



# Council of Bishops

## The United Methodist Church



For Immediate Release  
May 4, 2018

CHICAGO – United Methodist bishops, meeting in Chicago, engaged in a prayerful process to discern a way forward. At the conclusion of the discernment process, the Council of Bishops strongly approved the following motion and rationale:

**Having received and considered the extensive work of the Commission on a Way Forward, the Council of Bishops will submit a report to the Special Session of the General Conference in 2019 that includes:**

- **All three plans (The Traditionalist Plan, The One Church Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan) for a way forward considered by the Commission and the Council.**
- **The Council's recommendation of the One Church Plan.**
- **A historical narrative of the Council's discernment process regarding all three plans.**

**Rationale: In order to invite the church to go deeper into the journey the Council and Commission have been on, the Council will make all the information considered by the Commission and the Council of Bishops available to the delegates of the General Conference and acknowledges there is support for each of the three plans within the Council. The values of our global church are reflected in all three plans. The majority of the Council recommends the One Church Plan as the best way forward for The United Methodist Church.**

Guided by the mission, vision and scope document, the bishops agreed to recommend the One Church Plan. This plan provides conferences, churches, and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context while retaining the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church.

The One Church Plan allows for contextualization of language about human sexuality in support of the mission; and allows for central conferences, especially those in Africa, to retain their disciplinary authority to adapt the Book of Discipline and continue to include traditional language and values while fulfilling the vision of a global and multicultural church.

This plan also encourages a generous unity by giving United Methodists the ability to address different missional contexts in ways that reflect their theological convictions. The One Church Plan removes the restrictive language of the Book of Discipline and adds assurances to pastors and Conferences who due to their theological convictions cannot perform same-sex weddings or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals.

The Council's discernment process was guided by the over-arching desire to strategically help the General Conference do its work and to honor the General Conference's request for the Council to help the church find a way forward.

"With convicted humility, bishops want to be pastors and shepherds of the whole church in order to maximize the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible and with as much contextual differentiation as possible," said newly installed Council of Bishops President Ken Carter.

The bishops expressed deep appreciation for the diligent work that the 32-member Commission on a Way Forward did in formulating the three plans: the Traditionalist Plan, the One Church Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan.

While the bishops recommended the One Church Plan, they affirmed that the Connectional Conference Plan and the Traditionalist Plan held values that are important to the life and work of the church and will be included in the final report to the Special Session of General Conference that the bishops have called for Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

Bishop Carter, who served as one of the moderators of the Commission, said the bishops are adopting a spirit of collaboration with the Commission, and an attitude of respect for the delegations who will take up this work on behalf of the whole church.

"The Council's prayerful deliberation reflected the diversity of the global denomination on the matter of homosexuality and many other matters. The Council affirms the strength of this diversity and our commitment to maintain the unity of the church," Bishop Carter said.

Full details of the plans and accompanying legislative proposals will be released as soon as final editing of the entire report is completed and translated into the official languages of the General Conference. It is estimated this will be no later than July 8.

## A Message from Bishop John Schol (Greater NJ Conference) on the Council of Bishops Recommendation.

Full Text can be found at:

<https://www.gnjumc.org/news/message-from-bishop-schol-council-of-bishops-recommendation/>

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In 2016, the General Conference asked the Bishops of the United Methodist Church to lead a process that would find a way forward for the church concerning human sexuality and, in particular, the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the church. The United Methodist Bishops just completed a week-long gathering in Chicago to review three plans developed by the Commission on the Way Forward.

Our time was filled with worship, prayer, conversation and discernment about the way forward for the church. We finalized our recommendation to the February 2019 Special General Conference Session.

The three proposals and their variations include:

**1. The Traditionalist Plan:** Strengthen the existing language about homosexuality in the Book of Discipline and create swift and strong punishment of anyone that does not follow the Book of Discipline.

*The Council of Bishops is not recommending this model to the General Conference because it will create disruption, church trials and pain for individuals and congregations that would distract us from our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*

**2. The Connectional Conference Plan:** Create a Connectional Conference Model for the church which allows congregations to decide to be a part of one of three "branches"/conferences in the United States – progressive, centrist or conservative. These conferences could modify the Book of Discipline and align church practices to their theology and understanding. Present annual conferences and even congregations could choose different "branches"/conferences.

*The Council of Bishops is not recommending this model to the General Conference. A similar model was created in 1939 which separated a majority of African Americans and the rest of the church into distinct conferences. It was finally disbanded in 1968 and caused lasting pain to many in our denomination. It would not be helpful for us to be separate but equal, separating us by theology and segregating gays and lesbians. It would also require years to implement, maybe as many as 10 years and that would detract us from the mission of Jesus Christ and focus us on institutional matters.*

**3. The One Church Plan:** Create a One Church Plan that allows:

- Congregations to decide their marriage policies.
- Pastors to determine who they will marry.
- Boards of Ordained Ministry and clergy executive sessions to determine fit and readiness for ministry.

*The Council of Bishops is recommending this model to the General Conference because it preserves appropriate local decision-making and does not require congregations to think and act alike. It preserves our unity in the midst of differences, allows for contextualization and provides the least disruption to the mission of Jesus Christ.*

This proposal represents the Bishops' best discernment around these critical and sensitive matters....

I recognize there will be United Methodists that will not be in agreement with the proposed plan by the Bishops. Some will find it hard to be in a church that allows discrimination against gays and lesbians. Others will not accept that parts of our denomination will allow congregations, pastors and conferences to make their own decisions about marriage and leadership for the church that may include gays and lesbians. I recognize the Bishops' recommendation will generate different feelings and opinions. I humbly ask you to stay open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the church and in your life. I hope that while we may not all think alike, we will all love as Jesus loved....

Thank you for being United Methodist, for your commitment to Jesus Christ and for your service to the church and the world. In the midst of the vast diversity found within our United Methodist Church, the Bishops continue to work for the unity of the church and long for each of us to BE OF ONE HEART in our desire to discern the mind and will of Jesus Christ for the mission of our church.