



A WAY FORWARD



Why This Topic?

As United Methodist Christians, we profess faith in the God of creation, salvation, and the on-going work of sanctification. God and God's work in the world lies at the center of our faithful life together. This compels us to take seriously our own identity as God's beloved children.

Different perspectives on marriage and sexuality have caused a rift within our culture in recent decades. This is no secret.

Like other social matters, people are not only divided, but divided against one another. We wonder how to have (or if we SHOULD have) conversations around difficult topics; we wonder how we can live together if we discover we are different. However, Jesus' call to Christian discipleship ought to help us navigate "a way forward."

Why Now?

LGBTQ persons are feeling more comfortable "coming out" to their families, friends, and churches. As a result, people are asking, "How do I accept my child?" or "How do I welcome my grandchild's partner into our home?"

In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage. For some, this settled a long-sought hope. For others, this heightened concerns about public morality.

As much as some wish for the topic to go away, it has not, and will continue to impact church and society.

Why Now in the Church?

Virtually all Americans have been in conversation about marriage and sexuality. Those conversations have taken place in nearly every imaginable venue, except the Church. However, we serve the God-made-flesh who calls us into community. All questions of bodies, beings, and belonging rightly come under the domain of God; thus the Church.

Other mainline denominations have made declarations about homosexuality, especially regarding ordination and wedding ceremonies. The United Methodist Church is no different. There has been growing tension within our denomination with some people arguing that we discriminate against LGBTQ people, and others arguing that our practice of holiness is not strict enough. This tension has been felt every four years at the church's General Conference for over 40 years.

"Our Theological Task" in each generation asks us to identify and interpret the needs of the world so that they might be met through the resources of the gospel and Christian faith, as well as to recognize the ways in which our doctrine and polity may also need transformation over time so that we might continue to carry out God's Great Commission.

As United Methodists, we have an obligation to bear a faithful Christian witness to Jesus Christ, the living reality at the center of the Church's life and witness. To fulfill this obligation, we reflect critically on our biblical and theological inheritance, striving to express faithfully the witness we make in our own time.
from "Our Theological Task" The Book of Discipline 2016 ¶1105

What's Next for the Church?

The Commission on a Way Forward was proposed by the Council of Bishops and approved by the 2016 General Conference to do a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph of the Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and explore options that help to maintain and strengthen the unity of the global church.

To learn more about their work, go to www.umc.org/wayforward and see the included page for the Council of Bishops' Press Release from May 4, 2019. By July 8, after translation into various languages, their official legislation will be released. The special called General Conference (February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis) will vote upon this proposal and will have implications for our conference and local church.

How Can We Faithfully Prepare?

We are glad you asked. We place a premium on being nice to one another, and this frequently prevents us from having difficult conversation around difficult topics. We need to learn and practice kindness while engaging in the difficult conversations. The plan released by the Council of Bishops in July to be voted on at the called General Conference in February 2019 WILL be a national news item. We each need to feel prepared and equipped to answer questions for ourselves, for our community, and for our church once decisions are made. We are faithful to reflect proactively rather than reactively.

The mission of the Western North Carolina Conference is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." We look to Holy Scripture as the authority on our church's teaching; utilizing our tradition, reason, and experience to interpret the Scripture faithfully. We long for the church to be a safe place. This is certainly true for people who long to pray, read the Bible, ask questions, and engage in conversations about significant matters.

As we walk and talk alongside one another, you will be equipped to continue growing in holiness of heart and mind. As beloved of Christ, we look toward the future with hope- keeping our call to unity and mission in the center of our vision.