



The United Methodist Church

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Pastoral Letter to the Northern Illinois Annual Conference

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Dear Friends and Members of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference:

First of all, I want to thank all of you who provided such warm hospitality for the Council of Bishops who met in the Chicago area last week. Throughout the week, to the very last day, my colleagues kept commenting on how gracious you were! In the midst of a long and hard week of meetings, your smiling faces and warm greetings were appreciated far more than you will ever know!

I also want to thank those of you who kept the Council in your prayers. Your prayers, and the prayers of the whole church, met together with our own; all our work was surrounded by prayer.

The Council received the report from the Commission on the Way Forward (COTWF) and discerned our recommendation to the called session of the General Conference in February 2019 (GC19). For 4 days we discerned what our recommendation would be. We reviewed all three plans given to us by the COTWF, discussed them, provided pros and cons to each of them, and finally discerned our decision.

We recommended to the GC19 one plan: The One Church Plan. There was substantial support for it. Some have been confused by the [press release](#) which rightly said we also recommended that all three plans, and our discernment about them (pros and cons), would be a part of our report to GC19. We have called this our “historical narrative” as to why we came to our decision. (We are NOT recommending all three plans.) I believe that it will be important for delegates to “see our work” before, and when we get to GC19, so that if, or when, any of the other plans or parts of them come to the floor, they will see what our discernment was about them.

We discerned the One Church Plan because it gives space for our contexts in ministry and our theological convictions regarding human sexuality. The central conferences, especially those in Africa, will not be “forced” to change their cultural ways which in decades of colonialism has been their fear. In fact, it allows for all local churches to discern if they want same-gender marriages to be performed in their buildings and for clergy to decide if they want to perform same-gender marriages as part of their ministry. No one is forced to do what they don’t want to do based on their convictions. Likewise, no one will be penalized if they perform same-gender marriages.

The One Church Plan also allows each annual conference to decide if its Board of Ordained Ministry will recommend LGBTQ persons for ordination or not.

The full report and legislation will be released no later than July 8 after it has been translated in the official languages of the UMC. I will be meeting with the NIC delegation on the 15th of July to discuss it with them. We will have district conversations in the fall and I urge all clergy and laity to attend them so that you know what the One Church Plan entails, as well as what the other plans entail should they, or parts of them, be substituted at the GC19.

Now, I want to speak to another matter. One of the reasons that I delayed putting out a pastoral statement until today was that I knew that on Monday, May 7, the results of the constitutional amendments that were voted on and sent to annual conferences almost two years ago would be released.

Amendment #1 added language that both men and women are made in the image of God and that we as a church seek to eliminate any discrimination against women and girls. This amendment received an aggregate vote across all the annual conferences in our global church of 66.5%, falling short of the necessary 2/3 majority by .2 % (less than 100 votes). It failed to change our constitution.

Amendment #2 added language that provided constitutional protection not only for race, color, national origin, status and economic condition (these presently exist in the constitution), but sought to add “gender, ability, age, and marital status.” This amendment received an aggregate vote of 61.3%, again falling short of a 2/3 vote. It failed to provide constitutional protection for these persons within our church. (There were other constitutional amendments which met the 2/3 requirement; none were related to the matters in #1 and #2.)

Especially in light of the discussion and discernment about full inclusion in the church for LGBTQ persons, this came as a spiritual, emotional blow. There was much grieving, especially on the part of women as we received the report. You can see the full Council’s statement by [clicking here](#) and specifically the women bishops’ response which was affirmed by the rest of the Council by [clicking here](#).

As the women’s response says, “we have a long way to go to fully live into our deep commitment to the equality of women in our many countries and in the life of The United Methodist Church.” While we may not agree upon these matters of human sexuality or protection and honoring of all people, we are called to be “one body and one spirit just as God also called (us) in one hope” (Eph. 4:3). Our unity is in Christ, not our ability to agree or even our acceptance of the reality of humanity’s diversity as God has created us.

Please pray for The United Methodist Church and all its people as well as its witness to the world. We have work to do! Prayers to pray! Relationships to build! You are all in my prayers. May God have mercy upon us as we seek a way forward with each other.

In Christ,



Sally Dyck

