



# We Confess

NEWSLETTER OF THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT  
WITHIN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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## *Where are We Now as United Methodists and the Way Forward?*

DR. RILEY CASE

As you know, a special called General Conference of the United Methodist Church is scheduled for February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, MO to help the church move forward in unity in the midst of increasing controversy over the matter of ordaining practicing homosexuals and blessing gay marriage. For two and a half years committees and groups have explored options and discussed and debated various plans and possibilities for legislation. A special Commission on a Way Forward has worked to offer three possibilities for United Methodism's future. These plans were presented to the church's Judicial Council at their October meeting for rulings as to the constitutionality of each plan. The Judicial Council ruled the One Church Plan to be largely constitutional while they found constitutional problems with 7 of the 17 petitions with the Traditional Plan, along with parts of 2 others. Modifications will be made prior to General Conference to address the concerns of the council.

The Judicial Council decided it had no authority to rule on the Connectional Conference Plan because it contains proposed constitutional changes that have not yet been passed.

So now, with the General Conference only a few months away, where are we? Is there a plan which seems to have widespread support in the church? Is our future hopeful?

The answer is: there are many with deep concerns and frustration because the church is still divided and there are no discernable signs that there is a clear path that will make for unity and common purpose and mission. We who believe that God still has a plan and a future for United Methodism are praying for renewed hope and a clear way forward.

**The Confessing Movement is optimistic the  
General Conference will approve the Traditional Plan,  
keeping the current language on homosexuality  
in the Discipline.**





# RULINGS OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

*The church's Judicial Council, the supreme court of the church, met in Zurich in October spending its time examining and then ruling on the constitutionality of the three major proposals the Commission on a Way Forward is bringing to the General Conference in 2019. A brief summary of their findings is as follows:*

**1 THE ONE CHURCH PLAN**, originally called local option, calls for the elimination of all language in the Discipline on homosexuality and on the definition of marriage as limited to a man and a woman. It would include a freedom of conscience provision for churches or conferences or pastors who believe that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. These persons or churches or even conferences would still be able to perform ministry within the traditional understanding of human sexuality. The Judicial Council ruled that while there are several minor provisions of the plan that are not constitutional, with simple changes the plan basically can be enacted if passed.

**2 THE CONNECTIONAL CONFERENCE PLAN** would require a series of constitutional amendments in order to be enacted. Therefore, the Judicial Council made no ruling on this option because it was not rightly before them. The council can only rule on the Constitution as enacted. The plan can be considered and passed if that is the wish of the General Conference. If the amendments pass then the plan can be evaluated by the Judicial Council.

**3 THE TRADITIONAL PLAN**, supported by evangelicals, would make no changes in the basic teaching of the church's Discipline (the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching and marriage is between a man and a woman). It would call for more stringent accountability measures so that some bishops and some conference Boards of Ordained Ministry could not simply defy the

church teaching by their unwillingness to uphold that which they have taken vows to do. It would also allow for a gracious exit for those churches and clergy groups who, because of conscience, could not live with the teaching of the church. The Judicial Council struck down some of the petitions because of what the council called "selective certification." Those petitions "selectively" enforced ordination requirements related to homosexuality over other requirements in the Discipline.

According to Rev. Tom Lambrecht, "this problem can be corrected with a simple language change clarifying that upholding of the whole Discipline is required, not just certain parts to the exclusion of others." He also found it encouraging that "the Judicial Council declared that the Constitution does permit an annual conference to withdraw from the United Methodist Church under conditions established by the General Conference."

Rev. Lambrecht does, however, disagree with the Judicial Council's ruling that the process for withdrawal set forth in the Traditional Plan was unconstitutional requiring a 2/3 vote by the congregation and the annual conference for approval per paragraph 41 of the Discipline. He sees this as a misreading of what applies only to congregations transferring from one UM annual conference to another. "It has no bearing on the conditions for a congregation withdrawing from the church." Rev. Lambrecht is requesting the Judicial Council to reconsider this aspect of their ruling at their meeting prior to the opening of General Conference 2019.

**DESPITE THESE RULINGS THE TRADITIONAL PLAN IS STILL THE BEST OPTION FOR THE UMC.**



# The *Gracious* **EXIT PROVISION**

When the Commission on a Way Forward first made its recommendations to the bishops, there was a provision that was called a “gracious exit.” This meant that a church or group of churches, if they could not in good conscience support the position of the church, could withdraw from the denomination and keep its property with only the financial responsibility for their clergy pensions. In The United Methodist Church, as with a number of denominations, church property is ultimately owned by the denomination and, therefore, if a congregation withdraws it has to forfeit its property or pay for it. In actual practice the conference Board of Trustees is responsible for the abandoned buildings of congregations which withdraw. In cases where the property has but little value, or carries more debt than the conference can easily handle, negotiations can be made to the satisfaction of all parties. However, in most cases congregations lose the church property if they withdraw from the denomination. Therefore, churches that currently wish to leave do not because of the Trust Clause described above. The gracious exit plan addresses this issue.

The majority of bishops, however, opposed the “gracious exit” plan as proposed by the Commission in the One Church model, the plan the majority of bishops supported. They evidently fear that churches might withdraw in large numbers if they did not lose their property. The bishops appear to want to protect institutionalism above all expressions of “grace.”

The Traditional Plan (the plan opposed by the majority of bishops) does have a “gracious exit” provision for churches who would want to leave the denomination if the General Conference affirms that marriage is between a man and a woman and prohibits the ordination of practicing homosexuals. However, many progressive churches have let it be known they will not leave the denomination. It would seem their strategy is to force the church to change its traditional sexual standards through mass disobedience to church teachings.

The “gracious exit” provision is not dead. It will be brought to the General Conference as a separate petition. How the General Conference reacts will reveal much about whether they value grace or institutional protectionism.



# WHERE IS THE hope

Those of us who are evangelical and who stand with the Christianity of the historic church believe that the greater majority of United Methodists do not want to risk the implosion of the United Methodist Church which we are convinced would happen if the General Conference adopts the One Church Plan. We also realize there are major problems with many of the proposals before the General Conference.

At this point our hope is in an ever-faithful God who will show us a path through the wilderness. This may be a path we have been hesitant to consider up to this point, such as amicable separation. At any rate the major renewal groups such as the Confessing Movement, Good News, UMAction, IRD (Institute of Religion and Democracy), the Wesleyan Covenant Association, and informal groups of pastors and laity from significant churches, are ready to assume leadership for churches that wish to be faithful to the gospel if the leadership of the denomination should jettison its long-standing commitment to the historical Christian faith. The Wesleyan Covenant Association at its gathering November 3 in Georgia is on record that it will be a rallying point for churches and individuals in this case.

## IS THERE ANY SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR ANY OTHER VIEW OF MARRIAGE THAN IT IS BETWEEN ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN?



The answer to the question is **no**. For two thousand years of church history, the thought that Scripture is not clear on marriage has been unthinkable. This is the weight of tradition. If some today believe that somehow there is ambiguity on this in Scripture or in tradition, it would only be an indication that some are trading the Christian world view for that of secularism.

*For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.*

*As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.*

— 2 TIMOTHY 4: 3-5 —



It is nothing new.  
We've said it plainly.  
We've said it openly and repeatedly.  
We've said it over coffee with colleagues and friends.  
We've said it in person, in interviews and online.  
We've said it in magazines, academic papers, and books.  
We've said it in "holy conversations" and "listening sessions".  
We've said it online in blogs, tweets and discussion groups.  
We've said it in our local churches and our annual conferences.  
We've said it in Cleveland, Fort Worth, Tampa and Portland.  
We've said it in informal working groups and special commissions.  
We've said it with tears in our eyes and a lump in our throats.  
We've said it with fear and trembling.  
We've said it when it was costly.

If the United Methodist Church changes its definition of marriage from a man and a woman to "two people" millions of us will feel forced to leave. We simply cannot stay in a church that is embracing what we believe to be harmful heresy.

It is a matter of deeply held conviction.  
It is born out of our understanding of the Authority of Scripture.  
It is rooted in theology of grace, forgiveness, holiness and sanctification.

## WHAT IF...

... the 2019 General Conference changes the church's historical position on the practice of homosexuality? The WCA, at its legislative meeting at Mt. Bethel UMC in Marietta, GA, approved a document entitled "Fundamentals and Principles of a New Methodist Denomination." The action was taken to provide an alternative for the UMC should General Conference 2019 pass a plan that changes our church's position on the practice of homosexuality. Additionally, a work group was assigned to develop the plan.



## Christ is Born!

The Confessing Movement office will be closed Monday December 24, 2018 through January 1, 2019.

We will reopen on Wednesday, January 2, 2019.

May you and your family enjoy fellowship and joy during the Christmas Season and into the New Year!

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Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord. The Confessing Movement exists to enable The United Methodist Church to retrieve its classical doctrinal identity, and to live it out as disciples of Jesus Christ.

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