

Letter to the Congregation: Protocol for Separation

For the last 49 years the United Methodist Church has been debating, often quite heatedly, the status of people in the LGBTQ community as regards to holy marriage and eligibility for ordained ministry. The disagreement is centered primarily upon various biblical interpretations of some specific passages in the Old Testament and the New Testaments. In recent years the debate over this issue has become increasingly heated. It has come to the point where the controversy is preventing the denomination, or at least distracting us, from what's really important – making disciples for the transformation of the world.

There was a special General conference early last year which, it was hoped, would settle the matter. It only made things worse and served to further divide the various disparate groups and caucuses in the denomination. As a result quite a few people were hurt and the unity of the denomination was damaged.

Since that time a number of different caucuses have continued to coalesce around the several differing positions concerning the status of the LGBTQ community. Adding to this confusion was the problem of voting irregularities which occurred when these issues were acted upon at the 2019 General Conference Session. It became evident that the unity of the United Methodist Church was disintegrating.

Behind the scenes, last Fall, representatives of all of these groups started meeting. They conducted their business under the direction of a professional mediator and in the course of that work were able to iron out an agreement or protocol for separation. It is expected that this protocol will be presented at the upcoming 2020 General Conference this May for approval and further action.

We need to keep in mind that the group that ironed out this agreement was not officially tasked or sanctioned by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church to do this work. They do, however, include the major players in the various caucuses representing the differing positions on this issue. The protocol that they are presenting, though not perfect, is something everyone seems to be willing to sign on to. Though there is no guarantee of this there is a good possibility that this protocol for separation will be approved by the 2020 General Conference of the Church.

Essentially two major bodies will be created. The United Methodist Church and another body consisting of the Traditionalist movement. Annual Conferences will have to vote on which body or denomination they will align themselves with. Individual Churches may also decide which denominations they wish to align with. If an Annual Conference or individual Congregation does nothing, they will remain United Methodist.

If this protocol is accepted and approved by the General Conference another meeting of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church will be authorized to make the necessary adjustments to the discipline removing the prohibitions against ordination and marriage of LGBTQ individuals and to make the necessary adjustments to jurisdictional and conference boundaries. A General Conference of the newly created denomination will also meet to organize.

The trust clause which states that real and financial property of Annual Conferences and Local Churches belongs to the United Methodist Church will be temporarily eased to allow this to happen.

All realignments will need to take place before December 31st 2024.

There are a lot of other details in the protocol. Here is a link to an article on our Annual Conference website which outlines in a little more detail what I've written above.

<https://www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/mediation-team-offers-new-proposal-to-separate-umc/>

This is a link to the actual protocol agreement.

<https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/websites/www/pdfs/sig ned+umc+mediation+protocoal+statement+-2020.pdf>

This is a link to a fact sheet that will help explain the protocol agreement.

<https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/frequently-asked-questions-about-the-united-methodist-mediation-team-13133711>

I know that this may be a shock to some of you reading this. Some of us have been expecting something like this for a while now. Separations and unions like this have been occurring in the church ever since the church began. The church will survive! Most importantly our mission will continue regardless of what occurs – we will continue to be about the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

To help our congregation deal with what may occur at the 2020 General Conference I will be offering once again a class which may help provide a framework of understanding toward a biblical theology of human sexuality.

I am also considering other ways in which we may come together in small groups to discuss the separation and its impact upon us as individuals and as a congregation.

Please be in prayer with me for our church, for our denomination, and for the delegates who will be going to the 2020 General Conference. Pray for God's guidance, blessing, and peace upon all that will transpire.

Blessings and Peace - Pastor Mike