A Way Forward

Recommendations to the 2019 General Conference
Background

- General Conference 1972: differences in scriptural interpretation around human sexuality first surfaced.
- Debates and conflicts at each subsequent General Conference (GC).
Background

- Portland GC 2016: widespread rumors of potential church split.
- GC voted 428-405 authorization for Council of Bishops (COB) to establish commission to advise them on possible ways forward fostering unity.
Goal: design a way for being Church that:

- Maximizes UMC witness in as many places in the world as possible.
- Allows for contextualization differentiation as much as possible.
32-Member Commission on a Way Forward met over 15 months to prepare options and recommendations to Council of Bishops.

Commission membership is broad spectrum of stakeholders across denomination; chaired by 3 bishops.
COB used Commission on a Way Forward report to discern recommendations to Special 2019 General Conference.

COB desire: strategically help GC do its work, and honor GC 2016 request of bishops to help the Church find a way forward.
Commission on a Way Forward Provided 3 Models for the COB’s Consideration:

1. Traditionalist Plan
2. One Church Plan
3. Connectional Conference Plan
Discernment Process

Council of Bishops April 29 – May 4; 2018 Chicago meeting engaged in prayerful discernment process.

Outcome: COB submitting complete proposal to 2019 GC Special Session.
• All 3 plans considered by Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops.
• COB recommends One Church Plan.
• Historical narrative of COB’s discernment process regarding all 3 plans.
Invite Church to go deeper into journey that the Council of Bishops and Commission on a Way Forward have been on, by making all considered information available to General Conference delegates, while acknowledging support for each of the 3 plans within the COB.

Rationale:
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- Values of global Church reflected in all 3 plans.
- Majority of the COB recommends One Church Plan as best way forward, but the COB will not be releasing vote tally.
One Church Plan

- Allows contextualization about human sexuality.
- Allows Central Conferences in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines to retain disciplinary authority to adopt Book of Discipline, and continue to include traditional language and values.
One Church Plan

- Fulfills vision of a global and multicultural Church.
- One Church Plan encourages generous unity, as UMs given ability to address different missional contexts in ways reflecting theological convictions.
One Church Plan

- Removes restrictive language against practice of homosexuality in Book of Discipline.
Adds assurances to pastors and Conferences who, due to theological convictions, cannot perform same-sex weddings, or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Central Conferences could maintain restrictions.
Two Alternatives Considered, but not Recommended by COB.

1. Traditionalist Plan: affirms current Book of Discipline language, seeks to strengthen enforcement.
Alternatives considered, but not recommended by COB.

2. Connectional Conference Plan: allows Conferences to choose affiliation among 3 connectional Conferences – traditionalist, progressive, or blended variety. (continued)
Connectional Conferences aligned based on theology or perspective on LGBTQ issues. Implementation would require multiple amendments to UMC constitution.

Judicial Council to also rule on whether petitions other than the COB report may be submitted to the 2019 Special GC. If allowed, July 8, 2018 is deadline to submit petitions.
➢ Full details of plans and legislative proposals will be released when final editing and translation in all official General Conference languages is complete.

➢ Projected publication: no later than July 8, 2018.
Special Called General Conference:
February 23 – 26, 2019  Saint Louis, Missouri
Wisconsin Delegation

Clergy
Dan Dick
Sam Royappa
Steve Zekoff, Chair
Amanda Stein, First Reserve

Lay
Lisa King
Barbara Dick
Gail Burgess
Katie Crise, First Reserve