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The United Methodist Commission on a Way Forward has taken a really important step in the right direction by putting forward the One Church Model as one of its proposals for a way forward on the issue of human sexuality. But we've got some really important work to do to make the legislation it has submitted in support of this plan something that will get past the Judicial Council's constitutional review and then be adopted by General Conference 2019.

ERROR OF COMMISSION

The constitutional hurdle is pretty simple and can be fixed with a simple change. In Petition 8 of 17 it contains this provision:

"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."

The Constitution says the following: "¶54. Article X. The bishops shall appoint, after consultation with the district superintendents, ministers to the charges;"

What Petition 8 attempts to do, in effect, is legislatively to amend ¶54 to say, "The bishops shall appoint, after consultation with the district superintendents, ministers to the charges, except that a pastor who object to his or her appointment on grounds of conscience shall not be required to accept the bishop's appointment."

The General Conference may not legislatively amend the Constitution. This provision could be made constitutional by changing the "shall be" to "may be."

ERROR OF OMISSION

In the days leading up to the submission of the CWF report we were told that the One Church Model legislation would provide that each annual conference would be required to pay for its own bishop. This was clearly and unapologetically directed at the part of our problem caused by the election by the Western Jurisdictional Conference of 2016 of a gay woman married to her same sex partner to be a bishop of the whole Church whose financial support is provided from the Episcopal Fund to which churches in all parts of the UMC contribute.

The legislation before us does not include the promised provision, probably because such a provision was, correctly, determined to be unconstitutional without amending the Constitution. In fact the legislation leaves the episcopacy unchanged and untouched. As I've previously argued in this medium, without regionalizing the episcopacy, the One Church Model has very little chance of approval at GC19.

The good news is that this is not a complex addition to make, at least in terms of the language required to do it. Getting such a change adopted will require rounding up a two-thirds majority both at GC19 and later among the members of the annual conferences. But I think we have to make this effort, because without this change, the One Church Model has no chance at all.