the way, we are also monitoring Facebook and Twitter. Let us refrain from commenting on our women bishop's clothing, appearance, beauty, etc. They are inspiring leaders and awesome parliamentarians—all of them!

General Commission on Religion and Race Monitoring Report

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us . . .”

(Hebrews 12:1, NRSV)

“Cloud of witnesses”—“the ancestors”—“the grandparents”—“our forebears.” We use many phrases, from varied cultural heritages, to express our respect for those who have taken the journey of life before us, laying the fabric for identity, community, and a way to look at the world around us. In many indigenous cultures there is an awareness that we are watched over, not simply out of a care for our generation, but for how our actions will impact multiple generations ahead. If our actions concern only ourselves, then we fail to recognize that we are interconnected to our past and our future.

All who are here at GC2019 are witnesses, one journey removed from the eternal cloud of witnesses. We have engaged observations from a random cohort group, some who are delegates witnessing the experience of Holy Conferencing from within the circle of power and influence of the voting bar. The others are witnessing

that Holy Conferencing from the external margin, the place impacted by the action and behaviors within that voting delegation. We have also been polling individuals at large.

Some initial observations from that cloud of witnessing in our midst noted that it is hard to not be distracted. The sources of distraction are several. Even in the midst of prayer it is difficult to not be distracted by the urgent feeling of needing to begin the pivotal work of the petitions. At tables we become distracted by our pattern of expressing thoughts through social media. Perhaps some conversational deliberations and activities would benefit from participants engaging in a “digital fast.” When in conversation, it may be difficult to not be distracted by wondering what the agenda of the other person might be.

For example, as the plans from the Commission on a Way Forward were being presented, multiple individuals noted that the speakers were talking too quickly, causing lapses of content in the translation into other languages. It was not an intentional action, yet in a heightened environment it raised anxiety rather than reducing it. Now that the prioritization of the handling of petitions has been determined, the distractions mentioned earlier can

directly impact how well we are able to engage in holy conferencing. And, in a time of considerable expressed anxiousness, every action and optic take on larger dimensions.

Finally, another form of the cloud of witnessing comes through the use of graphic art, capturing images, themes, emotions, and expressions. Please take time to view the work of the artists we have asked to help in the observing of our processes as a faith community. Where do you see your own feelings and perspectives woven into those art boards?

https://www.facebook.com/pg/GCOR-RUMC/photos/?tab=album&album_id=10161428934890156



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of General Conference deals with legislation that affects central conferences—church regions in Africa, the Philippines and Europe.

Neil Alexander said his unofficial advocacy group Uniting Methodists, which supports the One Church Plan, is not giving up.

“We are in the beginning of a complex legislative process,” Alexander said. “There is much debate and many decisions to come. We will be sharing information and ideas we believe will win broad support.”

The Rev. Edwin Momog, a delegate from Sierra Leone, said the hall was charged and tense during the vote. But he believes a majority of delegates are happy.

“But God has a way of doing things. He has some sense of humor. When we feel so much anxious, that’s when he comes in with his own way. It is God’s church. And, I think the voting just went God’s own way.”

Audun Westad, lay delegate from the Norway Conference, said it saddened him that the disaffiliation petitions got such huge support.

“That does not look good for their willingness to stay together with people of a different mind,” he said.

The German delegation was surprised that the plan was ranked so low with less than 50 percent of the vote, said Klaus U. Ruof, German communicator. They likewise were surprised the delegates wanted to talk pensions and money before talking about a plan, he said.

The Rev. Alex da Silva Souto, an openly gay clergy delegate from the New York Conference, was less surprised. He has championed the Simple Plan.

“Today’s results are not the first time we as LGBTQIA United Methodists have been hurt by our

church, and not the first time that our denomination contradicts its mission, and still we are here,” he said. “We will continue to trust in God’s priorities for our welfare.”

After the prioritization votes, delegates elected officers for the single legislative committee: The Rev. Joe Harris, Oklahoma, chair; the Rev. Betty Kazadi Musau, North Katanga, vice chair; Carlene Fogle-Miller, Florida, secretary.

The *Book of Discipline* requires that all petitions receive a vote in a legislative committee.

Usually General Conference has multiple such committees, but because the whole gathering is dealing with the same parts of the *Book of Discipline*, there is only one committee with all delegates. The legislative work will continue on Feb. 25.

In the legislative committee’s first vote, delegates passed Wespeth’s petition 768 to 44, moving it on to the plenary session.

Concerns about being so close to their scheduled adjournment led delegates to vote to adjourn early and take up discussion on the Traditional Plan first thing tomorrow.

Bishop Carter, who was one of three moderators for the Commission on a Way Forward, said in his sermon that his work with the commission was not unlike his 28 years as pastor of local churches. The commission was charged with finding ways to resolve the divisions over the church’s stance on homosexuality.

When people disagree about how to interpret Scripture, “they imagined they were still learning and growing as disciples and had not arrived,” Carter said. “The divisions are easy to see. What would it be like for us to watch and listen for the connections?”

Editor's Note

The first clergy reserve delegates were omitted from the Alphabetical List of Voting Delegates and First Reserves on pp. 290–300 of the Sunday, February 24 issue of the *Daily Christian Advocate*. We regret this omission. In addition, the General Conference Business Manager's office has received updated information about reserve delegates from several annual conferences.

The first clergy reserve delegates are printed below, followed by the additional reserve delegates from the East Congo, Kasai, Northern Philippines, Oklahoma Indian Missionary, and Pampanga Philippines Conferences.

<i>Altunian,</i>	<i>Gadson, Telley Lynnette</i>	SOUTH CAROLINA
<i>Samuel</i>	<i>Giffin, Wade E</i>	WEST OHIO
BULGARIA-ROMANIA PROVISIONAL	<i>Gilts, Kip Ricardo</i>	TEXAS
<i>Alvarez, Jerome D.</i>	<i>Handschin, Esther</i>	AUSTRIA PROVISIONAL
BICOL PHILIPPINES	<i>Heisler, Benton Roy</i>	MICHIGAN
<i>Andrew, Clay Wesley</i>	<i>Hill, Carol Louise</i>	NORTHERN ILLINOIS
OREGON-IDAHO	<i>Hilliard, James Wesley</i>	ARKANSAS
<i>Ashcroft, Winston Adesumi</i>	<i>Howard, Jill Moffett</i>	INDIANA
SIERRA LEONE	<i>Ilunga Yonge Ndala, Seyssens Maurice</i>	TANGANYIKA
<i>Atrero, Cristine Carnate</i>	<i>Inis, Ronnie Pancho</i>	EAST MINDANAO PHILIPPINES
WEST MIDDLE PHILIPPINES	<i>Julian, Rommel Tanedo</i>	PAMPANGA PHILIPPINES
<i>Ausley, Rurel Reuben</i>	<i>Juwakali, Abisay Lameck</i>	TANZANIA
ALABAMA-WEST FLORIDA	<i>Keller, Dennis Raphael</i>	SUSQUEHANNA
<i>Bacate, Ruben</i>	<i>Ketoka, Paul Lokondo</i>	EAST CONGO
NORTHEAST LUZON PHILIPPINES	<i>Kilume, Kinenkinda Mwepu Gilson</i>	NORTH KATANGA
<i>Baguio, Recto</i>	<i>Kim, Seonyoung</i>	VIRGINIA
NORTHWEST MINDANAO PHILIPPINES	<i>Kraft, Irene</i>	GERMANY NORTH
<i>Bakawe, Thomas Azanchi</i>	<i>Lacaria, John Franklin</i>	WEST VIRGINIA
SOUTHERN NIGERIA	<i>Lamirte,</i>	
<i>Balagan, Lilibeth Asis</i>	<i>Dalton Palalay</i>	NORTH CENTRAL PHILIPPINES
NORTHEAST PHILIPPINES	<i>Letuka,</i>	
<i>Bogue-Trost, Dona Michelle</i>	<i>Thabiso Theodore</i>	SOUTH AFRICA PROVISIONAL
UPPER NEW YORK	<i>Linang, Tito Elarde</i>	MINDANAO PHILIPPINES
<i>Borromeo, Elmer Zapata</i>	<i>Love, Julie Hager</i>	KENTUCKY
PHILIPPINES-CAVITE	<i>Malone, Terry Lynn</i>	LOUISIANA
<i>Brander, Jori</i>	<i>Margulis, Irina</i>	NORTHWEST RUSSIA PROVISIONAL
FINLAND-FINNISH PROV	<i>Masang, Kayind Louise</i>	SOUTH-WEST KATANGA
<i>Breon, Stephan Robert</i>	<i>Mayo, Jonathan Maxwell</i>	TENNESSEE
MISSOURI	<i>Mbay, Mateus Chilond</i>	SOUTH CONGO
<i>Burris, Leanne Michelle</i>	<i>McEntire, W. David</i>	FLORIDA
MISSISSIPPI	<i>McPherson, Seth Ryan</i>	WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA
<i>Cancio, Celestino Ignacio</i>	<i>McRoberts, Sean Colin Donnelly</i>	IOWA
TARLAC PHILIPPINES	<i>Mendiola, Glenn Mendoza</i>	BULACAN PHILIPPINES
<i>Cedillo,</i>	<i>Milenge Basilwango, Jean Alexand</i>	KIVU
<i>Gilbert Abadilla</i>	<i>Miller, Russell Thomas</i>	RIO TEXAS
QUEZON CITY PHILIPPINES EAST	<i>Mitina, Irina</i>	SOUTHERN RUSSIA PROV
<i>Chimbwanda, Givemore</i>	<i>Moke, Mustafa</i>	ORIENTAL AND EQUATOR
EAST ZIMBABWE	<i>Mukosayi, Graham</i>	ZAMBIA
<i>Colon-Emeric, Edgardo A.</i>	<i>N'guessan, N'drin Roland</i>	CÔTE D'IVOIRE
NORTH CAROLINA	<i>Nawej, Arnold Chal</i>	NORTH-WEST KATANGA
<i>Conner, Glenn Davis</i>		
NORTH ALABAMA		
<i>Dabo, Carla Regina</i>		
MOZAMBIQUE SOUTH		
<i>Danburam, Danladi</i>		
NORTHERN NIGERIA		
<i>del Rosario, Daniel Joshua</i>		
PACIFIC NORTHWEST		
<i>Del Rosario,</i>		
<i>Eduardo Manuel</i>		
PANGASINAN PHILIPPINES		
<i>Dotson, Junius Boyd</i>		
GREAT PLAINS		
<i>Dulay, Benedicto Manzano</i>		
MIDDLE PHILIPPINES		
<i>Durovka-Petras,</i>		
<i>Maria</i>		
SERBIA-MACEDONIA PROVISIONAL		
<i>Dyson, Drew Adair</i>		
GREATER NEW JERSEY		
<i>Eason-Williams, Autura</i>		
MEMPHIS		
<i>Esguerra, Enrico Retotar</i>		
PHILIPPINES		
<i>Feltz, Amy Wilson</i>		
NORTHWEST TEXAS		
<i>Ferrer, Christie Sebastian</i>		
VISAYAS PHILIPPINES		
<i>Flippin, Vicki I</i>		
NEW YORK		
<i>Flores, Joseph Capul</i>		
SOUTHERN TAGALOG PROVISIONAL PHILIPPINES		
<i>Forsback, Stefan</i>		
FINLAND-SWEDISH		

<i>Nelson, Julius Sarwolo</i>	LIBERIA	<i>Soellner, Eric</i>	GERMANY EAST
<i>Nelson, Mark Philip</i>	ESTONIA	<i>Spahr, Roger Carl</i>	DAKOTAS
<i>Niederer, Jorg</i>	SWITZERLAND-FRANCE-NORTH AFRICA	<i>Starodubets, Oleg</i>	EASTERN RUSSIA-CENTRAL ASIA PROVISIONAL
<i>Nitangiyuwandemye, Edison</i>	BURUNDI	<i>Stein, Amanda MD</i>	WISCONSIN
<i>Njuguna, Paul Matheri</i>	EAST AFRICA	<i>Stobaugh, Joseph Phillip</i>	NORTH TEXAS
<i>Oehl, Karen M</i>	EAST OHIO	<i>Strickland, Walter Louis</i>	MOUNTAIN SKY
<i>Pacheco, Antonio P</i>	CENTRAL LUZON PHILIPPINES	<i>Tang, Anthony J.</i>	DESERT SOUTHWEST
<i>Perez Avalos, Rene Antonio</i>	NEW ENGLAND	<i>Tiger, Aaron C.</i>	OKLAHOMA
<i>Prochazka, Pavel</i>	CZECH & SLOVAK REP	<i>Tolentino, Pedro</i>	RIZAL PHILIPPINES EAST
<i>Prokhorov, Stanislav</i>	CENTRAL RUSSIA	<i>Townsend, Robbie Britton</i>	PENINSULA-DELAWARE
<i>Queen, Sally Wooten</i>	WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA	<i>Tshibang, Jacques Mutond</i>	LUKOSHI
<i>Reissing, Siegfried</i>	GERMANY SOUTH	<i>Usman, Yunusa Zubairu</i>	CENTRAL NIGERIA
<i>Risager, Thomas</i>	DENMARK	<i>Vetter, Molly Elizabeth</i>	CALIFORNIA-PACIFIC
<i>Rivera, Edgardo</i>	BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON	<i>Vigh, Bence</i>	HUNGARY PROV
<i>Robbins, Thomas Q</i>	CENTRAL TEXAS	<i>Vuksta, Alla</i>	UKRAINE-MOLDAVA PROVISIONAL
<i>Robinson, Randall Lee</i>	ILLINOIS GREAT RIVERS	<i>Walther, Megan Jo Crumm</i>	MICHIGAN
<i>Rodaszynski, Slawomir</i>	POLAND	<i>Walton, Karma Denise</i>	SOUTH GEORGIA
<i>Sanden-Bjonnes, Hilde</i>	NORWAY	<i>Weatherspoon, Dale Maurice</i>	CALIFORNIA-NEVADA
<i>Santiago, Rebecca Jurado</i>	NORTHERN PHILIPPINES	<i>Wilcox, Daniel Paul</i>	ALASKA
<i>Santong, Edgar Segundo</i>	NORTHWEST PHILIPPINES	<i>Wilt, Robert Jacobs</i>	EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
<i>Savage, Jim C</i>	RED BIRD MISSIONARY	<i>Yasay, Wilfredo A</i>	SOUTHWEST PHILIPPINES
<i>Scott, Jeremy William</i>	MOUNTAIN SKY	<i>Young-Ross, Bridgette Denise</i>	NORTH GEORGIA
<i>Seay, Paul Daniel</i>	HOLSTON	<i>Zaagsma, Carol Ann</i>	MINNESOTA
<i>Sharp, Scott Alan</i>	NEW MEXICO	<i>Zamchiya, Clarah</i>	WEST ZIMBABWE
<i>Sinai, Manuel Joao</i>	MOZAMBIQUE NORTH	<i>Zumba, Moisés Mazuela</i>	WESTERN ANGOLA

**The following individuals are reserve delegates.
Clergy names are printed in *italic*.**

East Congo

Mupasa, Germain Unda

Kasai

Otshudi, Gabriel Dikete

Northern Philippines

Baquiran, Bonifer B.

Oklahoma Indian Missionary

Johnson, Margaret B.

Thomas, Pearl Marie.

Pampanga Philippines

Cunanan, Helen Manalac

Transportation to the Airport for Departures

Transportation will be provided on Wednesday, February 27, and Thursday, February 28, for:

- Delegates
- Reserve Delegates
- Translators
- Spouses of those listed above

Anyone who desires shuttle service to the airport must request and secure a ticket by Tuesday, February 26, at noon (12:00 pm).

Any individual without a ticket will not be able to ride the shuttle.

A limited number of tickets are available for each time, so reserve your space as soon as possible.

Location to request and secure tickets:

- Delegates will secure their tickets in pre-function B, near the AdTrav booth.
- Reserve Delegates, Translators, and Spouses will secure their tickets in the main lobby of Entrance B at the “Reserve Delegates” booth.

To secure your airport shuttle ticket, you must know:

- Date and time of flight departure (You will want to secure a ticket for 2.5 hours prior to that).
- Airline on which you will fly from St. Louis
- Hotel where you are staying

Due to limited space on each shuttle, anyone who is not at their pickup location by the time on their ticket will miss their ride and will need to arrange alternate transportation to the airport.

Proceedings of the 2019 General Conference of the United Methodist Church

**Sunday Morning,
February 24, 2019**

(music)

BISHOP ROBERT T. HOSHIBATA: Good morning, church. Good morning, Church. Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

BISHOP HOSHIBATA: As we gather here at General Conference, many of our congregations back home are either in worship or getting ready for worship, so we invoke their presence as we gather to worship today. We're going to start to fill this dome with the Spirit of God. I'm asking you to stand and praise God as we sing "Lift High the Cross."

(music)

RYAN RUNAGER: Dearly beloved, the shadows of morning are deep.

ALL: But the sun is rising.

RUNAGER: Dearly beloved, when the dayspring arrives, who will we be?

ALL: We are water-washed and Spirit-born. We are anointed, beloved, and free!

(music)

KEN IRONFIST: Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

IRONFIST: In my Lenape language, we would say, "alàpaèk welhik," which means "good morning to you." My name is Ken Ironfist. I'll be speaking to you in my traditional Lenape language. My beautiful, wonderful wife of fifty years, Evelyn Firewalker—she'll be interpreting in English.

(clapping)

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

EVELYN FIREWALKER: *(translating for Ironfist)* In the presence of this house, maker God, master of all life, we give thanks. We have come from the four directions. I pray your blessings upon all of these present and all those who pray for them.

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

FIREWALKER: *(translating for Ironfist)* Father Sky, give these men and women the understanding beyond our eyes to see and make it known to them by the power of your Holy Spirit.

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

FIREWALKER: *(translating for Ironfist)* Earth Mother, we thank you for all you provide for us. Grant us the blessings that our word and work may come one of unity, and we might walk more peacefully upon you.

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

FIREWALKER: *(translating for Ironfist)* Grandfather of the East, we give thanks for the spirit of dreams and new beginnings. I pray we may walk hand-and-hearts as we face the future together. You bring your sunlight and your son, Jesus, to light our path.

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

FIREWALKER: *(translating for Ironfist)* Grandmother of the South, we thank you for your spirit of fire and contemplation. Send that spirit that we might do that which is good and right for your children, for we are all your children.

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

FIREWALKER: *(translating for Ironfist)* Grandfather of the West, may the flowing waters of spirit and connections allow us to be brothers and sisters. We ask your blessings of the elders past and present for their wisdom.

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

FIREWALKER: *(translating for Ironfist)* Grandfathers of the North, may the spirit of contemplation and strength come upon us as we hear your voice in our hearts and in silence. May we stay centered to walk in balance with you. And send your Holy Spirit to meet the challenges and opportunities.

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

IRONFIST: *(translating for Ironfist)* You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all of your mind and love your neighbors as yourself.

IRONFIST: *(speaking in Lenape)*

FIREWALKER: *(translating for Ironfist)* Listen to the wind and be strong of heart. May the Creator bless you. In the name of Jesus we pray. We are all related. Amen.

IRONFIST: Amen.

ALL: Amen.

EMMANUEL ILUNGA: God of grace and God of glory, grant us wisdom at the beginning of this day. Light of Life, may your word be the lamp that illuminates our way. The reading from the Book of John, chapter 8, verse 12: "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

You may be seated.

(*music*)

BISHOP KENNETH H. CARTER: Hear these words from the Letter to the Ephesians, taken from chapters 2, 3, and 4. Now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace. In his flesh he has made both groups into one, and has broken down the dividing wall that is the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with his commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace. And might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. Now to the one who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. To all generations forever and ever and ever, Amen. I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. Making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

You are here because people respect you. They have entrusted something very important to you: the discernment of a way forward for our beloved church. You brought with you enough luggage for a few days—amen?—and a few other essential items; and if you are like me, you brought with you some measure of anxiety and yet also the assurance that many people are praying for you. Amen? You came here from the north and the south and the east and the west.

And you come to this moment with a story. It could be a story of pain or a story of hope; it could be

the story of your salvation or the story of how you have offered Christ to others; or how you have been a reconciling person in your community. It could be the story of an opportunity that God made possible for you through this church.

If you look around—and I encourage you to do that—if you look around and reflect for a moment and really look around, it will occur to you that your story is not the only story. Many of us have learned this truth from the witness of Chimamanda Adichie of Nigeria in her TED talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*. My story is not the only story. Your story is not the only story. So we sit in these places, these privileged places, to share our stories and to listen to the stories of others.

The good news is that God has a story, too. God has a story. It's a story even from the beginning of our church of divided peoples. It's the story of the power of God to include what we have excluded, to make clean what we have called profane, to salvage what we have discarded.

God's story is a creation story. We may think that our story here is to divide something or to dismantle something; that may be our story, but God's story is about creation, about a new humanity. Imagine making peace and breaking down the dividing wall of hostility that is between us.

We can be honest. We come to this in our divisions. Amen? Our languages divide us, our life experiences divide us, and our opinions divide us.

Over the last three years since Portland, I was asked by the church to watch and listen; to watch and listen for the good in conservatives, in centrists, in progressives; to hear their testimonies and honor the work of the Holy Spirit in them; to assume the best about them; to assume the best about you; to assume that. It

was not unlike the work I had done for twenty-eight years as a pastor. Some of the most conservative and progressive people I have known in this life inhabited the churches that I served. They sang in the same choir. They studied the Bible together. They spent the night with the homeless. They mentored youth.

I learned to watch and listen for the faith that was just underneath the surface. It motivated them to be in those local churches, and yes, it motivated them specifically to be United Methodists.

I learned to watch and listen for the connections between them. When illness or death came, they prayed for each other. When an economic crisis crippled our city, they collected food and wrote checks. When they disagreed about how to interpret the Bible—imagine that—they simply understood that they were still learning and growing as disciples of Jesus Christ and that God was not finished teaching them yet.

The Commission on a Way Forward was a process of watching and listening. It was not an interruption of God's work. It was and is God's work. It was not a distraction from the mission. It was and is the mission. And now that work and mission is in your hands. Take a moment to look at your hands. This work is in your hands.

If you watch and listen for the good in conservative people and centrist people and progressive people, you will find it. And if you watch and listen for the good in all of us, you will see the cross and the flame. You will see people carrying the cross. You will see people living the prayer, "kindle in us the fire of your love," because the Holy Spirit dwells in them. You will see people loving people who do not love them back. And in these three days, we will continue to watch and listen. We gather under the cross and the flame. We

don't own the cross and the flame. We gather in submission to the cross and the flame within in us. Every one of us is a person who has professed his or her faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Amen? And so we will pray here for the gift of the Holy Spirit to make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

We pray, make us one, and that unity is for the sake of mission. Where you see the mission of God you will see people connected to each other for this very purpose. The divisions are easy to see. What would it take for us to watch and listen for the connections? So what connects us?

Not all of our stories. What connects us is God's story. And I have reflected on how radical the life and ministry of Paul was.

In sharing the story with the world, Ananias was sent to Paul and embraced him, the enemy, as brother—Acts 9. Paul remembered his call story and he constantly shared it—Acts 22. Paul followed Jesus, which meant traveling the way of the cross—Galatians 2. Paul confessed his sin and his struggle—Romans 7. Paul was willing to resolve conflict with other leaders for the sake of the mission—Act 15, Galatians 1. Paul led teams of women and men and developed an understanding of diverse spiritual gifts—1 Corinthians 12 and 14. Paul planted churches in strategic crossroads where the gospel engaged diverse cultures—1 and 2 Corinthians and Ephesians. Paul was a passionate advocate for the unity of the body of Christ—Ephesians 4. And Paul knew the difference between church and empire; *koinonia* and colonialism—Romans 12, Acts 17.

In Paul's writing for us this morning there is a movement from evangelism to doxology to life together. God overcame the almost

insurmountable division between our sin and divine holiness. God overcame these divisions in the New Testament and united the church for mission. God through Jesus Christ shows us the way of peace—peace amidst our polarizations and binaries.

And because God has done all of this, more than we can ask or imagine, are we bold to believe that God can do this again? It is as if Paul is saying to the Ephesians, there are these two groups—imagine—and God abolished the dividing wall of hostility between them. Praise God. And now we sing this doxology to the God who can do this and imagine that God might do it again.

(*applause*)

John Wesley writing in *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, and I paraphrase,

"It is a divine evidence and conviction that what God has promised he is able to perform. We admit that with us, it is impossible to make something clean from the unclean, to purify our hearts from sin, to till the ground of our hearts with holiness. Yet with God there is no difficulty since with God all things are possible. If God speaks, I shall be done. God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. God is able. God is able.

Think of your own life for just a moment. Think of your own journey, what God has made possible. A way when there seemed to be no way. How Jesus has walked with you. How the Spirit came like wind or fire or a still, small voice. It's your story. It's God's new creation in you. And in your own heart language say a prayer of thanksgiving to God, right here, right now, for all that God has done through you.

Yes, through it all, there are these dividing walls. We come to St. Louis pretty divided. I'm no stranger

to the statistics and the surveys. But could these be the three days where Jesus might resurrect us, and raise us to new a life, and reconcile both groups and all of our associated tribes into one body?

(*applause*)

And if I could be permitted to be theological just for a moment, could it be that Jesus Christ has actually already done this?

(*applause*)

That Jesus has already done this when he broke down the dividing wall of hostility that is between us and made peace by the blood of his cross? The cross, what God has done for us, and the flame, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, what God is doing in us. Love and joy and peace and patience.

Patience. Evangelism and doxology create something new, and that is people who are in connection with each other. That's you and me; that's us. That's the people of the cross and the flame. So, we have been called in humility, which means we allow our story to become a part of God's greater story. We don't suppress our story. We rejoice in our story. But conversion is allowing our story to be a part of God's greater story. And we are gentle with each other, which means we do no harm. Because every person who will share in this community has been created in the image of God. And we are patient. We bear with one another in love. That's sanctification. We bear witness to the world that we love each other, because God first loved us. And we make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.

Many of us have sung the beautiful music of Taizé. There is a *Rule of Taizé*. It's kind of their *Book of Discipline*. It's about five percent as long as ours. And I have long

been convicted by these words, just these two sentences, from the *Rule of Taizé*. I'm not reading them to say you should do this, I'm reading them to say I'm always challenged and convicted when I read them or hear them. Let's say them together:

"Never resign yourself to the scandal of the separation of Christians who so readily profess love for their neighbor and yet remain divided. Make the unity of the body of Christ your passionate concern."

It's an echo of the scripture. Make every effort to maintain the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace. And so this leads to a series of uncomfortable questions. Have we made every effort? Have we made every effort? Have we made every effort? Can we allow our stories, as important as they are, to become a part of a much bigger story? What if we imagined, as my spiritual director says, that this means more to God than it does to us? What if, in our life together in these three days, we became an outward and visible sign of the cross and the flame? What if—what if we sought to hold together an evangelical orthodoxy with a radical hospitality to all people, and trusted that God would journey with them and with us toward a holiness that finally is not ours to define in this life? What if we admitted many of us live in post-Christian cultures? What if we admitted that when we speak of holiness, the world hears judgment? What if holiness is experienced in these three days as we encounter the God of Isaiah 6, and in small circles of trust with each other, which we once called Class Meetings and Band Meetings, or to coin a phrase, Christian Conferencing? What if separation is never the path to holiness? What if division is never the way to revival? What if schism is never God's dream for the church? What if searching for the exits is

easier but less faithful, more about our preferences, but having very little to do with the one who never searches for an exit in relation to us?

(applause)

What if there's a deep center, a great tradition worth claiming? We know how to sing this, and we sing this in our churches, and it goes to the very nature of who God is.

"Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love."

"He left his Father's throne above."

"So free, so infinite. His grace, tis mercy all. Immense and free."

Do you know these hymns? And what if we, like our Lord, we were to *"empty ourselves of all but love"*? Do you know that hymn?

Friends, in these three days, make every effort, make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Those are not my words. They're in our book. Make the unity of the body of Christ your passionate concern. And remember you are the people of the cross and the flame. It might even be possible to say that in these three days you are the stewards of the cross and the flame.

Imagine that you and I are still learning and growing as disciples, as accomplished as we are. And imagine that God still has something to teach us about the scriptures. And imagine this, God still has a dream for us as a church. And so in these days, we say *"finish then, thy new creation."*

I love the preacher Zan Holmes, and Zan Holmes said once, "No sermon should end—" We're about to end—amen? "No sermon should end without two things happening. We should give God the credit." And so friends, if we find a way forward, we will give God the glory. Amen?

And he said "No sermon should end without there being some good news." So hear the good news: What

God has promised, God is able to perform. Hear the good news. God is able. Amen.

(applause)

(music)

(applause)

UCHENNA AWA (Boston University School of Theology): Please stand in body or spirit, and join in prayer.

Living God, we take a few deep breaths.

We live in a time of clenching fists:

In anger that threatens,
In greed that clutches,
In worry and fear that tense and tighten.

This is no way to live.

And so we let go.

We take a few deep breaths.

Our hands are empty.

We acknowledge our powerlessness.

We are not in control.

But we are humble protagonists in your great story of love.

We receive your grace that heals, forgives, and liberates.

This is the way to live.

And so, we open our hands, our hearts, our minds, our doors.

Ahhh!

We take a few deep breaths.

We extend our hands in blessing. As we have been blessed, so we bless. We hold no weapons and make no threats. We seek peace with all, and we make peace for all. It is better for us to give than to receive.

Make us instruments of your peace, living God. We surrender our lives to your purposes. May your Spirit fill our lives and work through these hands. Amen.

ALL: Amen.

UCHENNA AWA: We open our eyes. We see your light in one another; a flickering candle in the dark, a quiet glow at dawn, a rising sun for this new day. We call forth that light in one another, and we honor one another with these hands. May the peace of Christ rise in you.

(music)

DEBI VANDENBOOM: What will you do with this light?

ALL: Let it shine.

VANDENBOOM: Should you hide it? Should you hide it? Try to keep it safe?

ALL: Let it shine!

VANDENBOOM: Will you share it? Is it yours; is it mine?

ALL: Let it shine!

VANDENBOOM: Where will the light go when it leaves our hands?

ALL: Don't be afraid. It returns to the Son. Let it shine!

VANDENBOOM: Let us each sing in our own heart language!

(music)

BISHOP CARTER: In just a moment, we will receive the benediction and be guided in our next steps by Gary Graves, who's the secretary of the General Conference. The Council of Bishops, by our constitution, selects the first presiding officer of our work together. It's the tradition that the president of the council serves in that role. It's been a great gift to be able to preach this morning, later in the day to have a small part of the Commission on the Way Forward report as a moderator. I've been blessed in those ways. And my discernment and the discernment of the Council of Bishops has been that this presiding role could be shared. I am surrounded by many gifted colleagues. Amen? And so I'm delighted to announce that when we begin our work, the presiding president will be Bishop Christian Alsted.

(applause)

Now receive this benediction:

Dearly beloved, be confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. Let it shine. Let it shine.

ALL: Let it shine. Let it shine.

BISHOP CARTER: Amen.

(applause)

Gary Graves: Now we will be in break until 9:30, when we will begin the organizational session.

(music)

Conference Called to Order for Business

BISHOP CHRISTIAN ALSTED: Let us be in order. Please find your seats.

The 2019 Special Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church is now in session.

Good morning. Good morning. My name is Christian Alsted. I am the Bishop of the Nordic and Baltic Episcopal Area, part of the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference. I am working this morning with Bishop Hope Morgan Ward and Bishop Gregory Palmer, and we are assisted by the Secretary of General Conference, Gary Graves, and our parliamentarian, Len Young.

Dear United Methodists, this special session of the General Conference is called by the Council of Bishops with the purpose limited to receiving and acting upon a report from the Commission on a Way Forward upon recommendation of the Council of Bishops. We are not gathered here in St. Louis to discuss and decide on an issue or on a question. We are speaking about people and the church. Our conversation these days will be about sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, friends, and members of our church-

es who identify themselves as homosexuals. We are here to see God's way forward to discover how we as the body of Christ follow and serve Christ with all people, including LGBTQI persons, as we engage in God's mission. We gather in a football arena where football teams have played each other and they have been struggling to win the game. However, yesterday, today, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, this is not a football arena. This is church.

(applause)

And for these days, a different set of rules apply. And I'm not speaking about Robert's Rules of Order. I'm speaking about the General Rules crafted by the founder of Methodism, John Wesley: Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God by using the means of grace. In his message this morning, based on scripture from Ephesians, Bishop Carter preached what this implies. I invite us to let the General Rules shape our conferencing. I believe that is what our fellow United Methodists across the world expect of us. And I believe that is what Jesus Christ expects of us. So, I invite us to continue to work in a spirit of worship and prayer, and to continue to expect that the Holy Spirit will speak and guide us as we do our work.

Please pray with me with the words of Bishop Rueben Job. "Loving God, we offer open hands, open minds, and open hearts, and a willing spirit to hear continually your calling and sending voice. We abandon life and ministry into your care with assurance that you will lead us in the path of righteousness and goodness. Amen."

Now, I will turn to the Secretary of General Conference, Gary Graves, to do the roll call and establish the bar of the conference.

Secretary Graves Calls the Roll

GARY GRAVES: Thank you, Bishop. Our roll call will be accomplished in the following ways. I will be receiving a report from the Secretary of the Council of Bishops for the attendance of the bishops at this session; from the Secretary of the Judicial Council for the attendance of the members of that body; from the Chief Connectional Ministries Officer of the Connectional Table for all of our General Secretaries; from the chairperson of each annual conference delegation for its membership; and at that point, I will inform the heads of delegations that even though we originally thought that you would not have a form, one will be coming to you by page this afternoon and will need to be completed once each day. They may be returned to locker room A, the main office of General Conference.

Reporting from the chairperson of each of the delegations from our concordat, affiliated autonomous, and affiliated united churches, and from the attendance as recorded using the scanners in and out—that is a test system for this particular session as we look forward into 2020. Please do not be anxious about the scanning. It is helping us test the system and the ways that we might be able to utilize it in the future. That is the roll call, Bishop.

In establishing the Bar of the Conference, the Bar will contain all of the area which is the floor of the arena. Within the bar, there will be a designated seating area for delegates and seating for their meals around the edges of the perimeter. It will include the stage for those who are given voting rights and need to be voting from the stage. So it is the floor of the arena, including the stage. That is my motion.

BISHOP ALSTED: Thank you very much.

You have heard the motion. Now, I'm asking you to take out your devices, and if you would affirm this motion, please press one (1). If not, press two (2).

BISHOP ALSTED: Please vote. May we have the results displayed?

Thank you very much. We have established the bar of the conference. [*Yes, 679; No, 10, 1.45%*]

GRAVES: If you are coming to the stage to make presentations, it will be easier for you to make that access from the side of the stage that you are looking at the left. For us, we call that stage right. It is to my right. It is to your left. There is a set of stairs and two ramps that are both available. That will be the easiest way for you to access the stage.

Report on Committee on Agenda and Calendar

BISHOP ALSTED: Now we move to the report from the Committee on Agenda and Calendar, and I call on Emily Allen, the chair of the committee.

EMILY ALLEN (California-Nevada): Good morning, Bishop. Good morning. I am a lay delegate from California-Nevada Annual Conference and chair of the Agenda and Calendar Committee.

Today's schedule is on the first page of today's *Daily Christian Advocate*. The report from our committee is on page 284. Page 284. It includes the order that petitions will be presented to you today for prioritization. Adjustments will be made as needed after the Committee on Reference considers assigning items to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters. That concludes my report.

BISHOP ALSTED: Thank you very much. And we have received the report, and we will move on to the report from the Committee on Reference. And I call on Chuck Savage.

Report of the Committee on Reference

CHUCK SAVAGE (a member of the Committee on Reference): Good morning, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Bishop, before I give my report, if I could have a moment of privilege, I would appreciate it.

BISHOP ALSTED: Please.

SAVAGE: It's been my privilege to serve with a group of people on the Committee on Reference, and as you might expect, the group is—covers the full spectrum of theological positions. And my prayer for us as we do our work here today would be that we treat each other and act with each other as that committee did, setting aside those things and getting the work done. So that's my prayer for us today. The report from the Committee on Reference can be found on page 283 in your *DCA* for today. And it has the report from Thursday's meeting. Additionally, the Committee on Reference will meet today to discuss references or referrals to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, will be meeting in room 2—in room 145 over the lunch hour. Bishop, that concludes our report.

BISHOP ALSTED: Thank you very much. And I turn back to the Secretary of General Conference for an announcement of the Coordinator of Calendar.

GRAVES: Dr. Susan Brumbaugh was elected Coordinator of the Calendar in our session of 2016, and I am happy to announce that she will be continuing in that position during this Special Session of the General Conference. So thank you, Susan.

(applause)

BISHOP ALSTAD: Thank you very much. And now we turn to the Commission on General Conference with the chair, Duncan McMillan.

*Report of the Commission on
General Conference*

S. DUNCAN MCMILLAN IV
(North Carolina): Greetings. My name is Duncan McMillan. I'm a lay delegate from North Carolina. I've been blessed to serve on the Commission on General Conference since 2012. I welcome you to St. Louis and to the Special Session of General Conference. The Commission on General Conference has been praying, worshiping, talking, and planning for the past three years, not to plan one General Conference, but two. We have had meetings in person, via the web, and many a conference call. The commission has worked to provide you, the delegates of the called Special Session, the best opportunity to make a decision as a church. I would like to extend countless thanks to all the people who have helped make this event possible. I'd like to name some, so please forgive me if I leave one off. I would like to thank the commission itself for the efforts and the ideas they have put into this process in helping us as a voting body do our best work. I'd like to thank the officers of the commission, Kim Simpson and Rev. Mujinga Kasha-la, and our three committee chairs, Rev. Lynn Hill, Rev. Juliet Spencer, and Stephanie Henry. They have been great leaders in this time of the church and have helped our commission be faithful in their work. I'd like to thank our General Conference staff, Gary Graves, Sara Hotchkiss, and Raquel Molloy-Perez. The three of them have put in a great deal of overtime. They've visited all across the connection in helping prepare the global church for this gathering. I'd like to extend a new thanks to the Dr. Leonard Young, our parliamentarian, and the services and expertise he will bring this body to maintain clarity, calmness, and a method to

move through the legislative process peacefully. I'd like to extend a thanks to our worship team, led by Raymond Trapp, and the way that we are able to praise God through song, dance, and so forth.

(applause)

I'd like to give thanks to our interpretation team and for the ability to have simultaneous interpretation and the many talented interpreters that we have here who provide real-time interpretation.

(applause)

I'd like to extend a thanks to Bishop Tom Bickerton and Bishop Rudy Juan, who are Council of Bishops liaisons. They have helped us greatly in this partnership as the Commission on General Conference has worked closely with the Council of Bishops in planning this Special Session. I would like to thank the St. Louis Hospitality Team. They have worked with the General Conference staff in many ways to make this conference flow as smoothly as possible. I'd like to extend a thanks to the Illinois Great Rivers and the Missouri Annual Conference offices and their team of volunteers. These two conferences have come together as a cohesive unit in aiding delegates in whatever manner they may need. The volunteers, the pages, and the marshals, the countless other people that have helped behind the scenes and are helping now with all the ins and the outs to make a conference of this magnitude happen. Lastly, I would like to thank you, the delegates. You have prepared for this moment, you have prayed over this moment, and you have been called by your home annual conferences to serve the church. I personally would like to extend thanks for your time, for your faith, and your commitment to United Methodism. A question has been asked to the commission about

information gathered with the Lumi voting devices. The commission determined when working with Lumi that total votes will be recorded, but no individual voting data will be recorded or shared. So I ask you as we embark on this short but important journey together, let us show the volunteers, our delegates, and this Dome staff a spirit of grace. May we be in prayer with those who we disagree with. May we look honestly at the work that we have before us. May we pray over the work we have yet to do and the work that we will have to do when we go back home.

The prayer team prayed over each of the delegates and the seats in this Dome and the staff working this event. They laid comforting prayers down upon us. May we keep that spirit of grace as we engage in the legislative process. Yesterday, we spent most of the day in prayer, and we highlighted the missional needs of our global church. Each region of the world spoke to their various challenges, their concerns, and their celebrations. May we keep these things in our hearts throughout this conference and as we go back home. Please be in prayer throughout this time together as not only we delegates make decisions that will impact the church, but those who will watch from home. Thank you for your time. This concludes my report. God bless.

(applause)

*Commission on the General
Conference Report Adopted*

BISHOP CHRISTIAN ALSTED: Thank you very much. We now have the report before us, and I will ask you to adopt the report. If you wish to adopt—please take out your voting devices. We will be ready to vote in just a second. If you wish to vote in favor of this report, please press one (1). If you wish to vote against, please

press two (2). Please vote now. Please project the results. And we have adopted the report. Thank you.

[Yes, 716; No, 6. 99.17%, 8.3%]

During our—I see that there are some devices are not working, but I believe that will be fixed quite quickly. I do want to point out that all of you have been given translation equipment, and I realize that many of you are not using the translation equipment continuously. We do have several languages spoken in this room, and we have translation into many languages. We will have people speaking in languages different than English, and so I ask you to have you have your equipment on the table right in front of you so that you are able to put on your headphones quickly and you are able to follow what is being said.

Plan of Organizational and Rules of Order Sustained

We are now going to turn to the adoption of Plan of Organization and Rules of Order. And in connection with this, with the adoption of Plan of Organization and Rules of Order, the chair wishes to offer the following. The General Conference is a special conference called to do specific things. The purpose for which this conference was called by the Council on Bishops is contained in the following statement, date July 9, 2018. This purpose of this Special Session of the General Conference shall be limited to receiving and acting upon a report from the Commission on a Way Forward based upon recommendations of the Council of Bishops. A special conference by definition may only do such things as are in harmony with the call of the conference. The only actions in order at this special conference will be those amendments to *The Book of Discipline* that have been outlined in the decision on harmony given by the Committee on Reference.

No notice was given of any attempt to amend the Rules of Order. This means that the action to approve the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order would be just that—an action to affirm these plans and rules without the possibility of their being amended at this special conference. So in all respects, the Rules of Order adopted by the 2016 General Conference will govern these proceedings and may not be amended during the special session. This is the ruling of the chair. With this in mind, the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order are properly before the conference for a sustaining vote. And I ask you to take out your voting devices, and since these rules cannot be amended, we are ready to take a vote to sustain them. All of those who wish to sustain the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order will press one (1), and those opposed press two (2). You may vote now. Thank you, and please project the results. Thank you very much. You have sustained the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order for this special session of the General Conference, and those are the plans and rules which we will follow through our proceedings. Thank you very much.

[Yes, 717; No, 33. 95.6%, 4.0%]

Report from the Commission on a Way Forward

We now move on to the report from the Commission on a Way Forward. And in a moment I will turn it over to the Commission, who will offer their report to us. The moderators of the commission are Bishop Kenneth Carter, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, and Bishop David Yemba. Before we turn it over to the Commission, let us join in prayer. Let us pray. Almighty and Loving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we ask you to speak to our minds, to speak to our understanding, to speak to our innermost being of you and your plans and your future of The United

Methodist Church. Lord, we ask you to give us fresh perspective. We ask you to touch our lives, our community, our church, and we ask you to guide us in your ways. This we pray in your mighty name. Amen. So I turn it over to the Commission, and it will be David Field from Switzerland who will start us off.

DAVID FIELD (Europe Switzerland): I am David Field. Yesterday was a day of experiencing the power of prayer in a new and profound way. Coming together as delegates at General Conference, we spent the day in prayer as we prayed our way forward. As we begin our report, our continued prayer is, “Come, Holy Spirit.”

Before we share with you about the Commission on a Way Forward, I invite you to simply cross your arms. It feels natural. You know what to do without thinking about it. Now, switch your arms around. Put the other arm on top. And if you are like me, you had to think about it. You can do it, but it took more thought. It feels different, even awkward. The Commission on a Way Forward was a different kind of group, called together in a different way, and we did our work in a different way. That is what we had to do as the commission. We were called to think differently, to do our work in a different way, and we related to each other in new ways.

At high school, I had a chemistry teacher who loved to perform explosive experiments. He would stand in front of the class and slowly add different chemicals into a container and suddenly, to our delight, the combination exploded with loud noise and vibrant colors. We would all watch in anticipation, never sure which chemical would be the catalyst that ignited the explosion.

One of the first documents we received as members of the Commission was a list of the names of the commission members, stating that the person was a bishop, a clergyper-

son, or a layperson, and the conference from which they came. I had had personal contact with two of the commission members before we met. I knew some of the names of others from following debates and discussions in the UMC. But the majority were a mystery to me. I made a list of all the members, Googled each name, and made notes about each person. I'd never been to General Conference, but I had watched the live stream. I followed debates in the social media and had read webpages of the various caucus groups. As I read and reflected on the names and notes, the thought that kept coming to me was, *This cannot work. Such a combination of people in the same room can only end in a noisy and perhaps colorful explosion.*"

As I attended the first meetings of the commission, I waited in dread for the explosion. What statement would be made? What comment passed? What action would be performed that would be a catalyst for this explosion? It never happened. There was no explosion. Yes, there were moments of tension, times of deep disagreement, occasions when people not only expressed their opinions, but their deep personal feelings of frustration, of pain, of anger. There were a few instances when it seemed a spark was about to fly. But it did not.

Why not? Why were we able to work together in mutual respect, to develop unusual and unexpected relationships, to grow in love for each other? It was because the Holy Spirit came.

When we completed the work of the commission, I was relieved that I would not have to spend hours in preparation; make another ten-hour flight cramped in economy class; sit through long, intense, and emotionally draining meetings; be away from my family; return exhausted, and jet-lagged. Yet, something was absent in my life. There was a

dull emotional ache. I was deeply missing the diverse group of friends; siblings in Christ; people who, despite our disagreements and sometimes because of our disagreements, have become extremely important to me. Yes, we did not produce a unified report with one way forward. Yes, we still do not agree with each other. We did not find the solution for the crisis in the UMC. But we discovered together what it meant to be truly the body of Christ in its complexity, its diversity, its pain, its brokenness. But also its unity in a very deeply personal way.

As I look back, I can only confess in all that the Holy Spirit had come upon us. Not with tongues of fire, new languages, or demonstrative signs, but as a still, calm voice of love drawing us into relationship with Christ and with each other. Our prayer is that the Spirit would do the same amongst us here as we gather to reflect, to discuss, and decide on the future of The United Methodist Church.

DAVID FIELD (Europe Switzerland): Come, Holy Spirit.

(applause)

BISHOP SANDRA STEINER BALL: We are bishops Steiner Ball, Yemba, and Carter. Prior to the formation of the commission, the Council of Bishops named three from among them who would serve as moderators for the commission. The bishops named were Bishop David Yemba, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, and Bishop Ken Carter. The moderators' role was to design a way for the commission to fulfill the work as set forth by the vision, mission, and scope found in the *ADCA*, p. 126.

Additionally, our role was to help build community and trust among commission members so that they could truly listen to and respect each other as people who are created in God's image: holy, beloved, and valuable. We were to help the com-

mission members remain at the table in the midst of difficult and challenging conversations. We were to plan for and facilitate conversations; to arrange for information, research, and resources the Commission identified as necessary to their work; and to serve as the conduits of conversation and information between the commission and the Council of Bishops. The moderators were not members of the commission. The moderators walked with the commission as it sought to fulfill this mandate found in the vision, mission, and scope:

"The Commission will design a way of being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible that allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and that balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible."

In addition to the three moderators, there were two other persons who helped the commission in its work: Alex Shanks, who served as the project manager, and Gil Rendle, who consulted with the moderators and the project manager to facilitate the commission's work. Additionally, Maidstone Mulenga assisted with communications, Lauren Ashley handled logistics, and Isabelle Gardner and Michael Yang provided translation.

BISHOP DAVID YEMBA: In addition to the moderators, we had bishops who were members of the commission. The commission was made up of approximately one-third clergy, one-third laity, and one-third episcopal leaders. The following bishops were members of the commission and underscored their participation in the commission as a servant relationship. These bishops are: Bishop Grant Hagiya, serving the Los Angeles area; Bishop Mande Guy Muyombo, serving the North Katanga area; Bishop Eben Nihwatiwa, serving the

Zimbabwe area; Bishop Greg Palmer, serving the West Ohio area; Bishop Robert Schnase, serving the San Antonio area; Bishop Pedro Torio, serving the Baguio area; Bishop Deborah Wallace-Padgett, serving Birmingham area; Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, retired from Germany; Bishop John Wesley Yohanna, serving the Nigeria area. You may be seated.

(applause)

As presiding and a residential elders, the desire of the bishops serving on the commission was constantly focused on how to help The United Methodist Church through this current impasse and enable the church to more fully focus on multiplying the Wesleyan witness throughout the world and, more boldly, fulfilling the Church's mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Along with the whole commission, the bishops hope that the commission's report will enable the delegates to do their best work and discernment on behalf of the whole of the global United Methodist Church.

THOMAS L. SALSGIVER

(Susquehanna): My name is Tom Salsgiver, and we would like to introduce to you the rest of the commission: Jorge Acevedo; Brian Adkins; Jacques Akasa Umembudi, who was not able to be here because of issues with his visa; Tom Berlin; Matt Berryman, who will be here this afternoon; Helen Cunanan; David Field; Hortense Aka Dago-Akribi; Scott Johnson; Jessica LaGrone; Tom Lambrecht; Myungrae Kim Lee; Julie Hager Love.

JULIE HAGER LOVE

(COAWF): I'm Julie Hager Love. I also want to introduce to you Mazvita Machinga, Patricia Miller, Dave Nuckols, Casey Langley Orr, Donna Pritchard, Tom Salsgiver, Jasmine Rose Smothers, Leah Taylor, Alice Williams, and Alfiado Zunguza.

(applause)

ALICE WILLIAMS (member of the Commission on a Way Forward): I am Alice Williams, and throughout the last two years the most frequent question that I've received—and most of us on the commission—has been what was it like to be on the commission? Now, it's a question that required more than just a sentence or two, usually, to answer, and my standard response was, "Well, it is just about like any other church committee that you've ever been on, with maybe a few differences." We were a group of people who, for the most part, didn't know one another before we met. We came together to do some really complex and difficult work that we still at this moment have no idea what the final outcome will be. And overall, it turned out to be this really amazing, God-filled experience that I don't think any of us could have anticipated or thought we would ever find ourselves in. Truth be told, when we gathered for our first meeting, David Field wasn't the only one who doubted whether this was going to work. I want you to think about it: a group of thirty-two people from around the world designed to be representative of the twelve million people who call themselves Methodist coming together. It's hard to get thirty-two people to do anything together. This group was made up of some incredible people. There were eight bishops, eleven laity, eleven elders, and two deacons. There were eighteen men and fourteen women. We varied in age, although if there was one area that we were in a bit skewed in, it was here. We varied in our sex, our sexual orientation, our ethnicity, political perspectives, economic backgrounds, and the list goes on. We didn't speak one common language or come from the same cultural understanding. We varied greatly in our faith understanding. We were traditionalists, progressives, evangelicals, charis-

matics, centrists, but the one thing that we all held in common was our faith in Jesus Christ and our love of The United Methodist Church.

JORGE ACEVEDO (member of the Commission on a Way Forward): I am Jorge Acevedo, and Alice and I did not plan to wear the same color clothing. Our first meeting in Atlanta was very telling. When we first met, you could sense the enormity of the task before us, and the weight of this task fell heavily on each of us for the entirety of the work we did. After all, the work we were called to do involved the future of our beloved United Methodist Church, and make no mistake, we were very much aware that the world was watching and you all were watching and praying for this work. Our moderators and Gil Rendle gave us wise advice from the very start. We weren't here to change each other's perspective on LGBTQ inclusion. In fact, for the first few meetings, we were going to be very intentional in getting just to know one another. We were encouraged to go to dinner together, have coffee together. Yes, food was a common theme—after all, we are United Methodists—and spend time getting to know one another to begin the process of listening to each other's story. We began our work by building relationships, and that proved to serve us well. As our coach, Gil, would later say to us, "Relationships and stories come before ideas and answers." The travel for many wasn't easy. For some, it was a three-day journey to our meetings involving twenty plus hours on a plane. Each of us, at some point during the nine meetings, had to deal with adjusting to new time zones, different foods, missed or canceled flights, and lost luggage—some of which made for some memorable and funny stories.

WILLIAMS: Life didn't stop for any of us during the past two years when we engaged in this work.

Almost all of us had the demands of our real jobs that didn't let up. Some of us faced life events, such as the death of a family member or friend, during our time together. Others dealt with, and are still dealing with, very serious health issues. Some experienced job changes. Others faced financial challenges. Some relocated to new places and to new callings. Some of us had major government uprisings and political unrest in our home countries. There were at least three coups where we literally stopped our work to pray for those countries. We had natural disasters involving floods, hurricanes, fires, and earthquakes, but we also had some joys, and on the upside, we celebrated greatly. One of us welcomed a beautiful baby girl into the world. We also had some who welcomed grandchildren into their family tree. And others retired from lifelong callings and started their encore careers. One of us was even honored to be elected bishop during our time together. Through all of these events, we prayed for one another, we cared for one another, and our Methodist connection played out in some truly unexpected and beautiful ways as we attempted to support one another. Not surprisingly, you could say we became a thirty-two-member Wesleyan small group.

ACEVEDO: We certainly had our moments. The conversations became difficult, and at times strained. This wasn't always easy. We had to manage the tension between the rich diversity of the group and the monumental task we had been given. We used our covenant, *The Anatomy of Peace*, and Jesus' words in Matthew 18 to help us get through the difficult moments. And while we agreed on some things, we disagreed on others. I don't know how many pounds of Red Vines and M&M candies were consumed, but trust me when I say there was some serious stress eating

that took place. We saw each other at our best and at our worst. We spoke from the heart and with conviction. We learned what it meant to be a heart at war and a heart at peace. We had moments of laughter and profound, moving moments of tears, and we managed to stay engaged in ways that left us committed to the work and to one another.

WILLIAMS: Now, I will share with you that for me as a laity member who all I ever wanted to do was to go to a general conference—that's all I ever wanted to do—finding myself in a room filled with bishops, clergy, and really amazingly gifted church folk was at first a little intimidating. No, it was a lot intimidating. Added to that, as a member of the LGBTQ community, I had real concerns about how I would be received and treated while I was on the commission. If I am honest with you, I came into this thinking I was going to be like the skunk at the garden party. Now for those of you who may not be familiar with that saying, it means that you realize you have been invited but you don't know really for sure if you are exactly welcomed. Folks, I couldn't have been more wrong. For me, the greatest blessing was how, throughout our entire time together, I was treated with nothing but love and grace. To my LGBTQ brothers, sisters, and allies who may wonder, were our voices really heard, I have to say a resounding yes; and our voices were not just heard, but they were heard with compassion and with respect, and this was true of all the voices at the table.

JORGE ACEVEDO: Over the last two years, this group and prayed and engaged in the study of Scripture, shared Holy Communion, laughed, cried, agreed, and disagreed with each other. And in the end, we ended up loving each other deeply. We did our best to complete the challenge that the body of General

Conference 2016 gave to the Council of Bishops in a way that as we pray is acceptable and pleasing to the One who created us, redeemed us, and cares for each of us with a love so deep and unfailing that we can't even begin to understand. We want to say, "thank you" for entrusting us with this task. To God be the glory. It is important to know that the Holy Spirit was at work in our work. God showed up over and over. And our sincere prayer is that here in St. Louis, God will show up and that the Holy Spirit will invade this room. And so we pray, come Holy Spirit.

(*applause*)

SCOTT JOHNSON (Upper New York Annual Conference): I'm Scott Johnson, from Upper New York Annual Conference. Establishing our relationships gave the commission a solid foundation for beginning the daunting task before us. As disciples who love Jesus, and as people called United Methodists, it was not hard to feel the enormous weight of the daunting task before us. And before us sat this blank page. Now sometimes a blank page is tremendously liberating. It can be a playground for your creativity and imagination. Other times a blank page is overwhelming. I'm betting most of us don't have to think hard about a time we sat staring at several blue lines on a piece of paper or a blinking cursor on a blank screen for what feels like days. And we're trying to figure out some way to sort through all the million things buzzing through our heads and figure out which ones deserve to see the light of day. Or worse yet, we're agonizing because there's no buzz at all. Now take that feeling and add thirty-one other deeply faithful and experienced minds, experiencing the exact same things. Then add an entire world waiting to see your work. By the grace and movement of

God, two things were actually able to help us to begin. The first was the foundational Mission, Vision and Scope document. It gave us several key principles, aspirational outcomes, and parameters that shaped our conversations and guided our decisions. Unpacking a few of those might help you understand some of the thinking behind the plans. The language of the missional charge to the commission was challenging. Fortunately, one of the aspects of the mission that was members of the commission would be committed to the future of the connection and open to a new thing. It's different to envision new ways of walking together if you have no hope for the future. And even with the diverse experiences, perspectives and skills that each member brought to the commission, one thing we had in common was the belief that God was still at work in The United Methodist Church. God might be doing new things, but God is clearly still doing something. This genuine and profound hope made it possible to dream of what we might accomplish on the blank page before us.

(applause)

DONNA PRITCHARD (COWF): I am Donna Pritchard. Some outside the commission thought that our role was to choose a side or to pick a winner in the debate over the full inclusion of LGBTQI people. However, the charge we were given kept us clear that such a statement was not our task. Our work was to explore new possibilities that empowered a connection that maintained, if not magnified, the very best things about The United Methodist Church. If our time together had focused on our positions instead of acknowledging the presence of diverse understandings, no recommendation would speak to the hope entrusted to us. We had to

choose that we would not close our hearts to the new thing God might be doing among us. We had to choose that daily. It was also important for us that we focus on recommending options rather than definitively deciding on one course of action. That understanding kept our work focused on what was possible rather than creating a competitive environment where individual perspectives or preferences became the focus. It was clear that whatever would begin to take shape on that blank page would manifest some hopes for the church that had not yet been realized in our walk together. With that great potential, we worked hard to honor the aspirations captured in the vision we were given. This work would seem to maximize the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible. It would also allow for as much contextualization as possible and it would balance an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible. These hopes capture our sincere desire to offer the world the unique perspective of Methodism while recognizing the diversity of ministry settings around the global connection. And holding onto the hope that our walking in unity gives us the best chance to reach the most number of God's children. It was also clear that all of the members of the commission were working to substantively address the ongoing conflict that brought us to the table. Whatever took shape on the page had to offer something that might prevent a repeat of the harm that the Church has consistently experienced. These aspects of the mission, vision and scope would keep our work focused and would ensure that the image that filled the blank page before us would represent the best hopes of those who saw it.

HELEN CUNANAN (COWF): I am Helen Cunanan from the Philippines.

Recognizing that the work existed only in the practical context of a charge from the Council of Bishops and General Conference but also as a reflection of who we believe ourselves to be as disciples of Jesus Christ. It was essential that certain missional and theological principles guided our work. There needed to be a biblical references that provided a clear foundation for these core beliefs. You will find this on the p. 127 of the ADCA.

The United Methodist sense of the ongoing work of God is a distinctive contribution to the lives of believers and non-believers alike, and we believe that God continues to work purposefully to form us to the image of Christ. The church embodies God's mission for the world through making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As the church, we are called into being for the sake of the world. Our mission is central to our identity. We seek with all our heart that all of God's children experience the grace and love of God as we have experienced it.

Convicted humility was also critical element that brought to the task. We each understood that it was possible that God might be trying to teach us a new thing through our exploration. Every one of us had to remain open to the possibility of God changing our hearts and minds or the work could not continue. One of the ways we displayed convicted humility was that people worked on plans with which they didn't agree. So, we face the blank page with this key ideas in mind.

Still the task loomed large until one day during one of our devotions we heard about how an artist works. Many have heard this example but it was key in helping us move forward in different way. Understanding how

the artist may see a finished work in her head or not, but before she paints there is usually a sketch. Sometimes the artist is very clear. The picture in her head is sharp and well-defined, and she is but the means to translating it to the page. Other times, the feelings are opaque. The feelings and ideas find their way into some forms. Lines that help put the work into perspective and provide the foundations for colors and details that come later. Strokes and colors come together and she understands only when the image before the artist bears witness to those thoughts that we were once in her head, and she's able to put the pencils and brushes aside.

As a group, the commission moved very deliberately from idea to idea, moving with consensus when they felt a particular piece represented our hope and honored all the positions laid out in the mission, vision, and scope. Like the artist we moved from one concept to sketch to the recommendations that you have before you. Yes, Lord, come. Holy Spirit.

JASMINE SMOTHERS (COWF): Amen. I am Jasmine Smothers, and in the late 1990s and early 2000s the shared mission focus on young people invited us to dream a church. I dreamed a church that provided an opportunity for the young people of The United Methodist Church to share hopes and dreams. A church with a future filled with hope.

This opportunity grew into what we now know as the Division on Young People's Ministries and continues to impact the way in which we are the church with young people. The division on Young People's Ministries created new ways in which we understand and hear the voices of young people in leadership and in community in our world. It was new. It was bold. Many were uncertain about how all of the new legislation would impact our local congregations. And yet, all these years later,

we are a stronger church because we intentionally cultivate and value young people around the globe.

Every decade the people called the United Methodists, yes every decade, the people called United Methodists are invited to envision church in a different way. This is good news. After all, the age-old saying reminds us that anything that is not growing is dead. We've grown in our understanding in the inclusion of women in leadership in God's church. We've grown in our understanding of the inclusion of people of color in God's church. We've grown in our understanding of the inclusion of young people in God's church. We haven't always agreed, yet we've grown.

So is the spirit leading us to grow again? This time in our relationships with our LGBTQ family?

Introduction of One Church Plan

The One Church Plan is an invitation to again find new, flexible and innovative ways to maximize the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many ways as possible. United Methodists are good at this. Since the beginning of the Wesleyan movement we have been a people who reach people in places that others have deemed off limits. The One Church Plan says that it is time again to regain our momentum as a movement. To focus on the task of discipleship and vitality. To be the church with a future filled with hope for our world. The One Church Plan holds at its core three essential values—generous unity, contextuality for missional vitality, and the connectional nature of the church. First, the One Church Plan values a generous unity. The One Church Plan provides a generous unity that gives conferences, churches, and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context.

JASMINE ROSE SMOTHERS: The One Church Plan does

not understand unity as uniformity; rather, as our unity in Jesus Christ, one Lord, one Spirit, one faith, and one baptism. We pray through our communion liturgy, "by your Spirit, make us one." Our unity as the people called Methodists is found in our mission, the Great Commission, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our unity yields flexibility, diversity, and allows for freedom to maximize the United Methodist presence across the globe, so that the world can truly be our parish with all of God's children.

Next, the One Church Plan values a contextuality for missional vitality. Our communities are rapidly changing, and our congregations must live out church contextually in community. Wesleyans have always been called to contextuality to maximize witness and connection in community. We stood in fields, on street corners, in bars, to gather people to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. We put our sacred hymns to the tune of bar tunes so that they were accessible to all of God's people. We are the people of the via media, the middle way. We understand that vitality requires a close relationship to context. When we value context, we also value theological and scriptural understandings. The One Church Plan values that we hear and understand God in different ways. The One Church Plan provides space to act through conviction and conscience and ministry with our LGBTQ family while honoring variances in theological and scriptural interpretation and understanding. The plan includes protection so that no one has to act in a contrary way to their convictions. The plan also allows our central conferences to practice as they do now, and to adapt to their special missional context. Friends, we hear God in different ways and this is an invitation to be

led by God's spirit and how we practice ministry in context.

Thirdly, the One Church Plan values the connectional nature of the church. The connectional nature of the church is one of the unique strengths of the United Methodist movement. Together we can do more. We can make more disciples. We can reach more people for the cause of Christ. We can feed more people and clothe more people and heal more people and restore sight to more people and transform the world for good, because we will have Jesus Christ in more places with more people.

(applause)

The cost of division is high. The cost of disruption of the mission is beyond what we can quantify. The cost of church trials takes away from investment in mission, and the cost of damaging our public witness may lead our people to lose even more hope and trust in Christ. The One Church Plan seeks to prevent having to pay this high cost. It helps us to focus on the greatest and highest commandment. How are we doing at loving God? How are we doing at loving all of our neighbors? Through these values, the One Church Plan meets the mission of the commission's task by presenting a possible and potential new future for our denomination that allows our connectional, transformational mission to go forth in collaborative ways. Through these values, the One Church Plan meets the vision of the commission's task because it proposes new ways for being the church that maximizes the presence of United Methodist witness in as many places as possible with as much contextual differentiation as possible, and it balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with as much unity as possible. Through these values, the One Church Plan

meets the scope of commission's task by considering new forms and structures in our relationships with church and with each other and by providing avenues of freedom and flexibility for impactful, faithful, vital, and connectional ministry going forward. The "I Dream a Church" time changed how we cultivate form and include young people in ministry and mission. I myself—I dreamed a church that was full of hope for the future. The impact of that dream has had global ripples for good. It has maximized our vital United Methodist presence in ways that we could never have imagined. And we never do the work of dreaming or visioning for ourselves. It is always work that is done by the Spirit of God for the people that are to come. The One Church Plan dreams a church that minimizes the suffering of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:26.

"For when one hurts, we all hurt." It dreams a church that makes us one as Jesus prayed in the Gospel of John in chapter 17. And it dreams a church that provides for maximum impact as a missional, connectional, Great-Commission-focused church. Come, Holy Spirit, won't you come?

(applause)

Introduction of the Connectional Conference Plan

MAZVITA MACHINGA (COWF): My name is Mazvita Machinga. The Connectional Conference Plan is the Commissions Board attempt to dream about a new kind of a United Methodist Church. Yes, it is the most complex of all the plans. But beneath its complexity, is a beautiful, simple dream to remain one church, to avoid the splintering of our church into multiple, self-governing and disconnected denominations. The Connectional Conference Plan could be visualized as a big tent with

smaller tents underneath. Biblically, it springs from Jesus' vision of one vine with many branches, connected with Christ but reaching out into different parts of our mission field to reach as many possible people.

We know we need to bear more fruit as United Methodists. The Connectional Conference Plan seeks to honor the mission, the vision, and scope by maximizing the presence of the United Methodists' witness, remaining as unified as possible and becoming as contextual as possible. It may be daunting to conceive that. But we have a dream. We have a dream of a Church that can reshape and reform its structure and its constitution. We have a dream of a Church that can be one united church and yet have diversity of beliefs on the nature and condition of LGBTQ inclusion.

The plan is possible. Yes, it can work, but it does require us all to dream about a new kind of a church; to roll up our sleeves, brothers and sisters, into the unavoidable messiness of creating a new way of being a new church. The Connectional Conference Plan is characterized by three key values: first, the Connectional Conference Plan values new form of unity around a shared core. This is the idea we have more in common than we disagree about; that our common shared core is our doctrine of grace, our disciplined engagement with Scripture, our works of piety and justice, and our connectional way of life; that our common goal is our understanding of sacrament, our general rules, our Wesleyan hymns, and our small group accountability through class and band meetings. Even though we do not all think alike in terms of LGBTQ inclusion, can we not all love alike? Can we not have unity in essentials; diversity in the non-essentials; and in all things, charity? This plan envisions this new form of unity

around a shared core in a unique and vibrant way.

Second: the Connectional Conference Plan values space and differentiation. We heard from all sides of the church. Everybody was saying “we just need space to do our work.” This plan gives more space and differentiation than other plans. Each connectional conference can have its own space, its own additional name so the public could know what kind of UMC they are entering for worship. This differentiation is key to each connectional conference being able to reach its new people.

Third: the Connectional Conference Plan values all things new. Paul makes it clear that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The writer of Revelations envisions a future where God makes all things new. The writer of Revelations envisions a future where God makes all things new. In the reformation of our general agencies, our *Book of Discipline*, our constitution, our Council of Bishops, and our General Conference, the Connectional Conference Plan allows for the church to have newness of life in its structure in order to reach to the most diverse and global mission field. The Connectional Conference Plan mentions the constant refrain of the church, “revive us again.” Yes, revive us again.

The progressive connectional conference will mandate full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in every aspect of the church life. The traditional connectional conference will continue the *Discipline's* current standards concerning self-avowed practicing homosexuals and include a covenant of commitment to a more traditional understanding of doctrine. The uniting connectional conference will maintain that members are not of one mind regarding biblical interpretations, related to human sexuality. It will allow but not man-

date weddings and ordinations of self-avowed practicing homosexuals and will ensure that no bishop, no pastor, or congregation is required to act against their conscience in these matters. It will be able to do this in a stable way for a broad array of United Methodists because the existence of a healthy progressive and traditional connectional conference means its ongoing identity will not be primarily focused on changing or enforcing the church stand containing matters on human sexuality. Unlike ways we have divided in the past, the connectional conferences are not forced upon persons because of who they are, but are freely joined so that each includes individuals in different ages, gender, ethnicity, and geographical locations.

Just as important, our understanding of what makes up unity is radically different now than eighty years ago. Unity no longer can be defined in terms of forced or enforced uniformity of belief, but as something that occurs because people freely choose to be part of a church that creates both safe spaces for theological perspectives and a way to remain connected with others around core shared beliefs, structures, and relationships.

The impact of the Connectional Conference Plan on most of our local churches is minimal. Churches can discern with connectional conference they best fit. They won't have to vote at the local church level unless the local church wants to be in a different connectional conference than their annual conference. All churches will continue to welcome the LGBT community but then differentiate themselves around marriage and ordination. Our global church would stand on equal footing and there would no longer be a difference between central and jurisdictional conferences. Central conferences will not have to be defined by the U.S.

value-based connectional conference but could remain defined by geography. Central conferences would retain their ability to adapt their cultural context. The Connectional Conference Plan understands that. Any way forward will take a great deal of intentional effort. In fact, that is exactly why it requires a passage of nine constitutional amendments, takes several years to implement, and involves several sequential actions and formal votes by targeted dates. While this full involvement may take more effort in the short term, it is believed that this will bear fruit in the long term.

The Connectional Conference begins with a common faith in Christ and points to a future where we can continue to grow in a changed connection with deeper relationships. It will allow all the three connectional conferences to mobilize in the multitude of different contexts across the globe undistracted by constant fighting over differences in theology and moral teaching. It offers The United Methodist Church the opportunity to model through the power of the Holy Spirit how unity rather than polarization and fractioning is a viable option for the future. The Connectional Conference Plan is an opportunity to unleash the church in a new way for mission and fruitfulness. Mission in context is a key aspect of the connectional conference, mission in context. The cry of every connection in the Connectional Conference Plan is the desire to share the gospel in a way that aligns with the particular connectional conference's biblical understandings and its relevance to the culture each connection is addressing. This plan enables each connectional conference to be a faithful ambassador of the gospel within its own understanding of scriptural truth and socio-cultural context. This plan provides a way to mobilize more workers for the mission and ministry

of Christ through the expansion envisioned out of the multiple branches.

The Connectional Conference Plan is an attempt to be creative and be innovative and seek to address the adaptive challenge that faces our beloved United Methodist Church. It truly means there are no winners, there are no losers; there is no one who has to exit the church. In fact, there is no need for a gracious exit as we believe every United Methodist can find a home in this new form of unity.

(applause)

New structures and relationships are needed for a new time in our church. Keeping the old structures in place could result in a fracturing of our church. This plan, dear brothers and sisters, is a new way—a new way to allow for new structures and new relationships to claim our witness in our world. Come, Holy Spirit.

Introduction of the Traditional Plan

(applause)

JESSICA LAGRONE

(COAWF): I am Jessica LaGrone. On my first mission trip, I traveled to the mountains of Costa Rica with a wonderful crew of warmhearted United Methodists. While we were there to construct houses, my best work was often building relationships with the children of the village who taught me their games and laughed at my beginner Spanish.

One day, a group of them shyly pulled me by the hand and told me that they were going to show me the most beautiful place on their mountain, an amazing claim considering this was already the most beautiful place that I had ever seen. After a long and breathless hike, we turned a corner where I saw in the middle

of all the rugged mountainous glory, a lawn—a simple flat lawn just like thousands of suburban landscapes back home. To put it bluntly, I was underwhelmed. Just then, one of the boys pulled out a soccer ball and they began running and kicking it with glee. This space, while it looked ordinary to me, was their soccer field—or football field, as those of you from outside of the US would correct me. It was the only one for miles, and to them, it was holy ground. As they began to run and play, many of them barefoot, I recognized that they were right. In the freedom and joy of these children of God, I found the most beautiful sight that I would encounter on that mountain.

G.K. Chesterton's description of the beauty and order found in the Christian Scriptures was that the more he considered Christianity, the more he found that while it established it a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild. In the life of the church, the playing field of doctrine and discipline exists not to constrain or dehumanize God's people but to provide a kind of rule and order that allows a space for the kind of disciplined goodness to run wild. But the growing chaos within The United Methodist Church has overtaken our life together, distracting us from our mission, raising our anxieties. The decades of conflict that we have faced together have muted our hopes for world-changing ministry and damaged the vitality of our shared witness. While a healthy church is missionally intent on welcoming new players to the field, the current state of our Church is one in which many are playing by different rules, and some wonder are we even playing on the same field any longer?

The aim of the Traditional Plan is to strengthen the long-held

convictions voted on by each General Conference since 1972 and to restore the order and discipline that had been lacking as our conflict has grown to unmanageable proportions. The Traditional Plan affirms that the statements in *The Book of Discipline* addressing human sexuality and sexual ethics reflect the teachings of Scripture relevant at all times and places taught by the church in its diverse confessional forms and cultural contexts. Now, before I continue with the Traditional Plan, the commission wants to remind you of what's noted in our full report, and I read for that you now:

“The request from the Council of Bishops to include a full traditionalist's model was received by the Commission on a Way Forward just prior to its last meeting which began on May 14, 2018. Members of the Commission on a Way Forward registered concern that the time available did not allow for the full conciliar process utilized to the other two plans offered by the commission. The One Church Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan both received intensive and comprehensive participation from the commission and the Council of Bishops over an extended period of time. While there was some support within the commission and the Council of Bishops for a traditionalist model, the support was modest enough in both groups to discontinue the commission's earlier work on this model.

In order to serve the May 2018 request from the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward resubmits the sketch to the Council of Bishops in November 2017 as the commission's work on the traditionalist model. This sketch is found in the ADCA on p. 147. A traditional plan prepared by a few members of the Council of Bishops is found in Appendix 3 with legislative petitions. While the plan in Appendix 3

is not the work of the Commission on a Way Forward, it's included as a part of the report in respect to the motion and rationale for a way forward approved by the Council of Bishops in May 2018 and in service to the delegates of the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference.”

Now, for United Methodists, the clarion call of the inspired word of God burns in our hearts and establishes the boundaries of our faith. As children of the Wesleys, in Scripture, we find life and find life abundantly. The word of God convicts and comforts every heart, for every one of us finds our hope in Jesus Christ alone. In its affirmation of the belovedness of all God's children of sacred worth, the Traditional Plan does not require nor does it permit shaming, hatred, self-righteousness, abuse of power, or even cold disinterest as we serve neighbor, stranger, and friend. These, then, are the guiding values of the Traditional Plan.

First, the Traditional Plan values unity in doctrine. It celebrates the beliefs proclaimed in historic yet timeless Apostles' and Nicene creeds, the Articles of Religion, the Confession of Faith, and the Standard Sermons and Notes upon the New Testament. It maintains that receiving Scripture as authoritative and inspired is essential for those claiming a share of the worldwide Wesleyan Methodist movement and specifically The United Methodist Church.

Second, the Traditional Plan values consistency and practice. It affirms that the clarity of our Discipline on sexual ethics should be clearly followed with an outward consistency in our practices across the connection. As United Methodists, we have proudly held to a unity of practice for important issues such as the ordination of women and infant baptism, despite the fact that the church has not always been of one mind on these issues. The Traditional Plan affirms the

coherent unity of practice in marriage and ordination should be held at a connectional and not a congregational level. The Traditional Plan holds that this consistency in practice is connectional not only throughout the United Methodist connection, but within the Church throughout time and around the globe especially honoring our connection with our brothers and sisters in the global south.

Third, the Traditional Plan values accountability. Wesleyan discipleship has always valued the deep awareness that we belong to one another and hold each other in mutual accountability. Leaders of the Church have voluntarily taken on the responsibility for the life and the witness of the Church and, in doing so, bind themselves to live within the provisions of *The Book of Discipline*. Failure to follow the standards agreed upon by General Conference corrodes the unity of the Church and must be addressed in order to restore the health of the United Methodist body.

We lament the ways in which the church has lacked consistency, especially at times when our covenant has been broken, as when our unity is broken by principal disobedience on the part of some bishops and clergy. So the establishment—the establishment of additional accountability is vital. The Traditional Plan both enhances the current accountability in *The Book of Discipline* and also closes the loopholes that are currently being used to break our shared covenant. The plan provides for annual conferences, local churches, bishops, and clergy who cannot in good conscience live within our covenant to withdraw from the denomination in a gracious way, recognizing that the church's unity is not well served by attempting to force those who cannot support our church's teachings to remain within the denomination. Now this has a potential to maximize our witness by

allowing us as different groups the freedom to engage in that witness according to diverse standards and providing both space and continuing connection and cooperation in a new form of mission and ministry.

Aligning with the commission's mission, vision, and scope, the Traditional Plan affirms that the matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation that surfaces different ways of interpreting scripture and theological tradition. Simply put, our beliefs and our actions matter. Theology and practice matter enough to minister with consistency across our connection. The beauty of belief and practice as set out in the Traditional Plan allows us to envision a path of thriving mission and ministry, our calling to a playing field where we run with joy within the ordered space of our life together as United Methodists. Come, Holy Spirit.

(*applause*)

Exit Effect on Pension

LEAH TAYLOR (COWF): I am Leah Taylor. In Appendix 1, beginning on p. 149 of the *ADCA*, you will find that the commission did discuss that there may be churches that wish to change their relationship with The United Methodist Church through disaffiliation and exit. However, this was not the primary work of the commission. The commission believed it was important to be careful not to encourage exit, but to focus on unity. There is already language in *The Book of Discipline* around a way for churches to exit. An exit proposal is included in the Traditional Plan, but not in the other two plans. We are aware that there are exit proposals in the *ADCA*, and we commend this important issue to the General Conference for proper consideration either here in 2019 or 2020. Appendix 4, beginning on p.

157 of the ADCA, includes the work of Wespath. We are very grateful to Wespath and the work they did to analyze the impact of each plan on our pension program. You can find that work in Appendix 4 of our report. You will note that our report does include two petitions from Wespath. Although these two petitions are included in The One Church Plan, the commission and Wespath recommend that these petitions be considered regardless of which plan or no plan passes. These petitions are essential to the long-term conversation of our pension program as we keep covenant with our clergy and their surviving spouses. Come, Holy Spirit, come!

(applause)

BISHOP KENNETH H. CARTER: I am Bishop Ken Carter. The 2016 General Conference asked the Council of Bishops to offer spiritual leadership in seeking a way forward in the midst of conflict. The Council of Bishops, in response, developed a mission, vision, and scope for the work of this commission drafted by the executive committee and approved by the council. Bishops then nominated laity and clergy to be considered and thirty-two persons were selected. They have embodied the diversity and the gifts that you have witnessed today. Amen? Through eighteen months the Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops were in dialogue. The two bodies used many of the same processes and spiritual practices, including living in covenant, reading Scripture, prayer, and mutual accountability and encouragement. We gave feedback to each other and listened to the testimonies and convictions of our people from across the world. In the end, the commission offered three plans that are in your final report. The Council of Bishops asked on two occasions

that the Judicial Council act on the constitutionality of facets of the work. On the basis of Decision 1360, the report came to you from the Commission on a Way Forward.

We have been guided by a continuing desire to help you, the delegates, do your best work. While the Council of Bishops did affirm the One Church Plan by an overwhelming majority, all three plans are in the final report. In our disciplinary and teaching role, we have reflected on the plans and the implications for the unity and the mission of the church. In our presiding role, which is also disciplinary, we have sought to be fair in how the material is being presented to you, as in the last few minutes, and how your voices have been heard in residential areas and in how you will deliberate in these days. The inclusion of all three reports in printed and translated form flows from the conviction that the values of our whole church are found in the three plans. Our commitment is to serve in a way that you might do your best work and that honors the authority the Church has placed in you, the delegations, to discern the way forward for The United Methodist Church. This is conciliar work, and it began in response to your invitation in Portland, and this work is now in your hands. We give thanks to God for you, the delegates, and we pray that God will now use your discernment in helping us to a way forward for the sake of our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Come, Holy Spirit!

CASEY LANGLEY ORR (a member of the Commission on a Way Forward): I am Casey Orr. We are so thankful for the time that we have had to share the witness of the Commission on a Way Forward. As you have learned from Commission members about the process and values and relationships, I hope it has

become clear to you that the work of the Commission on a Way Forward was rooted in love and devotion. I saw it from the very beginning. I knew each person around that table to be a deeply devoted disciple of Jesus Christ, committed to faithfully following Jesus, serving Christ by leading and writing and flying and preaching and shepherding and coaching and making music and advocating and educating and counseling and organizing and inspiring. I knew each person around the table to be deeply devoted to the United Methodist Church; in some way indebted to our beloved denomination, small and large, local churches all over the world, for being instrumental in our faith; and also committed to the present and future mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And finally, I knew each person around the table to be deeply devoted to the work entrusted to us.

(to be continued in next issue)

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