



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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As Bishops of The United Methodist Church, we affirm that WE ARE OF ONE HEART in our desire to discern the mind and will of Jesus Christ for our leadership and the church. In the Northeastern Jurisdiction and around the world we experience great diversity of thought and practice within The United Methodist Church. In partnership with Bishops from around the world, we will continue to lead collectively and individually to value and provide room for our diversity as United Methodists.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction  
College of Bishops

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Susquehanna Conference,

Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ our Risen Savior, Prince of Peace, Healer of our brokenness, and Hope of the world.

Surrounded by and bathed in prayers, the Council of Bishops met in Chicago last week to discern the recommendation that would be sent to the special session of General Conference to be held February 23 to 26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. What was adopted by the Council is the following.

**Motion:** 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.
- All 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 has been on, the Council makes 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.

Here is the link to the office Council of Bishops press release <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/united-methodist-bishops-recommend-a-way-forward>

The Council of Bishops believes that the report is to be informative with transparency and that the recommendation is the faithful response to the following vision of a way forward:

- Maximize the presence of a United Methodist witness across the globe
- Allow for as much contextual differentiation as possible
- Balance an approach to different theological understanding of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible

The full report, including the recommended “The One Church Plan”, the other two plans (The Traditionalist Plan and The Connectional Conference Plan), and the historical narrative of the Council’s discernment process regarding all three plans, will be shared with the whole church as soon as it is perfected and translated into several languages, but no later than July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

Here’s a brief look at each plan concerning the matters of human sexuality and full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons.

The Traditionalist Plan:

- Current restrictive language will be strengthened.
- Accountability to noncompliance will be increased.

The Connectional Conference Plan:

- In positioning with theological orientations and values (traditional, centrist, and progressive) three Connectional Conferences (branches) will be created.
- Annual Conferences and local churches could choose which Connectional Conference to align with.
- Each Connectional Conference establishes its own language in the Book of Discipline.

The One Church Plan:

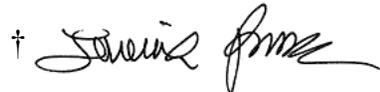
- Current restrictive language will be changed into permissive language.
- It is up to the Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and Clergy Session to determine the standards upon which someone is ordained, to the clergy to determine who they marry, and to the local congregation to decide their marriage policies.
- No one will be required to do something against one’s conscience.

While the Council of Bishops believes the report represents its best thinking and judgment around the critical matters before the church, it is up to the General Conference to deliberate, discern, and decide. Knowing the great diversity among the twelve million United Methodists worldwide, it will be an extremely challenging process.

In the midst of the disagreement we may have, we are called to be the church together. As the Body of Christ, we deeply love and care for one another. In less than a month, we will meet as an annual conference. We will have a significant time of holy conferencing with many moments of prayer in the spirit of “Better Together: One With Christ”. There will be other opportunities in the days to come for us to gather for continued conversation and prayer throughout the Susquehanna Conference.

This is an anxious time of our beloved United Methodist Church. We put our trust and hope in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church who yearns and prays for the unity of God’s followers. I solicit our brothers and sisters of the Susquehanna Conference to enter into this most decisive season of our beloved church in deep, intentional, focused, and purposeful prayer with openness to the movement of the Spirit. We know that God is in charge. The mission of the church is yet alive. God will lead us into a way forward. Alive in Christ together, the Susquehanna Conference will embody the beloved community of disciple-making congregations for such a time as it is.

Prayerfully In Christ,

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Jeremiah J. Park