



## Commission on a Way Forward

Council of Bishops



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

June 18, 2018

Dear Friends,

Our work with the Commission on the Way Forward has been one of the most challenging and yet one of the most hope-filled and joy-filled experiences of our lives in ministry. We talk a great deal about the diversity of The United Methodist Church, but rarely do we as individuals truly spend time trying to work together in the midst of that diversity. The Commission was an innovative approach to a challenge, and actually, a variety of challenges that the Church is facing.

Usually, when there is a decision to be made, the Church gathers together a group of fairly like-minded people to have conversation and to propose the next best step. The Commission was different. The Commission was not a group of like-minded people. The Commission was intentionally pulled together to include a richness of diversity among people who love Christ and The United Methodist Church. Commission members did not come together to convince other members of the Commission to change or compromise their stances or positions. The Commission was brought together to work in a conciliar fashion to explore how the Church might move forward in the midst of the current disagreement around the inclusion, treatment, and leadership of persons who are homosexual, or who identify with the LGBTQ community.

The Commission realizes that one of the greatest gifts that it can give to the larger church is the story and the stories of how we have been able to work together, to love each other in the midst of our difference, and how we have sought to stand together realizing that we have the same mission we are called to accomplish: make disciples of Jesus Christ and build God's Kingdom here on earth as it is in Heaven. How might we share what we have learned and experienced? How might we give a glimpse into the work, the relationships, the loving, supportive community that has been developed? How might we share how important it is to approach our work as a Church with a heart of peace rather than a heart of war? How can we tell people, that how we approach, with what mindset we approach our work as a Church makes a difference in how we listen for God's wisdom and explore possibilities for moving forward as The United Methodist Church with both unity and with diversity?

In order to give you a sense of how the Commission built relationship and community, how it developed and worked to maintain hearts of peace as we accomplished our work, and how the Commission developed the plans that the church will see in its report to the special session of the General Conference, 2019, we decided that we would gift the church with a series of videos. These videos document our experiences, our hopes, our dreams, our concerns, our approach, and some of our learnings.

We hope that you will take these gifts and use them to prepare for the upcoming General Conference. We hope that you will listen deeply for God's voice and wisdom in the midst of our words. We hope that you will get a sense that this work is not and will not be easy, but that we have a choice of approaching our work with either a heart of war or a heart of peace. We hope that you will be inspired and motivated to intentionally choose to prepare and to act and respond to General Conference with a heart of peace.

We have learned that this makes all the difference in how we treat one another and therefore listen to one another. We hope you will be reminded that in the midst of our diversity we do have one common mission: To make disciples of Jesus Christ, to reach all people for Christ so that all of those originally created in God's own image might say yes to Christ and, through discipleship, receive God's gift of eternal life.

Peace,

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, Bishop Ken Carter, Bishop David Yemba

Videos:

1. **Gil Rendle: a parable for today** is a video featuring Commission on A Way Forward Consultant Gil Rendle. Gil shares a story that illustrates the difference between positions and interests. When we are able to move from holding onto our positions to seeking to understand each other's underlying interests we are better able to move forward together. (length 5:14). Gil provides these questions for reflection:

- How can I become more aware of my own interests so that I am not confined from seeing more by my own position?
- How (and with whose help) can I listen for the interests of others?

**Download:** <https://tinyurl.com/COWFRendleParable>

**Watch on YouTube:** <https://youtu.be/D8ZGS6Dpl9g>

2. Gil Rendle gives an overview of the **Purpose, Principles and Importance of the work of the Commission on a Way Forward**. This video was recorded during the final, May 2018, Commission meeting of the Commission on A Way Forward and gives an in depth theological and technical overview of the work of the commission that helps to frame the work that is being asked of the delegates to the February 2019 General Conference. (length 54:18). Gil provides these questions for reflection:

- What is the new way in which I should approach my leadership in shaping the future mission of the church?
- Who should I seek to serve in my decision making about the future?
- What are the values that will best serve the purpose of the whole church in the future?

**Download:** <https://tinyurl.com/cowfRendleOverview>

**Watch on YouTube:** <https://youtu.be/j9sDqunec2o>

3. **Bishop Grant Hagiya**, a member of the Commission on A Way Forward, shares reflections about the book: *Anatomy of Peace*. Bishop Hagiya shares why the principles of this book help us make a fundamental shift from battleground to a place where people can have open and honest dialogue with one another. (length 5:44)

**Download:** <https://tinyurl.com/COWFAnatomyPeace>

**View on YouTube:** <https://youtu.be/6trW2HJuwP8>

4. **Donna Pritchard** (clergy, Pacific Northwest Conference), **Tom Salsgiver** (clergy, Susquehanna Conference) and **Leah Taylor** (laity, Texas Conference) are all Commission on A Way Forward members. They share reflections on their work, the value of connection and the relationships they formed during their time together on the Commission. (length 7:02)

**Download:** <https://tinyurl.com/COWFTomDonnaLeah>

**View on YouTube:** <https://youtu.be/aMBuw4vFLIw>