

To Fairfield Glade UMC
From: Jay Archer
Re: A Second Congregational Letter about the Special General Conference
March 13, 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ of Fairfield Glade UMC:

In this letter I want to give a simple account of the legislative results of the Special General Conference held Feb 23-26, 2019. We United Methodist are not of one mind about the matters before the General Conference and the passionate reactions from many different quarters of the United Methodist Church demonstrate this reality. As we each gauge our own reactions (and our own view of the impact of the adoption of the Traditional Plan...positive or negative) it is important that we begin with a baseline understanding about the legislative changes.

I wish to begin with what I think is a good statement from the Council of Bishops issued immediately upon the conclusion of the Special General Conference. *I have highlighted two paragraphs that I think are especially relevant to understanding the legislative results.*

+++++



For Immediate Release

February 26, 2019

General Conference tightens language on ordination of LGBTQI persons same-gender marriages in The United Methodist Church

ST. LOUIS – The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church would like to thank the delegates to the Special Session of the General Conference for their diligent work during the 2019 conference, which ended today in St. Louis, in the United States. The General Conference is the highest legislative body in the church and the only group who can decide church law and speak officially for the global denomination.

The 864 delegates (half lay, half clergy) from all over the world met from Feb. 24-26 to discuss and act on the report of the Commission on a Way Forward over the issue of human sexuality. The delegates also considered petitions other than the report from the Commission.

The decision of the General Conference was to offer a majority support for the Traditional Plan. The vote was 438 to 384. The delegates then voted to ask the Judicial Council, the highest court in the denomination, to review the constitutionality of the approved legislation.

What is the Traditional Plan?

The Traditional Plan keeps the current language around sexuality and increases accountability by streamlining the processes to enforce penalties for violations of *The Book of Discipline* related to marriage and ordination of LGBTQI persons. Some parts of the Traditional Plan were ruled unconstitutional, and it will take some time to clarify which parts will become part of our church law and which parts will not.

“We continue to teach and believe that all persons are welcomed in the church, all persons are persons of sacred worth and we welcome all to receive the ministry of Jesus. Human sexuality is a topic on which people of faith have differing views,” said Bishop Ken Carter, president of the

Council of Bishops, after the conference ended. “Despite our differences, we will continue to work together to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and share God’s love with all people.”

What is the next step for the UMC?

Since the legislation is not the official church law until January 1, 2020 for churches in the United States, the bishops are urging all Methodists to stay focused on the mission that glorifies God and reaches new people with the gospel. Bishops will be holding meetings with clergy and laity in their annual conferences on how details will be handled in each area. The legislation takes effect in churches outside the U.S. after the 2020 General Conference.

+++++

Some Things to Note:

I. The current language from the Discipline referring to sexuality, the practice of homosexuality, the definition of marriage, the standards for ordination, and the prohibition against the performance of same-sex marriages by clergy or in UM churches has not been altered by the Traditional Plan. What has been added to the Discipline through the Traditional Plan are accountability and clarity measures to address tactics deployed to ignore, avoid, or intentionally disobey the Discipline by those who strongly oppose the Disciplinary position. These accountability and clarity measures added by the Traditional Plan have not all been approved by our Judicial Council as being compliant with the constitutional clauses of our Discipline (though some have); therefore the final rendition of the Traditional Plan to be inserted into our Discipline has not yet been determined.

II. It is important for all of us to know the key points of the retained language of the Discipline, whether we think the General Conference should have changed the Disciplinary language or whether we think the General Conference was right to retain the language of the Discipline.

Below are passages from the Discipline that render the basic current Disciplinary position. Please read the whole passages. You will not know the current Disciplinary position unless you see its fullest dimension. **While many of us are aware of the basic prohibitions and statements in our Discipline, there are some statements we may have overlooked. I have put an ** before lines we sometimes don’t notice.**

¶ 161.C- Social Principles

C) *Marriage*—We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. ******We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. ******We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

¶ 161.G - Social Principles

G) *Human Sexuality* —We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. We deplore all forms of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused

children. **All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults. **We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. **All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the** practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. **We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. **We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. **We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. **We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

(Jay’s note: *The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality. The orientation towards homosexuality or same-sex attraction is purposely not included in this statement).*

¶ 304.3 - Qualifications for Ordination

3. **While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexual persons are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

¶2702.1 – Chargeable Offenses

¶ 2702. 1. A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶ 370), local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶ 2702.4) with one or more of the following offenses:** immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage; (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same sex wedding ceremonies; (c) crime; (d) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church; (e) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (f) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor; (g) child abuse; (h) sexual abuse; i) sexual misconduct including the use or possession of pornography, (j) harassment, **including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; (k) **racial or gender discrimination; or (l) fiscal malfeasance

(Jay’s note: Nowhere in the Discipline does it say that either homosexuals or even practicing homosexuals are excluded from membership. They are excluded from being certified or ordained as Clergy or appointed as certified or ordained clergy. A local church is not prohibited from hiring or not-hiring a non-clergy staff as they desire.)

Yours, in Christ

Reverend Jay Archer, Fairfield Glade UMC