

# A Way Forward


CONVERSATIONS ABOUT A WAY FORWARD  
FOR THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



# The Mission of the Commission



The Commission will bring together persons **deeply committed to the future(s) of The United Methodist Church**, with an openness to developing new relationships with each other and exploring a way forward for the UMC.



The matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation – one that brings our regional and cultural differences to the surface and which highlights **different ways of interpreting Scripture and theological tradition.**



The work is meant to **inform deliberation across the whole church and to help** the Council of Bishops in their service to the next General Conference **in finding a way forward.**

# The Vision for the Commission

The Commission will design a way for being church that:


- **Maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible,**
- **Allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and;**
- **Balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible.**

# Three Models


# One-Church Plan


## Council of Bishops Recommends


- ▶ Creates unity by allowing people of differing views to continue to be church together; allows for contextualization in different parts of the world.
- ▶ Removes the controversial phrase “incompatible with Christian teaching”

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- ▶ Removes restrictions that prohibit clergy from officiating same-gender weddings
  - ▶ Conference BOMs decide whether or not to recommend ordination of GLBTQ clergy based on fruitfulness and effectiveness
  - ▶ Local churches decide whether they will allow same-gender weddings on their property



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- ▶ Adds protections for clergy who do not want to officiate same-sex weddings. This plan does not require clergy, churches, or BOMs to act against their conscience


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- ▶ **PRO:** Allows for contextualization in different parts of the USA and the world
  - ▶ **PRO:** More coherent theology for unity. Does not assume that human sexuality is the defining issue for the UMC
  - ▶ **PRO:** Fewer trials


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- ▶ **CON:** Does not completely satisfy the progressives because it still allows for discrimination of LGBTQ in the UMC
  - ▶ **CON:** Does not completely satisfy the traditionalists because allowing homosexuality in the UMC violates their view of scriptural integrity.

# Connectional Conferences Model


**Not** recommended by Commission or Council

- ▶ Grounded in a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops, while also creating different branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice

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- ▶ The five U.S. jurisdictions would be replaced by three connectional conferences, each covering the whole country, based on theology and perspective on LGBTQ ministry (i.e. traditional or progressive or centrist)


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- ▶ Annual conferences would decide which connectional conference to affiliate with
  - ▶ Local churches could choose a branch other than the one chosen by their annual conference by voting to join another conference

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- ▶ **PRO:** Makes a place for all three viewpoints within the UMC and yet creates enough separation that there is clarity for each position

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- ▶ **PRO:** Conferences and local churches can make a clear choice on human sexuality and yet enjoy some of the missional advantages of remaining a global church.



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- ▶ **CON:** Creates a complex structure that is more congregational than connectional.


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- ▶ **CON:** It would take years of administrative work to put this in place and many constitutional amendments, which would be difficult to ratify in the annual conferences


- ▶ **CON:** Churches may split over as they try to determine which branch they will join
- ▶ **CON:** Some traditionalists will still be upset that LGBTQ is being affirmed in some parts of the UMC
- ▶ **CON:** Some progressives will still be upset that LGBTQ are being discriminated against in the UMC

# Traditionalist Model

**Not** recommended by the Commission or Council

- ▶ Affirms current BOD language: “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” Same-sex marriage is prohibited. BOM is prohibited from recommending non-celibate homosexual candidates for ordination.
- ▶ Enforcement measures would be increased in effort to purge those who would disobey the current rules.

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- ▶ **PRO:** This is a plan for keeping the status quo and some will prefer that option
  - ▶ **PRO:** Requires no changes to our structure

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- ▶ **CON:** This is a plan for keeping the status quo. Fighting will continue and our mission will continue to be compromised with bad publicity from costly church trials.
  - ▶ **CON:** Not a plan for unity and asks the progressives to leave or face costly trials
  - ▶ **CON:** It is likely that we will lose most of the millennials and next generations