

I Will Not Cast the First Stone.

By Cynthia Saarie

The 2019 General Conference Plenary Session is done. Did any real progress come out of it at all? It seems there is more discord and dissention than before the Legislative Committee's decision. Or were we responding like an ostrich, sticking our heads in the ground, hoping for the best?

We, as a denomination, spent over \$3 Million dollars to meet and debate the long-standing argument of addressing LGBTQ practices in the United Methodist Churches. Bishops from around the world met in St. Louis, MO. There was prayer, song, worship, debates, votes, and a lot of pain and frustration to end saying, ***"We still need to do more work."***

[The United Methodist Church's Reorganization Plan of 1968](#) was brought about with Love, Understanding, Fellowship, Caring and Concern for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ under the umbrella of the now, United Methodist Church. Worshipping together, and making disciples of all who come to believe in Jesus. **Our Savior, Jesus, brought us all together.** Now Jesus and Sin are at the center point of a large possible division of our denomination.

Does God Love Everyone? Or only those that agree with the Legislative Committee that interpreted the Scriptures to cut out those who claim to be LGBTQ affiliated?

I believe God does love everyone, but God Hates Sin. Any Kind of Sin. According to the Legislative Committee's ruling, this means the LGBTQ community will have to decide to become part of the Traditional Plan or leave our denomination. Under Scriptural law, only one man and one woman are considered to be in accordance with God's plan.

To decide if you favored the **One Church Plan**, or the **Traditional Plan**, one would first need a clearer definition of what both are. The Judicial Council did decide to move forward with the Traditional Plan.

Somehow, it feels like we are sitting in on Christ's sentencing 2019 years ago. Are we crucifying those that believe in Jesus because they act differently than others in the body of Christ Jesus? Maybe they are not following Scripture word for word. But, do any of us?

I, for one, will not cast the first stone.

Jill Wondel, a delegate from the MO Conference, said:

"The question we are asking is: 'Does this plan unite us or not? We are not voting on whether homosexuality is a sin or not. We are not voting yes or no if the Bible is true.'"

The One Church Plan: A large majority of bishops recommend the One Church Plan, which allows more freedom on matters of marriage and ordination. Opponents accused the One

Church Plan of radically changing the denomination's connectional form of governance and violating Scripture. The One Church Plan also would leave it up to individual churches and conferences for the ordination of individual LGBTQ clergy and the marriage of gays in their congregations and of their own clergy. Delegates opposed the bishops' recommendation and **the One Church Plan was defeated by a vote of 436 to 386.**

The Traditional Plan: If a Church decided to leave the United Methodist Conference and Denomination, they would NOT be allowed to take/keep their church building, property, and contents. They would be on their own, leave what they had and depart in peace. [Since the 1972 General Conference](#), The United Methodist Church has asserted all people are of sacred worth but **"the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."**

"It is better to be divided by truth than united in error," said **Rudolph Merab**, from the Liberian Conference.

The Rev. Ricky Harrison, an associate pastor in TX stated the General Conference's direction as *"frustrating and demoralizing."* He went on to say: *"I think it's disheartening for folks in the pews back home. The Traditional Plan is extremely alienating even for moderate folks."*

John Hannifan, an observer from Elizabethtown, KY, *"The sun might come out tomorrow but it's a dark day."*

Twenty-two-year-old **Jeffrey "J.J." Warren**, an openly gay reserve delegate from the Upper NY Conference, got a standing ovation during his speech at the conference. He spoke of his evangelism work with LGBTQ students at Sarah Lawrence College.

"They didn't know God could love them because their churches said God didn't, and so if we can be a church which brings Jesus to people who are told (they) can't be loved, then that's what I want our church to be, and that's the Methodist Church that I love and that I want to be a pastor in one day,"

Rev. Jay Williams, of Boston, MA, remarked that Warren's talk was a balm. *"Amazing! That is the word of God being preached — a word of love and justice. It absolutely gave hope amidst what's been a devastating day."*

Bishop Paul Leland from the Western NC Conference said he had been *"plan neutral."* *"We may need to be prepared to say goodbye to some individuals and some congregations."*

Bishop Laurie Haller of the IA Conference commented, *"I'm disappointed that the Traditional Plan has passed."* When asked if progressive churches will want to leave the denomination she stated, *"I suspect that would be the case."*

The UMC, especially in the United States, has gained more acceptance of the homosexual population. Many churches have publicly defied the rules against same sex marriages/unions.

Several conferences have led the way forward by the ordination and leading of congregations by professing same sex clergy.

The Rev. Hannah Adair Bonner, from Tucson, AZ, *“I’m queer, and the outcome of this conversation could end my career in The United Methodist Church and send a message to the young people I work with that there’s no place for them. It’s important to be here, if nothing more than to have a ministry of presence.”*

The Rev. Calvin Cosnahan, Brandon, MS, spoke up, *“To be a traditionalist, a lot of times, has been painted as a mean person without a heart, who doesn’t care, who doesn’t have compassion. That’s totally not true. We’re called to love everyone and welcome everyone, and I’ve always done that, and all the pastors I’ve known have done that. At the same time, Scripture is also clear that when you’re confronted with sin, you confront it.”*

The Legislative Committee’s decision will be reviewed by the Judicial Council after Easter in the end of April, 2019. Their findings will decide the Constitutionality of the Traditional Plan. After the review and deciding decision by the Judicial Council the plan will be put into use January, 2020. The decision would be enacted world-wide by the United Methodist Church.

For my final comments, I turn to one of our founding fathers of faith,

John Wesley, (1703-1791)

Do all the good you can

By all the means you can

In all the ways you can

In all the places you can

At all the times you can

To all the people you can

As long as ever you can.

As long as the United Methodist Church can answer in the affirmative on what John Wesley said, we should be alright. But it seems to me that there’s a lot of room for improvement. I pray that those that find the rulings harsh, unwavering, undeserving, **please wait**. God is still there loving all of us. He’s still desiring a way to be in fellowship with us. **All of us**. Everyone is still

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welcomed into most of the United Methodist Churches, despite the rulings. Because, after all is said and done, we are all sinners in one way or another, and **we all need God's saving grace.**

May the Peace and Understanding of God's Will prevail in these tough times. Amen.

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