

From Adam Hamilton's Facebook Page April 26, 2019

Adam Hamilton

19 hrs ·

Yesterday, the Judicial Council of the UMC (the church's version of the Supreme Court), ruled on the constitutionality of the various parts of the Traditional Plan passed at General Conference the end of February. As expected, portions were deemed unconstitutional while others were deemed constitutional.

As much as some may have hoped the Judicial Council would have ruled it all unconstitutional, the JC has made a reasoned argument that some parts of the Traditional Plan comply with our constitution while others do not. This is painful and disappointing, once more, for those who disagree with the Traditional Plan. But it is not unexpected.

The divisions in the denomination cannot be solved by the Judicial Council.

There are numerous conversations taking place across the church focused on finding a way forward for United Methodists who disagree with the Traditional Plan. Most United Methodists in the US believe they can remain in a church where Christians disagree on same sex marriage. They have been doing this for years. There are few UM churches where everyone agrees completely on these questions.

There are, however, some who cannot remain in a United Methodist Church where any view or interpretation of scripture regarding same-sex marriage, other than their own, is allowed. These self-styled "incompatibilists" have said they cannot remain in a church where everyone doesn't adhere to their interpretation and practice regarding same-sex marriage. The conservatives who hold these views wrote and passed the Traditional Plan. They have said that there is no room for compromise - it is their way, or those with differing views should leave.

So, where do we go from here?

It is likely that as long as one side makes no room for compromise or acknowledging the views and convictions of the other, the only path forward is division. What does this look like?

1. One side or the other convinces their churches to leave (the Judicial Council ruled that churches could, in fact, vote to leave the UMC when certain conditions are met).
2. Perhaps there is a new way of staying united that allows for different expressions of Methodism that are still somehow connected and share the name, logo and some central agencies, as Bishop Scott Jones has suggested.
3. There may be a dissolution of the UMC, and the formation of two or three new expressions of Methodism out of the one denomination.

These are the three paths forward that I most often hear in the various conversations I'm a part of.

While various groups are holding conversations about these questions, one very broad conversation will be held in Kansas City, May 20-22, for "compatibilists" - those who believe we can disagree about how we interpret scripture while agreeing that we will welcome LGBT persons without treating them like second class Christians. Ten leaders from each US annual conference will be attending this gathering, as well as many bishops, general secretaries and other leaders of the church. [18% of those invited are young adults, 18% are people of color, 12% are LGBT leaders in the church.] There are evangelicals and progressives, men and women, laity and clergy. They will be dreaming about what Methodism should look like going forward, and how we create a dynamic Methodism that welcomes all people, is focused on inviting them to faithfully follow Christ, and inspires them to pursue a passionate personal life of faith while also "doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God."

The 600 participants were selected from over 2,600 people who were nominated or nominated themselves in just a few days from when nominations were announced. The rapid and large number of

nominations indicates a high level of interest in this conversation. These persons are from over 2,000 churches indicating, once more, the high level of interest in a better way forward.

Conversations will focus on what centrists and progressives believe God wills for United Methodism going forward. The group will look at various paths forward. And ultimately seek consensus on the way forward. Attendees will then return to their annual conferences to expand the conversation within their conferences.

I believe by May 2020 we will have resolved the current division and that there will be a United Methodism for the majority of UM's in the US who feel that the Traditional Plan does not reflect their understanding of God's love, mercy or grace.

I also believe, with many others, that annual conferences are the key to how things ultimately sort themselves out. It is likely that annual conferences will vote to align as compatibilists or incompatibilists (something like One Church Plan or Traditional Plan). All like minded conferences will form connections. Churches who disagree with their annual conferences will have the ability to vote to align with a conference that shares their views. This approach shares elements in common with the CCP and Bishop Jones' suggestions.

Again, the Judicial Council decision was not unexpected. The important work for United Methodism will be in the upcoming conversations. For most local churches, little changes. Progressives will continue to do church as they have. Centrists will continue to lead and do ministry as they have. And conservatives will continue to do ministry as they have, regardless of the ruling of the Judicial Council or the passage of the Traditional Plan at GC 2019 in February. But this season does represent an exciting moment as Methodists pray and discern where God is leading our church in the future.