

FAQs - Vision for the Future

- **Will our congregation need to take a vote on this plan after January 1, 2022?**

This plan does not require a congregational vote. It does make space for congregational leadership and clergy leadership to make decisions together about hosting same gender weddings in the church space. If this is not a pressing ministry decision of your congregation, no decision needs to be made at this time. We encourage every local church to do the ministry God is calling you to do, with the neighbors and people you actually have relationship with.

- **What happens if our church leadership decides to not host same gender weddings, but our clergy wants to officiate same gender weddings?**

This plan allows for both congregational choice as well as clergy choice. If the church leadership decides hosting same gender weddings is not a faithful expression of the ministry of the congregation, then no same gender weddings will be held at the church. Clergy who desire may officiate same gender weddings at a different venue. We encourage Clergy and Congregations to partner with each other in circuits and beyond as we trust each other to do faithful ministry.

- **What happens if our church leadership decides to host same gender weddings, but our clergy is unable to officiate?**

This plan allows for both congregational choice as well as clergy choice. If the church leadership decides hosting same gender weddings is a faithful expression of the ministry of the congregation, then the appointed clergy may work with other trusted colleagues to make space for that ministry. No one will be compelled to act contrary to their conscience, conviction or understanding of scripture.

- **What will happen with appointments now – in terms of church leadership decisions and clergy decisions? How do you plan to make sure a pastor is a good missional and theological fit for our church? (Will we be able to say no to a clergy who has differing values than our own?)**

We will not be doing anything different than we are currently doing. The Iowa Appointive Cabinet has affirmed the following principles in making appointments:

- Our priority is to make appointments that will further the mission of The United Methodist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- We will look at the context, the community, and the missional priorities of the congregation and the circuit in making appointments. We will then consider the needs of the pastor and her or his family.
- Since past performance of both clergy and congregations (through collected data and direct observation) is a strong indicator of potential, we will focus our attention on matching highly effective clergy with high potential congregations.
- Salary level is a consideration in appointment-making but is not the primary consideration.
- While we will do our best to keep pastoral family needs in mind, we expect Elders, Provisional Elders, Associate Members, and Full-Time Local Pastors to itinerate unless they choose to limit their itineracy, in which case the best fit may not be possible.
- Clergy are appointed for one year at a time. We continue to affirm the value of long-term appointments. However, there are times when the missional needs of congregations and the Conference may necessitate a change that is not requested.

To put it simply, the Bishop and Cabinet strive to make good missional, contextual, theological fits in all appointments. SPRCs will be able to ask for a reconsideration if there are differing values of the pastor and the congregation, and the Bishop and the Cabinet will be open to that reconsideration.

- **What is a best practice to make this decision with our church and church leadership?**

Even within our local congregations we know everyone is not of one mind regarding same gender weddings. In many places there is a great fear that having to make this decision locally will split the local church. In an effort to avoid splitting the church into “winners” and “losers” we advise entering into a deep season of prayer and conversation before a decision is made.

We also advise entering into these conversations not as a hypothetical and theoretical scenario, but with actual ministry potential and real neighbors in mind.

We also advise discernment about when is the right time to make this decision together – if now is not the right time for your congregation, then that is ok.

We call each one of us back to our best selves as a church, where we are able to live and work together for the mission, even as we disagree. We call each one of us to remember that we have been and continue to be able to maintain relationship within our families, our workplaces, our community, and community organizations, as well as our churches, while holding differing convictions and opinions. We know how to do this. That is not to say it isn't difficult, and that it won't require prayer, struggle, hard conversations and finding places of compromise and forgiveness with one another as we practice being the church together.

- **What if the upcoming General Conference mandates clergy and churches must officiate and host same gender weddings?**

Our United Methodist Polity (Book of Discipline) does not currently mandate clergy to officiate or churches to host weddings. We do not anticipate a change in practice around this. Clergy are currently and will continue to be expected to counsel the parties involved; the decision to perform the marriage will be the right and responsibility of the appointed pastor.

- **This plan doesn't mention ordaining or appointing LGBTQI+ clergy – why not?**

The Board of Ordained Ministry is the body responsible for developing clergy candidates and assessing fitness for ministry. Through a system of mentoring, education, examination, and recommendation they bring to the Clergy Session of Annual Conference any and all motions for annual election of a local pastor, elections of associate membership, election to provisional membership and election to full conference membership of elders and deacons. The Clergy Session is the body that votes on licensing and ordination, the Appointive Cabinet is responsible for deployment and oversight.

- **Why now? Why not wait for the vote at GC2022?**

The impact of the global Pandemic has resulted in General Conference being delayed twice - in fact, the General Conference Commission will be determining during the first quarter of 2022 the feasibility of having General Conference, which is now scheduled Aug. 29-Sept. 6, 2022, in Minneapolis.

In recent history, there has been a narrative that we must fear our neighbor or those who think or believe differently than we do. In our US culture, we have a serious division that needs to be solved. In visioning a post-separation United Methodist Church, the Appointive Cabinet (that is a diverse theological, social and cultural body), asked the question - “Why not now?”

We believe now is the time to give Iowa United Methodist clergy and laity opportunity to faithfully determine their local mission and ministry. We believe compatibilists (people of differing views who believe they can live in unity and diversity) should have the opportunity to demonstrate we can be a United Methodist Church where inclusivity and practices are modeled differently though faithfully.

We also believe the core of our problem is not so much whether our clergy marry or do not marry same-sex couples; our larger problem is division and the damage that does to our character and connection. The Appointive Cabinet believes we do not need to be afraid of a fully inclusive church. The Appointive Cabinet also believes we have given too much energy to two things: that we should be afraid of each other and our future together; and, that we should not trust one another.

Our energy should be pouring into The Great Commandment and The Great Commission. We want to give Iowa United Methodists opportunity to have the lived experience of a fully inclusive church so that when it comes time for decision-making post General Conference - we are informed not by what others say, but by our own experiences and expressions of faith.

This is a continuation of the agreed way of living across the United Methodist Church as we have been waiting for General Conference where we anticipate a vote on the legislation called "Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation." The Protocol Team agreed that all administrative or judicial processes addressing restrictions in the "Book of Discipline" related to full inclusion (weddings and licensing/ordination) shall be held in abeyance through the adjournment of the first conference of the post-separation United Methodist Church. Iowa is one annual conference that has chosen to follow The Protocol agreement. In this liminal time and under this agreement, the Appointive Cabinet felt we could allow for contextual ministry around marriage to happen so that we could get a real sense of the impact, if any, on the Iowa United Methodist Church.

- **What does it say about a Cabinet that is willing to encourage its clergy to violate the BOD. How can you hold us to it in any other way if you encourage violating 2702?**

We hope it indicates we trust our clergy and laity to practice holy conferencing together as they ground their local policy and practices as ones deeply rooted in Scripture, tradition, reason and experience.

As a Cabinet, we are not so much encouraging an act, but more so giving space for localized ministry that is faithful for United Methodists across the Conference to do contextual ministry.

One of the primary goals of General Conference will be to vote on Regionalism where all United Methodist churches will be placed in regional bodies that will further enable this localized practice. One of the primary drivers for Regionalism is the need for our world-wide church to engage mission and ministry in a diverse and changing world addressing different needs and contexts.

A bit of background: In the United States of America, The United Methodist Church is divided into five areas known as jurisdictions: Northeastern, Southeastern, North Central, South Central and Western. Annual conferences located outside the United States are organized into central conferences, much like jurisdictions. There are seven central conferences: Africa, Central and Southern Europe, Congo, Germany, Northern Europe, Philippines, and West Africa. At the upcoming General Conference, delegates will be voting on legislation where the hoped for outcome is that the entire United Methodist Church move away from jurisdictions and central conferences and move into Regions.

- **We previously understood that an Annual Conference would have to vote as to how it wanted to affiliate after the schism. What has changed? Is this a temporary**

measure? Is your vision as assumption that SOMETHING will be left of the UMC and this is how it will look?

While there has been much anticipation of what will happen post General Conference 2020/2022 – we don't actually know what the process will be, as we don't yet know what the final proposals and decisions are of that General Conference.

We do know that Post General Conference 2020/22, the Global Methodist Church and the Liberating Methodist Connexion are intending to launch as new denominations.

We also anticipate Post General Conference 2020/22 that Annual Conferences may need to vote if their intent is to leave the current United Methodist Denomination. If local churches do not align with their Annual Conference, then the local church can also vote to discern their future separately from the Annual Conference.

Our vision is that the United Methodist Church will not only continue, but will be missional, relevant and transformational. Everyone who wants a home in the remaining United Methodist Church will have a home here.

- **Why the change in our disaffiliation plan?**

In conversations with clergy and laity throughout Iowa, we know for those preparing to leave the United Methodist Church, we wanted to return to the minimum requirements of disaffiliation laid out in ¶2553 that was adopted at the 2019 Special Called General Conference.

We recognize there are portions of that legislation being reviewed by the Judicial Council this fall. Our intention is to provide a non-punitive disaffiliation process as we move forward. Truly, our desire is to bless any congregation or pastor seeking to leave the United Methodist Church and bless them and their ministry as they step into their own future. Grace-centered exits must be a priority as we will remain siblings in Christ serving together yet separate in mission and ministry.