



Affirmation

An Independent Voice for:

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

PO Box 1021, Evanston IL 60204-1021

UMAffirmation_at_yahoo.com * umaffirm.org * Facebook: TinyURL.com/UMAffFB

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Affirmation: The Long Walk in The UMC

By Gary Shephard, Co-Convener & Ann Craig, Co-Spokesperson

The United Methodist Church has denied the rights of sexual minorities and gender diverse people ever since the very first General Conference of the new United Methodist Church. In the waning hours of General Conference 1972, delegates dropped in the “incompatibility” clause which reversed an otherwise affirming statement for “homosexuals.” At each following GC, the church either made no forward progress or the language got worse. Delegates at GC2016 voted for a Called GC in 2019 and for the Bishops to take the lead. The Bishops created the Commission On a Way Forward which worked hard and came up with three plans. Here’s a quick summary of the plans.

- The One Church Plan allowed for clergy to, if they wished, perform same-gender weddings where legal, and allow but not require annual conferences to ordain LGBTQIA+ pastors.
- The Connectional Church Plan set up three connectional systems in The UMC along traditional, centrist, and progressive values. This plan required eight separate constitutional amendments to be approved by 2/3 of the conferences across the global UMC. The failure of any of the amendments would have been problematic.
- The Traditional Plan kept existing restrictions and expanded punishments.

The Simple Plan emerged from a grassroots church movement that began with the Queer Clergy Caucus and then spun itself off into UM-Forward. It required no constitutional amendments and allowed but didn’t require clergy or bishops to perform marriages or for bishops to ordain LGBTQIA+ people.

Behind the scenes, LGBTQ advocates supported The Simple Plan. However, bishops in the Philippines had been persuaded to support the One Church Plan. African delegates had received The One Church Plan. How could everyone possibly get behind The Simple Plan when the Counsel of Bishops had endorsed The One Church Plan?

At the called GC 2019 the first vote approved the means for congregations to leave the UMC and take their property. Delegates voted down The Simple Plan, the One Church Plan, and the Connectional Church Plan. The Traditional Plan passed and was then amended to make it harsher. It was finished, for the moment. We could see no way forward.



Protesters at the Called 2019 GC. Karen Oliveto is in the blue jacket.

What To Do? Stay or Leave? By Ben Roe, Affirmation National Council

I came into my Annual Conference's plenary session in 2019 and noticed the band was playing "Hotel California." I refreshed my memory of the words, "You can check out any time you like but you can never leave." I thought, that's like me with the United Methodist Church right now: I may check out of The UMC, but I can never leave the Methodist Way of following Jesus.

So here's my dilemma (and it may be like yours): Do I stay and continue to resist the abuse of LGBTQIA+ people from those who seem to refuse to understand us? Do I stay and continue to resist the legalistic, literalistic, punitive laws put into place by the 2019 Special General Conference? Do I continue to subject myself to the abusive language and concepts, like "you're going to hell," "you deserve to have a millstone around your neck and thrown into the lake," and "we really love you but..."? And the abusive behavior based on these concepts, like bringing charges based on those laws?

Or, do I leave the abusive relationship so I can be more free to continue to live an authentic life, as a person whose values are so Wesleyan? I thrive on grace, grace, and more grace. I reflect on issues of faith, life, and ethics using the four sources Wesley laid out: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Christian Experience. Oh, and I love the Wesley aphorisms: "Do no harm," and "Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can." All these things are a part of who I am as someone born into the Methodist Way, and nurtured, challenged, encouraged, and supported by Methodists all along my journey of faith.

One person suggested another alternative: defect in place, per the study by Miriam Therese Winter of Christian feminists in patriarchal institutions. That is, find your spiritual sustenance from more subversive sources, like support groups and social action and service groups.

The problem is that I feel like my church left me: changed almost beyond recognition a church that:

- Doesn't appear to use all the tools of scriptural interpretation that my church taught me
- Doesn't appear to value research from the late 20th century on that shows same-sex relationships are traditional in Christian history
- Doesn't appear to use the gifts of rational ethical reflection and scientific study and knowledge
- And most of all, doesn't seem to want to listen deeply to the experience of faith from LGBTQIA Methodist believers.

My dilemma is also rooted in that most human of limitations: the inability to see the details of the future clearly, and to discern where God is moving. The "Traditionalists" have won their most important battle of the last 48 years.

(What To Do?...Continued on page 3)

Affirmation Newsletter

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Editor: Gary Shephard with assistance from Ann Craig

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PO Box 1021 Evanston, IL 60204-1021.
umaffirm.org
[TinyURL.com/UMAffFB](https://www.facebook.com/TinyURL.com/UMAffFB) (Facebook)

E-mail:
[UMAffirmation_at_yahoo.com*](mailto:UMAffirmation_at_yahoo.com)
[AffirmationLGBTQ_at_gmail.com*](mailto:AffirmationLGBTQ_at_gmail.com)

Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God's beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "_at_" in the email addresses.



(What To Do?...Continued from page 2)

But even with this win, they have lost a significant portion of the UMC in the USA and Western, Northern Europe, and perhaps the Philippines

Even with their wins, they don't have the power to handle the hundreds of complaints and church trials which are sure to follow if they are to have the kind of "pure" (punitive) church they seek.

Yet, the winds of the Spirit are blowing in the UMC, with church after church, pastor after pastor, group after group, organization after organization all voicing their commitment to continue to welcome LGBTQIA+ people into full participation in their churches, celebrate their marriages, and support their ordination. What does the Holy Spirit have in store with all this ferment?

How can I be a part of this movement? Stay and resist, or leave and build something new? The Holy Spirit will be in both places.

This raises yet another alternative in my dilemma: The urge to stay and resist while building the more graceful and more truly Wesleyan movement.

So, perhaps it comes down to things like this: what do I have the time and energy to do? What does my heart (i.e., my deepest commitments) call me to do? Where are my skills, interests, and abilities most needed? Someone once said, "Where your talents and the needs of the world cross, there lies your vocation." There is a world of need for sure, and in the UMC for sure!

The decision must be made by each individual, in conversation with supportive friends and colleagues. For me, a lot depends on what happens in the next few months and what opportunities present themselves, and how they align with the above questions. Our decisions will be shaped by our life experiences, our tolerance for conflict, our ability to be graceful and respectful in the midst of sometimes heated debates, and other factors unique to each of us.

Ben Roe is a member of the Affirmation National Council, member of Arvada UMC in Colorado, graduate of Claremont, former UM minister, and is a former sexuality educator. Personal web site is <http://JBenjaminRoe.com>

Where Do We Go From Here? By Gary Shephard, Co-Convener



Progressive coalition protestors at GC 2019

The demise of the UMC at GC 2019 produced rumors of plans to let the church divorce itself, with progressives in one denomination and traditionalists in another denomination. To be truly fair, neither going forward should be allowed to call themselves "United Methodist" because we are now "Untied" Methodists. With each passing day, the split becomes deeper. COVID19 hit, and GC 2020 became GC 2021, August 29 to September 7.

Some speculate that GC 2021 could begin with an opening worship with words of sorrow for not being able to live together. The first business session would put forth a motion to temporarily suspend the agenda and a second motion to split The UMC. Once passed, there would be a

brief recess while each group would leave the conference floor to reconvene elsewhere, and go about the process of setting up each new church. Those identifying as progressives, would meet, identify a new name and vote to remove the restrictive language from The Discipline.

This roadmap is a proposed way forward. It's not guaranteed and it may end up in the hands of lawyers, but we will definitely not be the same. While causing a church split was never our intention (Affirmation, RMN, MFSA, and so many others), if a split will get rid of the rancor and oppression, we are forced to embrace it.

GC 2020 Rescheduled

By Mary Lynn Ragan Clunn, Affirmation National Council

The 2020 General Conference, the quadrennial meeting of our denomination's decision-making body was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The new dates are August 29 through September 7, 2021 at the originally planned location of Minneapolis, MN. "The Commission decided to focus on 2021 as it was not feasible to schedule any earlier with so much uncertainty over international travel and the spread of COVID-19," said a statement from the Commission on the General Conference.

The postponement has some precedent. In 1800, church leaders moved the gathering to the spring to avoid fall yellow fever outbreaks. In 1862, Southern Methodists shortened their session to two days because of the Civil War. As there are 852 delegates, and hundreds of attendees from all over the world set to attend, the delay is out of concern for the health and safety for all concerned.

Since the 2019 Special Session banned same-sex marriage and said the LGBTQIA+ members could not be ordained under the "Traditional Plan," there have been multiple calls to split the denomination. Since General Conference is the only body that can revise *The Book of Discipline* and *The Book of Resolutions*, it appears that the changes will be reflected in one or more new denominations. Many conferences are already doing ministry to all, but others are not. Affirmation needs to make sure your voice is present!

Love Your Neighbor Coalition (LYNC)

By Ann Craig and Gary Shephard



Gay United Methodists 1970s

Rick Huskey, back row left, Gene Leggett, back row right

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/exhibits/umc-gay-caucus/>

The roots of LYNC, as an advocate for full inclusion, go back to the early 1970s when United Methodists such as Gene Leggett and Rick Husky spoke out as early queer United Methodist voices. At the national meeting in 1978, they decided to incorporate Affirmation in Texas.

National Affirmation chartered local chapters across the country and hired Mark Bowman and Marilyn Alexander to publish a supportive magazine for welcoming churches, *Manna for the Journey*. In the 1980s it emerged as Reconciling Congregations. As time went on, Affirmation's partners grew to include Methodist Federation for Social Action. For a history of Affirmation, see [Affirmation Brief History \(http://www.umaffirm.org/site/about-us/4-a-brief-history-of-affirmation\)](http://www.umaffirm.org/site/about-us/4-a-brief-history-of-affirmation)

In 2008 Love Your Neighbor (no "C" yet) had 8 partner groups. With the leadership of Steve Clunn, a former Affirmation Council member, support grew and by GC12, 13 groups agreed to support

LGBTQIA+ inclusion while the coalition worked more intentionally at the intersection of many issues.

Today, Affirmation is a vital presence among the 13 coalition groups. Ben Roe has served as an outstanding Affirmation representative to LYNC for several years and is now passing the torch to Jim Palmquist, the Affirmation treasurer. Ann Craig aside from her Affirmation duties is part of LYNC, and is working with communications.

LYNC In Action

By Ann Craig, LYNC Communications

LYNC faced challenges as it moved forward toward the Called General Conference in February of 2019. Common ground was difficult to find. Although we shared values, all the groups in LYNC did not share strategies. Despite this, we worked with a relatively public face of unity. Denominational leaders must be free to minister to their people.

The world was watching and many prominent LYNC leaders were interviewed by major media via TV, print, and online. Advocates worked hard to persuade delegates from around the world to vote for a plan that would help the United Methodist Church stay together through compromise. Compromise, however, was not popular in the church in 2019. All plans failed and the punitive Traditional Plan was adopted.

In early 2020, COVID-19 hit and General Conference 2020 will now be held in 2021. LYNC, like the rest of the church and the world, is finding its way as to how any plan to split the church will impact all of us.

LYNC continues to meet to strategize and listen to each other. At a series of retreat meetings recently, Lysette Perez, from MARCHA, offered a helpful distinction. LYNC is a “coalition” not necessarily a “group” such as each of the coalition members. LYNC has common values that help us all understand inclusion and the intersection of all of our issues. but each coalition member is a group with its own agenda. Expecting a coalition to function like a group that moves into joint public statements and advocacy is not always possible.

Some have wondered about the function of LYNC in a world where changing policy around LGBTQIA+ people in The UMC is moot and the world is in crisis. The USA is finally pulling back the curtain on systemic racism as police murders of Black people, the ongoing caging of children on the border, the ramp up of military action against protestors, the profile of the deaths from COVID 19, and the expansion of autocratic politics overwhelm us.

Nonetheless, LYNC functions on a quorum basis for any decision making and coalition groups are regularly well-represented. As we move to GC 2021, LYNC will continue with an emphasis on outreach to Central Conferences, and mutual support for specific legislation and advocacy efforts among member groups. LYNC will broker news media interviews and coverage to help journalists reach key spokespersons on a range of issues and work hard to help prepare the spokespersons for effective interviews.



Affirmation and LYNC leaders welcome Rev. Kennedy Mwita from Kenya during GC 2019

East Africa Partnerships

Affirmation continues to expand its work to support pro-LGBTQIA+ communities in East Africa. We recently received an update from Uganda where the hair salon first funded by Affirmation is running well.

In 2020, Affirmation led the way on two new fundraising drives. The first was for electrification of a clinic associated with the first pro-LGBTQIA+ church in Kenya. The second drive is to help the community after the destruction of all crops in the area from flooding.



Moheto Mission Health Center now has electricity so that it can stay open longer hours. They can now also keep insulin and other medications for the community cold.

Heading the work in Kenya is Rev. Kennedy Mwita whose first partnership was with The Fellowship Global under the

leadership of Bishop Joseph Tolton and Ann Craig over the last six years.



The center now has refrigeration.

Rev. Kennedy was instrumental in leading the East Africa Bishop's cabinet to spend a week studying human sexual and gender diversity. With Affirmation's partnership, Rev. Kennedy attended the Called General Conference in 2019. Recently under Rev. Kennedy, the local church became the first Reconciling Congregation in Africa. RMN has been a great partner in these efforts, along with New Paltz United Methodist Church where Ann Craig and Marisa Villareal are members. Individual donors stepped up and put each effort across the finish line funding wise.

Moheto has been hit by wave after wave of disaster. First locusts ate most of the crops, then COVID19 hit. Finally, the whole country was hit with torrential rains which took out whatever crops the locusts hadn't eaten.

Through a birthday fundraiser with Affirmation as the recipient and personal outreach, Affirmation raised \$8000. Significant gifts were given by people who had met Rev. Kennedy at General Conference. The \$8,000 raised bought seeds and fertilizer to be used across the community. The seed arrived at the end of July, just in time for the planting season.



Affirmation National Council

Mary Lynn Ragan Clunn, Recording Secretary
Alexandria VA
marylynnrc_at_yahoo.com

Ben Roe
Arvada, CO
ben_at_earthlink.net

Rev. David Weekley
Hull, MA
dew_at_ba.edu

Ann Craig, Co-Spokesperson
Newburgh, NY
craignewyork_at_gmail.com

Gary Shephard, Co-Convener
Haslet, TX
umaffirmationeadmn_at_prodigy.net

Jim Palmquist, Treasurer
Macungie PA
jim.palmquist_at_gmail.com

Marisa Villareal, Co-Convener
Newburgh, NY
mvvtech_at_gmail.com

In all email addresses, replace “_at_” with “@”.

Trans-Inclusive: Yesterday and Today

Rev. David Weekley

Following the 1972 General Conference, the gay and lesbian Methodists became known as “Affirmation.” Affirmation had the mission of continuing to educate and witness for the full inclusion of gay and lesbian United Methodists with our denomination. Every General Conference got worse. Notably, the 1980 General Conference defunded the Council on Youth Ministry because of its support of Affirmation and the full inclusion of gay and lesbians in the United Methodist Church.

But while the denomination was getting worse, Affirmation was working hard to be more inclusive. The group had an intense debate over whether to include the B for bisexual people. In the mid 1990’s, Affirmation member Jeanne Knepper moved to include transgender persons within its community of advocacy and support. The mood was very positive, but Jeanne made us stop and think. This was not casual. This was a commitment and Affirmation was ready.

I attended my first Affirmation meeting as a probationary clergy member during the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference in 1982. I was newly ordained, and no one knew my transgender history. When I entered the church basement that night, I realized exactly how unique and precarious my position in The United Methodist Church really was. I needed to be welcomed and affirmed that night in a new conference. It provided hope and a circle of friends that meant more to me than they would know for many years.

Aside from knowing that Affirmation was there, which was a source of strength for me as a new stealth transgender clergyperson, I really didn’t interact much with the organization until 2009. After sharing my story in worship with my congregation in August of 2009, Tim Tennant-Jayne contacted me. He invited me and my spouse to meet with Affirmation, and I have been affiliated in some capacity ever since. Tim was a wonderful asset to Affirmation, a good friend, and a gifted human being. (Editor’s note: We lost Tim in 2014 to pancreatic cancer. He is sorely missed.)

Much has changed since I first met Affirmation as a young pastor in Idaho. Even from when I began working with Tim Tennant-Jayne at General Conference, a lot has happened. National Trans organizations have been established, and transgender people formed the “United Methodist Alliance For Transgender Inclusion,” within the Reconciling Ministries Network.

In addition to the birth of new organizations around LGBTQIA+ people within The United Methodist Church, the denomination is facing a major decision in the fall of 2021. Discrimination as “business as usual” since 1972 is over. During COVID-19, many of us live under the stress of uncertainty. Some are jumping ship from the UMC. Some are choosing to remain and see it through to the next transformation of Methodism.

No matter what the future holds, transgender people need advocacy and support now more than ever. Since the Trump administration was elected in 2016, transgender people are increasingly weaponized for personal political gain, targeted for discrimination, oppressed, and increasingly victims of violence. In July of this year—one month—six transgender persons in the US were murdered. Most of them were transgender women of color.

Though I began my transition in 1971 when the word transgender did not yet exist and fears were rampant, I cannot recall a more violent time than today for transgender people.

(Trans-Inclusive...Continued on page 8)

(Trans -Inclusive...Continued from page 7)

My question for all of us who serve and support Affirmation is, how do we strengthen our support for one of the most oppressed populations in the world? This work is important, and Affirmation does not want to participate in Performative allyship. Performative allyship is when an individual organization or group with the power to loudly professes support through their words and actions while actually continuing to do harm, taking focus away from, and generally hindering the group they claim to support. This happens all too frequently to the transgender community.

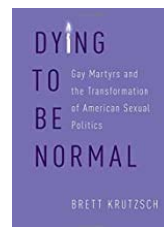
Today is another Jeanne Knepper moment. Are we committed to the lives and safety of transgender people?

(Editor's note – There's a good definition of Allyship here: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/allyship>)

***Dying To Be Normal: Gay Martyrs and the Transformation of American Sexual Politics* by Brett Krutzsch (Oxford: 2019)**

By Gary Shephard, Affirmation Co-Convener

David Weekley talked about the violence toward transgender people in his article starting on the previous page. Affirmation is a place where each of us can do the work to fight violence to sexual orientation and gender identity, and keep on living. Many of us have faced emotionally, physically, and spiritually threatening situations. *Dying To Be Normal* tells the stories of three people who have died before their time. We probably won't ever know the names of all that have died, but we'll know the circumstances of their deaths. Telling their and our stories helps keep us alive.



Here's part of my story. I knew I was gay from a young age. I didn't have to deal with my parents finding out since Mom died in 1962 on Christmas Day, and Dad died four and a half years later. I went to live with an aunt on my father's side of the family who, in turn, died a year later. I then went to live with another aunt on that side of the family, old enough to be my grandmother. I was then shipped off at the age of 15 to live with an aunt on my mother's side of the family and her second husband, Uncle Bert, short for Ethelbert. (No, I'm not making that up.) The smartest scholastic decision I ever made was learning to type in high school. I spent my first two years after graduation working in a clerical position. I then went to college majoring in data processing. The typing, while valuable for schoolwork, turned into a life long asset. As I got older and it became more apparent that I wasn't getting married any time soon, I made sure there was at least 1,000 miles between me and any family members. I married my husband in 1986, and we made it legal in Minnesota in 2013.

I remember the shock of Harvey Milk's murder in 1978 while I was in college and working to full time to pay my rent. I remember when Tyler Clementi took his life in 2010. I remember when Matthew Shepard was pistol whipped and left to die on a fence in Wyoming. When the news about Matthew broke in October 1998, we were gathering for the fall Affirmation National Council meeting. Six days later, Matthew died. I will never forget these three people.

These are just a few of how many LGBTQIA+ people that have been killed or committed suicide over the years? With my chaotic and sometimes heartless family situation, I have no idea why I'm not among the suicides. Well, I do know. Hardheadedness comes from both sides of my family.

Harvey, Tyler, and Matthew are the people that this book looks at in depth. It's by no means a comprehensive history of the LGBTQIA+ struggle. Rather, it concentrates on those that even Uncle Bert (were he still alive) with his narrow world view would have to know about, a few of our modern LGBTQIA+ martyrs. Tell your story. Be hardheaded. Stay the course.



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