



# Affirmation

An Independent Voice for:  
United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns  
PO Box 1021, Evanston IL 60204-1021  
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Volume 47 Issue 1

Fall 2021

**SAVE THE DATE!**



**Nov 6, 4pm Eastern Zoom**

**AFFIRMATION:**

**Yesterday! Today! Tomorrow!**

**November 6, 2021 5pm Eastern Time**

**Register at:**

**<https://tinyurl.com/AffirmationNov6>**

**Hear greetings from Bishop Karen Oliveto. Be inspired by Pro-LGBTQIA leaders who share their hopes for the future.**

**Be ready to Break out to talk to each other. You will be part of the 50 Year History celebration of AFFIRMATION!**

**Bishop Karen Oliveto**



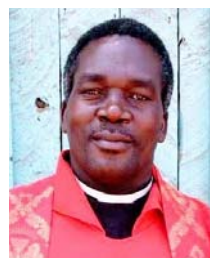
Out lesbian bishop in the UMC and early member of Affirmation

**Rev. David Meredith**



Out gay clergy in West Ohio, candidate for Bishop, and early member of Affirmation

**Rev. Kennedy Mwita**



AIDS advocate, First RMN Congregation and Pastor in Kenya, and partner with Affirmation in agricultural project

**Hawk Hawkins**



Supportive Housing Case Manager in the Delores Project.  
Affirmation Council Member

**Karen Prudente**



Former Director of Finance, Nature Conservancy, NEJ Rep on UMC Connectional Table, Christmas Covenant Advocate.

## A Lament For The United Methodist Church

By Julie Taylor

As a youth, my mom gave me a camera. I loved it. It was something I asked for and waited to receive. Once I got it, it became a treasured possession. I took care of it until one day I lost it. No one found it even though we asked and looked. The disappointment of losing something I “loved” made me cry. Of course, life went on and it’s hard for me to think about taking that kind of loss so seriously now.

Today, loss feels different to me. I’ve lost jobs, housing, friends, and family. These losses bring a loss of bearing such as when your last parent dies and you feel “orphaned” or when your spouse/partner dies and you feel that the life you had hoped to share is gone. When your sibling or cousin dies, you feel your own mortality so keenly. Jobs, especially those which represent your “calling” as a person, can sometimes make you lose your sense of self. Mourning any of these can be devastating. Finding your way back from changes like this are even more keen when they are sudden. Sometimes you simply cannot come back to your best self.

The last two years have included events that make me feel as though our country, our denomination, even our world are losing their bearings and cannot find their best self. The pandemic spurred financial loss, angry disagreements, illness, and death. The January 6 insurrection was a stark reminder that fomented hate can bring frightening results. The sequence of videos of unarmed black men dying at the hands of police officers continue to expose the harsh results of racism.

The called 2019 General Conference, whose sole purpose was to resolve our differences in an amicable fashion, instead created further barriers to the acceptance of our LGBT pastors. The departures have begun by congregations among both conservatives and progressives. But the funds will not be distributed until another General Conference is held to establish the process. But the Delta variant may make travel impossible. Everything is hanging by the lifeline of our connectionalism, but it is fraying rapidly.

I grieve the loss of progressive congregations going to the United Church of Christ (although I appreciate their welcome). I grieve the loss of conservative congregations who are no longer willing to talk, pray, and serve together. This is a deep and mournful loss as one who grew up in a small town UMC. Perhaps it is necessity, but I am not joyful at all.

A friend of mine in Northern Virginia shared with me about her Baptist Church’s support of a UMC pastor being brought to trial over the same sex wedding he performed for a young person who was part of his ministry. I was gratified by the Baptist Church’s financial contribution to help with the UMC pastor’s defense but dismayed by the reality that such trials are taking place in our denomination at all, especially in this “in between” time from the Church’s decision and its implementation of the split. It is tragic.

The United Methodist Church is where I learned about the love of Christ through Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, UMYF, and church youth camp. It is where I committed my life as a Christian at a young age and rediscovered that commitment over and over throughout my life.

*(A Lament...Continued on page 3)*

### Affirmation Newsletter

**Only Affirmation’s elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here, signed or unsigned, are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.**

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### 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.**



*(A Lament...Continued from page 2)*

The church, specifically, The United Methodist Church, is where I received a call to full time Christian service and found mission through believing that "The world is my parish." I believe I have, to some degree, ordered my life around the Wesleyan quadrilateral and the Social Principles. I treasure the structure which provides an equal voice and vote to both lay and clergy representatives. As an adult, I was witness to the far-reaching mission of the church through our connectional system when I visited the Philippines to see plaques dedicated to 50 years of following Jesus as disciples. This is what I love about The United Methodist Church. This is what is diminished by the split. This is what I will miss. This is what will be lost. This is what I now lament.

A long, long time ago, I found a church  
Through the hospitality of a car salesman and his wife  
Through the outreach of Vacation Bible School  
Through the evangelism of Sunday School  
Through the mission of the congregation

And the church welcomed me  
I came to church without my parents  
I came to church without financial support  
I came to church without my own transportation  
I came to church without self-awareness

And the church loved me  
In the church I found Christ as Savior  
In the church I learned about discipleship  
In the church I was part of outreach to the community and world  
In the church I was called into full time Christian service

And the church gave me a home  
I found a place in local church ministry  
I found a place in church-related justice education  
I found a place in an agency of the denomination

I found a place in faith-based justice organizing  
Church was a place of love  
Church was a place of joy  
Church was a place of peace  
Church was a place of faith  
Church was a place of community

But now, I cannot find a church  
That practices reckless hospitality  
That extends boundless outreach  
That expresses the evangelism of unconditional love  
That recognizes mission as absolutely mutual

But now the Church does not welcome me  
I cannot come to Church without a traditional family unless I am alone, pledged to celibacy  
I cannot come to Church without resources to give  
I cannot come to Church unless I have prescribed access  
I cannot come to Church with my authentic self

But now the Church does not love me  
Even though Christ loves me, unconditionally  
Even though discipleship is challenging and messy  
Even though non-judgmental love is the core of outreach to the community and world  
Even though I am still following my call into full time Christian service

But now the Church will not give me a home  
To be part of local Church ministry  
To lead Church-related social justice education  
To serve in an agency of the denomination  
To minister in a faith-based organization

But now, Church is not a place of love  
The Church has lost its celebration of joy  
The Church has lost its ministry of peace  
The Church has lost its place of faith  
The Church has lost its sense of community

I mourn the coming split  
I mourn the end of global connectionalism  
I mourn the end of equal clergy and laity voices  
I mourn the ending of social justice born of great love

My heart is broken for those who must flee for safety  
My heart is broken for those who are hurt and afraid  
My heart is broken for those who say good riddance

Even as I mourn, I am still here.  
I will not go  
I will stay, though I do not know how  
I will not abandon the church that is my home  
I will remain, praying, loving, working in hope

In the midst of loss there is still joy  
Joy, when I focus on a creative God  
Joy, when I let go of the past  
Joy, when I let trust God for the future  
Joy, when hearts open to a new beginning  
Joy, when I BELIEVE that God's love will prevail

This I believe because God is love  
And love is creative  
And love relinquishes the past  
And love rises  
And love is always born again.

## Welcome to the Future of the United Methodist Church!

By Luis Reyes and Ann Craig

Welcome to the future of the United Methodist Church! This? This is the future of the UMC? The denomination has postponed General Conference two times and, judging from the surging Delta COVID19 variant, the 2020 General Conference will most likely be completely canceled. Budgets are dangling and bishops are fading.

Northwest Texas Annual Conference [is already planning its departure](#). At the local level, [disaffiliations](#) of both conservative and progressive churches are moving forwards. Congregations are either thriving through remote worship or accelerating downhill. Many of us find community in local churches that are inclusive and welcoming but few people, even in welcoming congregations, know the scope of global church politics.

What we know and the world knows is that United Methodists are in trouble. Average people on the street and in the pews have heard that something is wrong, but what is wrong is unclear. Sometimes, even those in the mix of political wrangling and wringing of hands are not clear.

Affirmation leaders have had frank conversations about whether to follow pro-LGBTQ congregations to exit the United Methodist Church or to pursue all of the resulting “Methodist” groups to support LGBTQ people wherever they or we are.

Here is our effort at a summary of the “plans” which may shape the next version of the church:

The UMC may pursue regionalization through the [Christmas Covenant](#) or the [Connectional Tables Plan](#). The [Connectional Table](#) endorsed the Christmas Covenant in November of 2020.

The “Protocol” proposal emerged from a theologically diverse team and includes a gift of \$25 million to a breakaway group (expected to be conservative) and \$2 million to other groups that might want to exit. The Judicial Council was asked to rule on whether the Protocol is constitutional but declined to rule until General Conference. There, it may be amended and approved, and only then can it be examined for constitutionality.

[The UM Next Proposal](#) puts a moratorium on trials related to LGBTQ people and supporters. It establishes a Commission on the 21st Century Church UMC to determine the appropriate resources to receive as any group exits the UMC. Bishops would serve terms rather than a lifetime. Laity could take on new leadership. A de facto moratorium was observed for about a year. Now, [charges are being filed](#) and reviewed in Virginia.

As we lay out some of the possibilities for the future, it is important to share that between the two of us, we bring more than 60 years of serving local churches and global programs of The United Methodist Church. We have experienced the hopes and fulfillment as well as the shock and disillusionment of working in church contexts. We are all so human! We believe in the transformative power of Jesus and God’s communities of Spirit. We read the words of Jesus, the prophets, and the saints as we think about the future. The handwriting is on the wall.

Prophecy is not so much fortune telling as it is looking at the present and laying out the probable consequences people are afraid to face. We have some idea of what the future will be because we see what is happening now. No matter what legislation becomes operative, the trends are in motion. There will be fewer boards and agencies with less money and fewer and fewer people making decisions. Bishops will supervise larger and larger geographic areas and congregations and districts will increasingly be on their own. Local pastors with a limited education and a conservative bent will continue to grow in numbers. Ordained elders will be considered an expensive luxury for many congregations.

Globally, we have observed inconsistency from conference to conference. Some bishops are dedicated. Others provide minimal oversight and others are vindictive. Recently, conflicts among United Methodists in Nigeria were prominent in church and secular media. Charges of corruption against Bishop Yohana are confidential in the UMC system, but the arrest of clergy and laity by Nigerian police was public and calculated. Bishop Yohana, a bishop from Nigeria, has already announced that his conference will go with the conservative “Global Methodist Church”. (See the July 16, 2021, UMNews article, [”Divide Deepens Among Church Leaders”](#).)

Five [additional positions for African bishops](#) were approved in 2019 and are waiting for a final vote in the postponed 2020 General Conference. Bishops’ salaries in Central Conferences are relatively lavish since clergy in places like Kenya receive next to nothing or nothing. It’s a risky combination, and charges of corruption have



*(Welcome To The Future...Continued from page 4)*

been levied against more than one bishop. The set up of financial disparity, conflict, and corruption is a classic colonialist model.

[Bishops' salaries are still shaky.](#) In this year (2021), U.S. bishops each make \$162,344. In Africa and the Philippines, the bishops each make \$79,788. The European bishops' salaries range from \$61,824 in Germany to \$120,132 in Central and Southern Europe, where the bishop's office is based in Switzerland. All bishops' housing and office allowances will remain unchanged. (UMNews August 23, 2021)

The financial position of the denomination will make delegates to General Conference think twice about making leaving profitable. Chances are, there will be little money for those leaving. Global delegates will resist letting Americans of any stripe bleed the coffers.

On the hopeful side, what could the new United Methodist denomination look like? With a regional structure, area leaders would set policies in keeping with their area's values and needs. General Conference would become a place of global celebration and sharing success stories about mission programs.

Affirmation leaders are thinking about our future. We have challenged discrimination for 50 years. Should we stop now and say there is no hope? Should we go with a progressive breakaway denomination to affirm the full inclusion of LGBTQ people? If we stay, will we be accused of acquiescence to injustice and will we say "NO, we are here to resist! We are here for the next generation of queer people in the pews!"

Affirmation will most likely continue being a modest, but historic, beacon for movements toward justice and inclusion. We will continue to explore both local and global settings for outreach as we convene and love our people. An August 20, 2021, UMNews headline lifted up a [farming project in Kenya](#) that Affirmation helped fund for a partner congregation in rural Kenya. (This article starts on page 6.)

Conservative delegates look at every proposal as potential promotion of LGBTQ rights and forcing clergy to perform same sex marriage across the denomination. Maybe, just maybe, regionalization will look more appealing once the monetary agendas of conservatives are laid bare. Maybe the tensions in the denomination can recede, so we can actually have some holy conference engagements that allow United Methodists everywhere to practice their ministries and missional programs. Perhaps, with the globalized awareness of the existence of LGBTQ people in all contexts, change will begin again. We can emerge out of the tomb of injustice to a world of light and love.

Around the world, we are living in this liminal time and have time to ponder what can be done. How can we emerge out of this to be justice seeking United Methodists rather than just United Methodists? Are we just trying to save the institution rather than face the collapse of the UMC -- a shattered denomination? Does this shattering free us or add to the pain that comes from the incessant efforts to dehumanize our souls? Can we withstand the ongoing assaults and help those who are trying to survive so much injustice?

We look to the teachings and the life of Christ and his followers. The story of spiritual resilience and stalwart resistance to all the forces of oppression, whether from the State or from religion, show us the way we can go. Some will go home. Some will hide and deny and eventually come around. Others, wherever they are, will resist—and love—to the end.

#### **For further information, see:**

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/july/umc-leave-church-methodist-split-lgbt-conference-protocol.html>

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/conference-signals-its-plans-post-separation>

<https://www.christmascovenant.com/>

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/connectional-tables-us-regional-conference-legislation-now-available>

<https://connectional-table-affirms-the-christmas-covenant-legislation>

<https://umcnext.com/proposal/>

<https://www.anewthingva.com/2021-expected-motions/#Declaratory-Decision>

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/divide-deepens-among-nigerian-church-leaders>

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/group-advises-where-to-add-5-new-african-bishops>

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/funding-for-bishops-improves-but-still-shaky>

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/church-farming-project-grows-skills-in-rural-kenya>

## **Affirmation Project Bears Fruit ...That Is, Corn And Beans!**

**By Ann Craig**

Affirmation's work in East Africa has been strategic by supporting LGBTQ people and our allies at points which could help turn the tide. When a small team of Ugandans ran for their lives, Affirmation provided a small grant to help support them until the attacks calmed down and they found a different place to live. Now, they are leading a worshipping community and helped set up HIV testing which became a clinic in conjunction with MCC.

Recently, after a disastrous year of locusts and flooding, Affirmation became the distribution point for funds raised to replace the ruined crop. With this funding, under the leadership of Rev. Kennedy Mwita, a United Methodist pastor, an agricultural collective is producing a beautiful corn crop.

Rev. Mwita leads the first Reconciling United Methodist congregation in Africa. Affirmation also gave \$1000 to help lay the floor for the second story on their church building.

Gad Maiga, communicator for the Kenya-Ethiopia Conference, is a communicator for the Kenya-Ethiopia Conference and wrote a substantive article on the agricultural project which Affirmation helped. Read below.

### **Church Farming Project Grows Skills In Rural Kenya**

**By Gad Maiga, Communicator for the Kenya-Ethiopia Conference**

#### **Key points:**

**Affirmation leaders helped raise more than \$7,000 for our partner congregation's survival project.**

**Moheto First United Methodist Church extends training opportunities and offers seed funding to farmers.**

**To become sustainable, the church grows maize and beans, which are in high demand.**

**Each participating farmer is expected to plant a demonstration plot on their farms, where they practice what they have learned.**

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Aug. 20, 2021 | MOHETO, Kenya (UM News) - Used by Permission

Moheto First United Methodist Church in Kenya's Migori County is helping lift people out of poverty in its rural community by training them to farm in tough conditions.

Participants learn new farming techniques, receive quality seeds and are offered extension services through the church program, which began in 2019 after flooding and drought destroyed crops.

The region previously had long and short rain seasons, and farmers knew the best times to plant. However, in recent years, the region received abnormally more rain within short time periods, flooding fields and destroying crops. The rains often were followed by long dry seasons, which led to crop failure and subsequent hunger.

Responding to the situation, Moheto First United Methodist Church started a project to grow maize and beans. They recruited members to take part. Initially, 42 members were involved. The following season, a partnership was initiated between the church and Kenya's Pannar Seed Company, which trains farmers in improved farming methods and gives them certified seed.

Ann Craig, a member of New Paltz United Methodist Church in the New York Conference, initiated a funding campaign in 2020. Proceeds were used to buy fertilizer, certified maize seed and beans. After funding, the project engaged 88 church and community members.

"After three years of implementing these farming practices, an estimated 125 farmers have been trained in better

*(Church Farming Project...Continued on page 7)*

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*(Church Farming Project...Continued from page 6)*

farming techniques that have led to increased crop yields and improved quality of life for their 750 family members,” said Husen Chacha, project supervisor. “In addition, trained farmers have taught their neighbors these new farming methods, benefiting another 750 people.”

The church strengthens socioeconomic well-being by promoting community participation and ownership of the development process and organizing with the goal of sustainability.

“I was known as a farmer without skills,” Chacha recalled, “but today, I can provide more food for my family, and I am happy to be called a farmer. I can meet my family’s basic needs and still make some little profit for my farm produce.

“Thanks to Pannar Seed Company,” he added, “I was able to grow maize after receiving seeds and fertilizer. I gathered much more than previously and invested in a basic dryer, allowing me to store and sell it to earn money. This assistance tremendously aided me and my family in producing adequate food for the household. I can now pay my children’s school tuition and supplies by selling the excess food.

“Together, we farm for the future,” Chacha said.

Agronomist Thomas Otato noted that a five-acre demonstration farm was set up near the church to teach traditional and conservation farming methods. “At the end of the training,” he said, “these farmers embark on fieldwork for four months under the guidance and supervision of Pannar Seed Company extension workers.”

Each participating farmer is expected to plant a demonstration plot on their farms, where they practice what they have learned. “At the end of each quarter,” Otato said, “up to 15 farmers complete the training in improved farming methods and increase their food



Husen Chacha, project supervisor of a farming project sponsored by Moheto First United Methodist Church in Kenya’s Migori County, removes the husk from maize to demonstrate the quality of his plants. The church’s partnership with Pannar Seed Company has helped farmers improve their crops. The church also is offering training in new farming techniques and extension services. Photo by Gad Maiga, UM News.

*(Church Farming Project ...Continued on page 8)*



*(Church Farming Project...Continued from page 7)*

security and standard of living for their families.”

“We have successfully increased our harvests, directly due to the skills we’ve learned from the Moheto farming project,” said local farmer Rael Gati. “The government has been unable to support our agricultural efforts as farmers,” she said. “When the church came along to offer this training and follow-up support, we were thrilled.”

Thomas Matiko, a large-scale farmer, said he likes what the First United Methodist Church Moheto farming project does for communities.

“Training people in a rural area, especially in farming methods, is lifting them out of poverty,” Matiko said. “In the past, Kenyans used to depend on rainfall to farm, but in areas like Moheto, which are affected by droughts, it is safer to use other methods of farming.”

The Rev. Kennedy Mwita, senior pastor at Moheto First United Methodist Church, said farmers need to diversify their farming practices, including the crops they plant.



Rev. Kennedy Mwita at New Palz UMC with church members Twana, Ann, Salome, and her son

“There was need to plant drought-resistant crops and experiment with other methods such as irrigation,” Mwita said. “This project might be the only way that people in this community can improve food security and raise their standard of living.”

Mwita has more than 23 years of experience supervising and training farmers, especially small-scale farmers in Migori County, giving him the ability to work with large groups of farmers.

“With high poverty levels, especially in rural Kenya,” Mwita said, “there is a great need to reach out to people with alternative methods of improving their lives. This project provides a sustainable solution to food insecurity. Farmers are now able to use drought-resistant seeds, bred for yield stability, that suit the environment.”

Moheto First hires equipment for the demonstration farm. The project takes place in remote Kenya, and the hired truck transports crops and delivers produce to local markets.

To become sustainable, the church grows maize and beans, which are in high demand.

“Going forward,” Mwita said, “the church is seeking funds to purchase a 10-horsepower tractor, a truck, a harrowing disc and a disc plow to revamp and diversify the ongoing training of local smallholder farmers.

“Pray for the people of Kenya,” he continued. “God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.”

*Maiga is a communicator for the Kenya-Ethiopia Conference.  
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