

Q & A

Questions surrounding the recent decisions of the General Conference and the Ruling of the Judicial Council

SURVEY RESULTS

We had 348 Hyde Park parishioners take the survey, representing almost 50 percent of our worshipping congregation. Due to the high response level, the following results are a reliable measure of our current thoughts and feelings.

Age demographics were as follows:

- Under 25 - 5%
- 25-45 - 13%
- 46-65 - 30%
- Over 65 - 53%

Three questions related to inclusion were asked. *(Percentages are rounded up or down.)*

1. Would you be accepting of a clergy person who openly identifies as LGBTQ becoming a part of the clergy staff at HPCUMC?

- Yes - 85%
- No - 10%
- No Opinion - 4%

2. Should our pastors be permitted to marry same-sex couples?

- Yes - 81%
- No - 13%
- No Opinion - 6%

3. Should same-sex marriages take place on our church property?

- Yes - 80%
- No - 12%
- No Opinion - 7%

The results for persons under 46 years of age and over 46 years of age were as follows:

Under 46 (N=60)

1. Would you be accepting of a clergy person who openly identifies as LGBTQ becoming a part of the clergy staff at HPCUMC?

- Yes - 95%
- No - 5%
- No Opinion - 2%

2. Should our pastors be permitted to marry same-sex couples?

- Yes - 92%
- No - 8%
- No Opinion - 2%

3. Should same-sex marriages take place on our church property?

- Yes - 90%
- No - 8%
- No Opinion - 3%

Over 46 (N=288)

1. Would you be accepting of a clergy person who openly identifies as LGBTQ becoming a part of the clergy staff at HPCUMC?

- Yes - 84%
- No - 10%
- No Opinion - 5%

2. Should our pastors be permitted to marry same-sex couples?

- Yes - 80%
- No - 13%
- No Opinion - 7%

3. Should same-sex marriages take place on our church property?

- Yes - 78%
- No - 13%
- No Opinion - 8%

FOUR OPTIONS

Q. WHAT OPTIONS ARE WE EXPLORING TO ENSURE HPCUMC REMAINS A VIBRANT, WELCOMING AND GROWING CHURCH IN THE FUTURE?

While other options may present themselves in the days ahead, these three possibilities seem to be the leading choices amongst like-minded churches right now.

1) Stay and resist; 2) Disaffiliate alone; (become independent) 3) Disaffiliate with others and hope to form a new conference/fresh expression of Methodism
4) Disaffiliate

We continue to be in meaningful conversations with our conference, like-minded churches across the country, and the greater United Methodist Church leadership structure.

1. Stay and resist

Strengths: connection to broader church, saves cost of exit, pastoral certification, retains voice in United Methodist Church and guaranteed appointments

Weaknesses: institution does not represent our values, clergy forced to risk livelihood, opposes our survey results potential to do more harm, association with the negative connotations of the UMC/tarnished brand, so far has been ineffective

Opportunities: we try to change the Book of Discipline, Wesleyan Covenant Association chooses to leave, build alliances with like-minded churches, reclaim the brand

Threats: cost of the fight, forces us to become 'one issue', polity shifts, demographic changes, core commitments are threatened, mission and vision would be threatened, WCA unlikely to leave

2. Disaffiliate alone

Strengths: no obligations to a larger institution, flexibility, completely inclusive values, not subject to future apportionments, staff are protected, write own statements of belief, leaving a dying institution

Weaknesses: no support from others, separation from UMC, loss of connectivity, missional and seminary, cost of disaffiliation, including staff benefits etc., loss of membership

Opportunities: quick, clearly defined, hire own clergy, self-supportive, less bureaucracy, gain new membership, develop own marketing materials

Threats: lack of job protection, cost of disaffiliation, strained relationship with other churches, need for increased staff

3. Disaffiliate with others and hope to form a new conference/fresh expression of Methodism

Strengths: fully live our values, clergy protected, have more influence in decision making processes

Weaknesses: waiting hurts us, lose some inclusivity, lose missional connection, options are not clear at this time

Opportunities: stream lined bureaucracy, freedom to grow again, create new accountability, finances are ours to manage, frees us to mission, freedom from AC inaction, can write a new book of discipline.

Threats: lost missional connection, clergy long term and interim, pension costs

WHAT HAPPENED?

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CHURCH'S DELIBERATIONS REGARDING HUMAN SEXUALITY?

In February, the United Methodist General Conference (the official body responsible for church governance) adopted what was called the "Traditional Plan."

That plan affirmed official exclusionary language and policies concerning LGBTQ people in the United Methodist Church, and imposed severe penalties on Pastors who violated those policies (for example, by officiating same-sex weddings).

The General Conference also enacted provisions to allow dissenting congregations or other United Methodist organizations to exit the denomination, as well as a petition that protects clergy pensions. After the vote, the legislation was appealed to the Judicial Council, a nine-member body tasked with deciding whether proposed church legislation comports with the church's constitution and existing rules.

WHAT IS THE TRADITIONAL PLAN?

The Traditional Plan, which passed by a narrow majority at the most recent General Conference, affirms the church's current bans on ordaining LGBTQ clergy and officiating at or hosting same-sex marriage.

WHAT PARTS OF THE TRADITIONAL PLAN WERE VOTED AS CONSTITUTIONAL ON APRIL 26, 2019?

The Judicial Council (which functions as The United Methodist Church Supreme Court) ruled in Decision 1378, the following provisions of the Traditional Plan are constitutional:

- Expanding the definition of self-avowed, practicing homosexual to include persons living in same-sex marriage,

domestic partnership or civil union, or who publicly state they are practicing homosexuals. (Petition 90032)

- A pastor who has been found after trial to have conducted a same-sex marriage now must receive, as a minimum penalty, a one-year suspension without pay for a first offense, and termination of their clergy status for a second offense. (Petition 90042).
- Boards of Ordained Ministry must make a full examination of candidates for licensing, commissioning or ordination, and shall not recommend anyone who does not meet the qualifications for ministry. The Bishop must rule the recommendation of any such person out of order. (Petition 90043)
- Bishops cannot consecrate a "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" as a bishop, or commission or ordain a self-avowed, practicing homosexual. (Petition 90036)
- Where a complaint is filed against a pastor for violating the Discipline, the person filing the complaint is to be a participant in any efforts to reach a just resolution of the complaint and every effort is to be made to have the person filing the complaint agree to any resolution before it takes effect. (Petition 90046) A bishop cannot dismiss a complaint unless it has no basis in church law or in fact. (Petition 90044, ADCA at 191). If a just resolution is reached, it must state all identified harms and how each harm will be addressed. (Petition 90046)
- The church may now appeal the outcome of a trial based on egregious errors of church law or administration. (Petition 90047)

WHAT HAPPENED? *(continued)*

IF THE TRADITIONAL PLAN PASSED, DOESN'T THAT MEAN THINGS STAY THE SAME?

No. The plan makes significant changes to the United Methodist Book of Discipline, including imposing severe penalties on both pastors and congregations for any deviation. This could lead to additional mandatory penalties and church trials.

HOW IS THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH GOVERNANCE STRUCTURED? WHO VOTES AND WHO IS IN CHARGE?

General Conference

The global meeting of The United Methodist Church. This gathering occurs every four years and includes a maximum of 1000 voting delegates (half clergy, half laity) elected from each Annual Conference to vote on matters of church law on behalf of the denomination.

Jurisdictional Conference

This regional collection of Annual Conferences meets following General Conference for the purpose of electing Bishops for their geographical region. The North Western Jurisdiction includes the West Ohio Conference, which is HPC's Annual Conference.

Annual Conference

Geographical areas are separated into Annual Conferences based on density of UMC congregations in any particular area. Each Annual Conference is led by a Bishop, elected out of the Jurisdiction. The West Ohio Annual Conference includes two thirds of the state of Ohio. Bishop Gregory Palmer is the episcopal leader of the West Ohio Conference.

Districts

Each Annual Conference is sub-divided into districts, each led by a District Superintendent. HPC is part of the Ohio River Valley District.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

ARE WE PLANNING TO LEAVE THE UNITED METHODIST DENOMINATION?

HPC has not made any decision to disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church at this point in time. In April, the HPC Servant Leadership Board established the Task Force on a Way Forward to help lead our planning. This group has gathered information and sent 2 recommendations to the SLB in October.

The Task Force's work included research of General Conference actions and Judicial council decisions; multiple listening sessions; an all Church survey and continued evaluation of denominational options. The SLB will ensure that our assets are protected and continue to be used in ministry. Pastoral Leadership is in close dialogue with the West Ohio Conference, North Central Jurisdiction, and leadership throughout the country on the challenges in front of us.

We are in a prayer-filled discernment process, in the future, should the Task Force conclude that a gracious exit is best for the future of HPC, both SLB and the congregation will have their voices heard, in a vote, prior to any decision.

WILL WE CONTINUE TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?

We will pay 100% of our apportionments, however, holding back in escrow, our General Conference apportionments as leverage to move the denomination to become fully inclusive.

HAVE WE BECOME A "ONE ISSUE CHURCH"?

HPC has never been and will never be a "one issue church." LGBTQ exclusion was pressed upon us by the vote at General Conference in February and we have no choice but to respond. We believe that exclusion of any people because of their sexuality, race, gender, or for any other reason is discriminatory, against Wesleyan teachings, and incompatible with HPC's values. As the Task Force considers our options, we remain focused on the core value of our HPC family, that all persons are of sacred worth.

CAN THE UMC TAKE OUR CHURCH PROPERTY?

Loss of our church property is a very remote possibility. All United Methodist Church property is held in trust for the conference in which it's located, which in our case is the West Ohio Conference. The so-called "trust clause" exists so that in the event of a church closure, or a congregation being unable to meet its bills over the long term, the property can be used to start or support new ministries in the West Ohio Conference.

Before such a decision can be made, there is a long process of evaluation, involving several conference level committees and a West Ohio Conference vote which requires a 2/3 majority, to close the church and repurpose the property.

Under even the simplest of scenarios, that process takes several years. None of those conditions apply here at HPC: we are a thriving congregation doing strong ministry.

Finally, an important part of the work of the Task Force is to ensure that we will be able to protect our material assets and continue to use them in our ministry. The Task Force will be carefully reviewing our options and reporting back to the congregation. Any decision to exit the denomination would need to be approved by both SLB and congregational votes.

The Judicial Council has determined that an exit must meet three minimum requirements:

- Approval of the disaffiliation resolution by a two thirds majority of members of the church present and voting at the church conference.
- Establishment of the terms and conditions, including the effective date, of the agreement between the West Ohio Conference and the exiting local church by the conference board of trustees in accordance with applicable church law and civil laws.
- Ratification of the disaffiliation agreement by a simple majority of the members of the West Ohio Conference present and voting.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

CAN OUR CLERGY BE PUNISHED FOR REJECTING THE DECISION OF THE GC?

Effective January 1, 2020, they may be. Penalties are a year's suspension without pay for first offense and termination of conference membership and church credentials for a second offense. Because of the steps necessary to impose those punishments, it's unlikely. But as a matter of Christian conscience, all of our clergy are deeply committed to including everyone in the life of the church and are willing to face whatever penalties may be imposed.

CAN THE DECISIONS BE OVERTURNED AT THE NEXT GENERAL CONFERENCE IN 2020?

While the mechanism exists within the United Methodist Church to overturn the decision through debate and voting, the Global (outside the U.S.) conservative faction is growing in size and strength. It is likely that the church will become less inclusive as those in favor of full inclusion increasingly become the minority.

DOES HYDE PARK COMMUNITY HAVE A PLAN?

Yes, based on listening sessions and the congregational survey the TFWT and two recommendations from the October SLB. The recommendations, now interim policy are as follows, (List Recommendations), Now Policy and the statement of inclusion and welcome.

ARE OTHER CHURCHES LOOKING TO SEPARATE FROM THE DENOMINATION AND FORM SOMETHING NEW?

Yes. While the Traditional Plan prevailed by a slim margin, many churches in the United States and Europe are dissatisfied with the outcome. Like-minded congregations have been exploring ways to join together to create a fresh expression of Methodism.

HAS THE TASK FORCE ACTED TIMELY OR IS IT MOVING TOO QUICKLY (OR SLOWLY)?

We believe it is important to work at a steady deliberate pace given the importance and consequence of this issue and we are committed to a thorough and thoughtful process.

Post General Conference 2020 we will do our work with intentionality and fact finding, prayer centered discernment to determine best steps forward for HPC.

The Task Force is striving to be thoughtful and responsive to voices across the thought spectrum, acknowledging that we are all processing the changes within The United Methodist Church after the General Conference vote at our own pace.

I FEEL LIKE I SHOULD BE DOING SOMETHING. IS THERE ANY WAY I CAN GET INVOLVED?

Most importantly, continue to be HPC. Reach out to your neighbors and community with love. Commit anew to creating inclusive and welcoming space for everyone. Pray for the HPC Task Force on a Way Forward.

HOW CAN I STAY INFORMED?

OUTSIDE OF HPC, WHERE CAN I FIND INFORMATION ABOUT UMC STEPS FORWARD?

www.umnews.ord, www.umcnext.com