



Affirmation

An Independent Voice for:

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

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Pre General Conference 2019

General Conference 2019

This GC (General Conference) came out of the impasse reached at the 2016 GC, and was called by the Council of Bishops at the request of the GC itself. This 2019 GC would deal with all sexuality issues. In reality, "sexuality" is a bit of a euphemism for "homosexuality." None of the many other issues related to sexuality were looked at.

The called GC will take place in St Louis, MO, February 23 to 26.

GC will be dealing with 78 petitions regarding the future of the UMC and the "unity" of the denomination. There are four plans for this, including the one recommended by the Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops called "The One Church Plan." There was one other plan which came out of the Commission's meetings, the "Connectional Conference Plan." Everyone talks about the third plan as coming from the Commission, but it did not get anywhere near the attention of the other two and in fact was written by a small group of bishops. It was called "The Traditionalist Plan" when it was first announced, and now is called The Traditional Plan. (See below for more on these two plans.)

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/court-one-church-plan-largely-constitutional>

A fourth plan was developed by the United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus (UMQCC) and is called "The Simple Plan," simple because it only removes the discriminatory and harmful language towards LGBTQ persons from The Book of Discipline. It does not mandate any belief about homosexuality, and leaves the issues of ordination up to Annual Conferences where it is now, and marriage and covenant ceremonies, where they are now, too: with the clergy asked to perform the service. No voting is required. Discrimination can still happen, but at least it won't be put into church rules or law. See much more about this plan here: <https://um-forward.org/simpleplan>

See this page on UMAffirm.org for much, much more: <http://www.umaffirm.org/site/current-events/24-latest-news/170-resources-on-the-plans> and this on WMJM's site: <https://wmjm.org/web/news/219-resources-for-four-plans-for-a-way-forward>

Affirmation's Preferred Outcome for GC19

This called GC in February, 2019, is a critical meeting to decide the future of The UMC. This is our heartfelt commitment to the future of the UMC:

Affirmation supports the dropping of all harmful language and the unequivocal affirmation of LGBTQ people as children of God. Both the **Simple Plan** and **One Church Plan** make strides toward that goal but both the implicit (Simple Plan) or explicit (One Church Plan) allow for ongoing discrimination based on context and local prejudice.

Affirmation supports both the Simple Plan and the One Church Plan as meaningful options and will work for improved language from the floor of GC in either case.

The oppressive paragraphs have been strangling the church for 46 years, and it's time for the church to be able to breathe the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit which continues to move among LGBTQIA people of faith. We applaud the individuals in the United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus both for their work on the Simple Plan and for the important leadership in the Central Conferences for the One Church Plan. Their courageous and powerful witness reminds us that God's Spirit is among us.

We hope that the outcome of GC 2019 will allow the spiritual gifts of God's diverse creation to be fully expressed.

Affirmation will be around for years to come, until The United Methodist Church fully embraces the gift of human sexuality as seen in God's wondrous, diverse creation.

If the General Conference takes the **Traditionalist** approach of legalism, loyalty oaths, and expulsion, we will continue to challenge people who seek to exclude us.

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No GC 2019 proposed legislation includes a full affirmation of God's LGBTQIA children or a call to confession for the harm done by the church. Until the church publicly affirms us and confesses its sin of exclusion, Affirmation will continue to witness to our experience of God's grace in our lives and in our loving sexualities.

Thoughts on the Traditionalist and Connectionalist Plans

The **Traditionalist Plan** makes 6 or 7 passages which appear to be about “homosexuality” the litmus test for being a Christian called United Methodist. Promoters of this plan call it “gracious.” It would force people out of our church who have a different view. This plan is neither “traditional” nor “gracious” and makes the Book of Discipline a rule book that is heavily legalistic and is an approach to life and faith that Jesus challenged all of his teaching. It was not those who were called “sinners” of his day who were to be cast into the darkness with gnashing teeth, it was the self-righteous religious leaders who excluded those rejected by society.

So called “traditionalists” consider those who would be ejected from the church to cover anyone who publicly or privately talks about being LGBTQ as well anyone “living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership, or civil union.” If someone is married to a same-gender partner and is called to the ministry, they would have to divorce their partner! Anyone who disagrees with this legalism or who celebrates a same-sex marriage would be expelled.

Although seven of its 17 petitions were declared unconstitutional by the Judicial Council, we will deal with a revised version at General Conference which will still be punitive.

The **Connectional Conference Plan** divides the church into those who idolize 6 or 7 passages in the Bible and those who put grace at the center, along with a middle ground. This plan would split the church into three structures for Conservatives, Moderates, and Progressives under a big Methodist umbrella. Together they plan to support mission and ministry, but only that ministry not related to sexuality. The plan requires a long constitutional amendment process, which ultimately enshrines the same mindset as created the segregated Central Jurisdiction from 1939 to 1968. This time the focus is on sexuality but the same biblical literalism used for racism is used against LGBTQ people.

If this plan is approved, the numerous constitutional amendments would bog down the whole denomination for years to come. If even one of the amendments failed in the global United Methodist annual conferences, we would be back where we started from.

And A Bit of Biblical Background

The United Methodist argument over “homosexuality” is propped up by 6 or 7 passages in the Bible which have been shown to either be mistranslations from the original texts or which have nothing to do with modern concepts of same-gender loving people, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Science is discovering that sex and gender are not binary but on a continuum. It is time to stop the harm and it is time to stop blaming scripture as the source for this bigotry.

Our International Friends have shared their thoughts in separate articles.

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.

Articles for consideration for publication may be submitted to:

AffirmationNewsletter_at_yahoogroups.com*

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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.



Kenya and the Future of the UMC

By Rev. Kennedy Mwita, UMC District Superintendent in Kenya & Conference Statistician

Rev. Kennedy Mwita will attend GC2019. Affirmation members and friends are invited to a reception on February 23 in St. Louis. Exact time and place will be announced on Facebook.

Born in 1975, I am the first in a family of six children from the Moheto Village in Migori County, Kenya. I am married to Francisca Elnora Mwandau and we are blessed with four children. I studied computer science at Nakuru Institute of Technology, and studied General Agriculture, Livestock and Marketing at Puwani University. I taught in high school, and studied Divinity at Africa University-Zimbabwe. I was ordained an elder in full connection in 2013.

I served as the executive director of Moheto Community Based Organization (MCBO) from 2013 to 2017. MCBO's objective is to mitigate human suffering. MCBO works on gender-based violence, poverty, female genital mutilation (FGM), and the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. I served as the Pastor of Moheto First UMC until 2015, when I was appointed to the cabinet as the District Superintendent of South Nyanza District in Kenya-Ethiopia Annual Conference. I also serve as the conference statistician and chair of the Board of Church and Society.

My advocacy for the inclusion of the LGBTQI person in Kenya started after I witnessed LGBTQI persons being segregated, arrested by the police, and tortured by society. I realized most of those who did this kind of persecution were Christians and were using the Bible to support their actions. As a human rights activist in Kenya, I felt compassion for my friends who were the target of rejection. I feared coming out openly to speak on the rights of the LGBTQI persons in Kenya and the church in particular. Knowing that the constitution of Kenya forbids same sex relationships, I found it easier to address the rights of the intersex persons which became my entry point towards the advocacy of the marginalized in the society and the LGBTQI persons. This was the first time I saw Christians and Muslims agree in common to persecute the victim. I started conducting workshops through the church and MCBO. In this approach I managed to engage the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights to understand the rights of sexual minorities.

In 2015, I met Bishop Joseph Tolton* and this completely changed my approach. After going through a series of trainings on theological lessons with Bishop Tolton, I became more empowered and strengthened to stand and proclaim a prophetic message of inclusion. I learned that all forms of oppression are connected, and Jesus' message to humanity was that of deliverance and inclusion of all. He says he came to his own but his own did not receive him. But to all who have received him – those who believe in his name – he has given the right to become God's children. This is my conviction, that regardless of our sexuality we are children of God. This inspired me to find other sons and daughters of the Lord who have been shut out of the house of God and have been crying out to be heard.

I took the initiative of engaging my bishop on the discussion of inclusion and the leadership of the church. It has not been easy to convince Christians of African descent who were born and raised with the patriarchal background and the given theology that dehumanized and condemned homosexuality. My joy is that in the United Methodist church in Kenya, after a long struggle, we have conducted training for the cabinet and conference leaders on human sexuality. This became a turning point for many leaders in the Kenya-Ethiopia Annual Conference.

**Bishop Joseph Tolton is the Executive Director of The Fellowship Global. In 2012, Bishop Tolton was part of the LYNC outreach to Central Conferences. Bishop Tolton has been partnering with United Methodists in East Africa ever since, as part of building a network of clergy who are affirming of LGBTQI people in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC.*

Further Reading

Ubuntu Values Relationship, Dignity, Grace, Justice
by Albert Otshudi Longe
<https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/a-way-forward/ubuntu/>

Race, Gender. and LGBTQ United Methodists
By Ann Craig
<http://www.umaffirm.org/site/current-events/24-latest-news/175-race-gender-and-lgbtq-united-methodists>

We need your e-mail address!

The Love Your Neighbor Coalition (LYNC) is producing a daily newsletter at GC19. We will be distributing it only electronically via e-mail and websites. If you want timely updates from us, send us your e-mail address. (umaffirmation@yahoo.com or AffirmationLGBTQ@gmail.com) Otherwise, you can check the LYNC website, LYNCcoalition.org for the daily newsletters and our site at UMAffirm.org.

The Church is My Spiritual Home by Israel Alvaran

I am speaking as a person in exile from my country, the Philippines. The Philippines is my home, not just a central conference. Home is very important to me. I live in San Francisco but I only use the word “home” for my home country. Sometimes I cannot even say I am going back “home” when I return to San Francisco.

The church is my spiritual home. Yes it is an institution and I do not want to preserve an institution that is harmful, but I see the church as a gay man and a clergy person as home and it shapes my advocacy. People continue to be harmed but no one is going to force me out of my church home. I am at home in the United Methodist Church, not because someone said so, but because of my baptism. My baptism makes me part of this community. Unfortunately, people in the church have not always fulfilled the promise of unconditional love.

In Tagalog, home becomes more poignant. Home is TAHANAN. The Root word is TAHAN which is the word used when you are crying and your mother tells you “don’t cry.” TAHAN is where we go to cry and be comforted. Home is where I am comfortable, where I don’t need to cry, where I feel safe.

Home is deeply connected to grace. Grace is the cornerstone of Wesleyan Methodist beliefs. I see my queerness as part of God’s saving grace. My dad was very conservative and I was raised conservative. I went to a Calvinist bible college where movies and dancing were not allowed. Chapel services were segregated male and female and we awakened at 5 am for prayer and chores. I was a teenage evangelist. My home church was the first Protestant church in the Philippines. I was invited to be one of the evangelists and preached to my elders.

My queerness was a means of grace because all along the fact that I am gay made me question everything. It is a gift to all LGBTQ people because it forces us to ask questions. We hear the teachings and the contradictions and it forces us to accept ourselves as God has created us, and ask questions when others are ignored or excluded. In the light of prevenient Grace, God made me gay in my mother’s womb.

When a person’s baptism is dismissed by judgmental people, they are not judging us, they are judging God. Their exclusion is defiance, disrespect and disobedience to God’s grace.

I don’t come to this struggle as the victim. Even though I am treated as second class and given crumbs, and although I want to rant about my hurt, I see my identity as a gift from God and an instrument of Grace. My being queer is God’s sacrament of Grace to the church. Queer people are a mirror to the church. My presence in the church helps the church not to sin. We are God’s message, “You can do better.”

The LGBTQ people in the pews are oppressed, but we are already children of God. Will the church continue to block God’s grace? I think about those who have committed suicide and those who have left the church. I am blessed by supportive parents. I am in a job that allows me to be an out gay man. I was a witness to Bishop Karen Oliveto’s consecration. I have received so many gifts.

I am still here and am willing to remind the church that this is my home. I have no right to tell others they have not place in this church. I can simply say I am still here by God’s grace and I can offer that grace to you, even though you harm me and my people. We are called to share this spiritual home.

A Big Thank You!

We shout out our big thank you to all our givers and donors, big and small! You help keep the witness of same-gender loving alive and present to a church that has harmed us for decades. We acknowledge and celebrate the donors who have given \$10, \$25, \$35, \$100, \$1000, and \$5000! We remember and give thanks for Jesus’s story of “the widow’s mite” where one gave what she could and it was valued above all else. And we remember the rich young man. Can you give more?

You can make your donation a monthly one, and that will be a predictable level of support for us. If you want your gift to outlast your physical presence with us, you can put us in your will. Long-time Affirmation member Tim Tennant-Jayne did that and has blessed our presence since his death in 2014. Contact us for details.



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