

Uniting Methodists

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UMCallofus@gmail.com

POSITIONS ON NEW OR CHANGED PETITIONS

Special Session of General Conference – February 23-16, 2019 – St. Louis, MO

The Judicial Council identified three sentences in the One Church Plan as unconstitutional. We recommend three amendments to address these concerns.

We support the following actions:

- i. Petition 4 (90004, ADCA p. 165): DELETE ~~The bishop may choose to seek the non-binding advice of an annual conference session on standards relating to human sexuality for ordination to inform the Board of Ordained Ministry in its work.~~
RATIONALE: The Judicial Council determined that the bishop cannot initiate such resolutions from annual conferences. But of course, annual conferences can choose on their own to consider and adopt these types of resolutions. A simple solution is to delete the entire sentence and leave the initiative in the hands of the members of each annual conference.
- ii. Petition 8 (90008, ADCA p. 166): Clergy who cannot in good conscience continue to serve in a conference based upon that conference's standards for ordination regarding practicing homosexuals, may seek to transfer under ¶ 347, and shall be supported and assisted in that process. Similarly, clergy who cannot in good conscience continue to serve a particular church based on unresolved disagreements over same-sex marriage as communicated by the pastor and Staff-Parish Relations Committee to the district superintendent, shall be reassigned may request reassignment. All clergy with security of appointment shall continue under appointment by the bishop of the annual conference.

RATIONALE: The Judicial Council ruled that appointments are made by bishops and a guarantee of reappointment cannot be added to the *Discipline*. We have heard bishops publicly represent that they will consider alignment of the views on sexuality between churches and appointed clergy. We believe matters of conscience of individuals should be protected and recommend modifying the petition from “shall be” to “may” so the communications leading to a successful relationship are in place.

- iii. Petition 13 (90013, ADCA p. 167): DELETE ~~Provided, however, that any clergy session of an annual conference that votes on such matters shall not, without the consent of the presiding bishop, take up any subsequent motion on that issue during any called or special session of annual conference held within 30 full calendar months from the date of such vote regardless of the outcome.~~

RATIONALE: The Judicial Council found that limiting potential actions to once every 30 months is not constitutional. The simple solution is to delete the sentence.

Other Possible Changes:

We support only three amendments by either deletion or simple replacement to the One Church Plan to correct deficiencies identified by the Judicial Council.

We recommend that the General Conference defer actions on other amendments to the One Church Plan and encourage delegates to maintain the integrity of the carefully crafted petitions as presented by the Commission on a Way Forward and recommended by the majority of the Council of Bishops.

The One Church Plan makes room for diverse opinions and honors the unique requirements for faithful mission in different settings. It does not demand uniformity but sets the table for our collective mission to love God and our neighbors. Any amendments should be measured by whether the proposed changes assure freedom on matters of conscience for *all*.

If any amendments are considered, they should be evaluated in light of their contribution to: 1) the pursuit of unity in mission; 2) the degree to which they assure protections to all in matters of conscience; and 3) how well they balance the needs of varied contexts for ministry.

Exit Provisions:

The General Conference resolution creating the Commission on a Way Forward articulated a clear desire for the Church to find a path toward unity. There are existing and ample provisions in the *Book of Discipline* that allow for local church exits. Newly proposed exit provisions that encourage annual conference and church departures would create schism and do not align with the expressed intent of the 2016 General Conference to create a plan for unity.

We urge General Conference to complete the One Church Plan petitions first. If there is a desire to enhance or clarify exit provisions, we recommend asking the Council of Bishops to thoroughly investigate options and bring recommendations for consideration to the 2020 General Conference.