

A CRITIQUE OF UMC GENERAL CONFERENCE ACTIONS

Now that the United Methodist Church's "2020" General Conference, after five re-schedulings, finally concluded on Friday, people will need some time to understand the momentous changes made.

While this denomination is keeping the name "United Methodist" and [a proposal to replace the iconic cross-and-flame logo failed](#), this General Conference has effectively established a new denomination that is very different from the UMC that used to be. This new denomination will only continue with a portion of those who were United Methodists in 2019, and it remains to be seen whether or not it will even keep a majority of 2019 United Methodists.

This new denomination's leaders have made clear what they do and do not value in their new church...

What's hot: intersectional progressive social-justice ideology, what centuries of biblical Christian tradition have considered sexual sin (heterosexual as well as homosexual), legalizing drugs and prostitution.

What's not: the Nicene Creed, Israel, saving sex for marriage, tolerance of different political views, caring about North Koreans' human rights, offering fairness to those who never had a chance to disaffiliate, and making nice with the Global Methodist Church.

Media attention almost exclusively focused on this conference's removing longstanding policies disapproving of homosexual practice and, to a lesser extent, taking important first steps for "regionalization" plans to bring greater structural segregation between predominantly white Americans and other global regions. The former has been a focus of decades of controversy. The latter has been widely criticized as segregationist (supposedly "separate but equal"), morally incoherent (allowing different moral standards in different regions – as if God changes His mind when He goes from one continent to another), curtailing Global South power precisely once non-Americans became the majority, and rushing to impose on Africans something most of them (aside from a few over-amplified, unrepresentative figures) have already said they don't want. When the same basic idea of "regionalization" came before every annual conference in the world in 2009, it [was reportedly rejected by some 95% of African United Methodists](#).

But there were MANY other major changes made.

As we see some UMC leaders go into damage-control mode, beware of misinformation along these lines:

- **MYTH:** This moved the UMC's governing Discipline "to neutral" on LGBTQ issues, simply taking out "discriminatory" language to leave a core on which we can all agree. **FACT:** Many of the revisions to church law go far beyond neutrality to require active United Methodist affirmation of non-traditional sexual identities and practices.
- **MYTH:** Any suggestion that these changes will not force any congregation to submit to the leadership of a non-celibate gay pastor. **FACT:** Now many congregations will be officially forced to submit to the leadership of non-celibate gay bishops imposed over

them, and one adopted petition specifically requires congregations to be prepared to accept pastors of diverse sexual orientations.

- -Some may also try to downplay, minimize, or explain away how this General Conference rolled back church disapproval of pre-marital sex and even adultery. But please look below at what this conference actually adopted on these, which together show a consistent pattern of the leaders of the new UMC repeatedly refusing to agree that sex is for marriage, and making unforced choices to delete longstanding sex-is-for-marriage language from previously established church law. Research how this ethos has been repeatedly promoted in various General Conference votes and UMC advocacy group statements for many years. This is simply a logical extension of the “how dare the church object to private sexual activity between consenting adults?!” arguments used for acceptance of homosexual practice.
- **MYTH:** Enacting regionalization will mean that even the now officially authorized liberalization of sexuality standards in the USA will somehow not affect other regions. **FACT:** Remaining with the UMC means that even a conservative region must be effectively muzzled from objecting to American bishops openly having same-sex partners and leading influential councils and agencies of their shared denomination. For any non-US region wishing to even partially maintain traditional standards, regionalization imposes a major unfunded mandate of developing and printing their own Discipline. Plus, Scripture explicitly warns that sexual immorality in one part of church necessarily infects the whole (1 Corinthians 5). Other global impacts are noted below.

At the bottom, I will say more about how to look up these changes.

First, key sexuality changes:

Petition # 20730: Revised Social Principles [Paragraphs] 161 and 162

Among other sweeping changes, deletes standard that sex is for marriage, deletes “fidelity” as key part of marriage, deletes landmark statement calling homosexual practice “incompatible with Christian teaching,” and replaces definition of marriage from being “between a man and a woman” to being between “two people” (more on that below).

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/petition/730/20730-CB-%C2%B6161-G>

Note that UMC *Discipline* Paragraph 101 includes these Social Principles as among the official statements that are authoritative for every global region of the UMC, not subject to regional adaptation:

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-101-general-book-of-discipline>

Petition #20191 (Calendar Item 275): GCFA Responsibility and Petition #20182 (calendar Item 265): Amend Funding Statement

Deleted restrictions in Discipline Paragraphs 806.9 and 613.19, which forbade the use of general and annual-conference denominational funds from being given “to any gay caucus or group” or otherwise being used “to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.” For many years, these restrictions. The deletion of the restriction on denomination-wide apportionment funds was amended in committee to say that this change “takes full effect immediately upon adjournment of the postponed 2020 General Conference.” Both deletions finally adopted in a 667-54 vote.

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/calendar-items>
<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/petition/191/20191-FA-%C2%B6806.9-G>
<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/calendar-item/275>
<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/petition/182/20182-FA-%C2%B6613.19-G>
<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/calendar-item/265>

Now a required condition of remaining United Methodist is that your congregation will be forced to pay apportionment dollars that they can trust WILL be used “to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.” This is not just hypothetical. Immediately after this change, the liberal leader of the UMC General Commission on Archives and History announced that her apportionment-funded agency will establish a “Center for LGBTQ+ United Methodist Heritage,” making clear the intent was not just objective history, but also a perspective of liberal advocacy.

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/gcah-announces-new-center-for-lgbtq-united-methodist-heritage>

Note that this particular agency is funded by the denomination’s General Administration (GA) Fund, into which central conferences (non-Americans) are required to pay apportionments:

https://www.gcfa.org/files/ugd/5524b1_4845c7e34c0442ffa8656e435b56c658.pdf

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/whats-in-the-budget>

So now even conservative African and Filipino regions will be required to pay for liberal LGBTQ+ advocacy if they choose to remain United Methodist.

This is not neutrality.

Petition #20177: A Simple Plan #3

In Paragraph 304 (Qualifications for Ordination), deletes sub-paragraph 3, which had said “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.” Committee amended to say this change “shall take effect at the close of the postponed 2020 General Conference”

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/petition/177/20177-FO-%C2%B6304.3-G>

Petition #20469: A Simple Plan #3

Deletes longstanding rule that “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.” Committee amended to say this change “becomes effective May 4, 2024.”

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/petition/469/20469-OM-%C2%B6341.6-G>

Petition #20360 (Calendar Item 322): Next Generation UMC #19-Moratorium on Judicial Proceedings

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/calendar-items>

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/petition/360/20360-JA-%C2%B62701>

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/calendar-item/322>

Apart from the other changes above, declares that “all pending judicial proceedings shall be suspended” for formal complaint (disciplinary) processes that may have already begun over allegations of any minister or denominational official violating any of the now-repealed homosexuality-related restrictions, with this moratorium “go[ing] into effect effective as of the close of the 2020 General Conference.”

Petition # 20364: A Simple Plan #8

Summary: Removes adultery and pre-marital sex, as well as homosexuality-related offenses, from specific list of behaviors for which clergy can be disciplined!

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/petition/364/20364-JA-%C2%B62702.1-G>

More: This petition amends the list of “chargeable offenses” for which UMC clergy can be disciplined to remove officiating gay weddings or openly having a gay partner.

But this change went much further than that. For decades, this amended paragraph also listed a separate chargeable offense of “immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage.” The committee majority wanted to keep the word “immorality” but delete the rest of the just-quoted standard. Traditionalist delegates rallied around a minority report, which offered a compromise of deleting only the word “heterosexual” to keep as a chargeable offense “immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage.” In presenting the minority report, Rev. Bob Zilhaver of Western Pennsylvania, a district superintendent and self-described theological traditionalist, pleaded with fellow delegates to at least make clear that even after the changes on homosexuality, adultery and pre-marital sex would still not be approved behaviors for United Methodist clergy. A noted church-law expert, Zilhaver stressed how General Conference is uniquely responsible for defining what constitutes “immorality,” and pointed out how keeping this language against extra-marital sex was essential for how officials in his conference were able to bring accountability and healing to an actual recent case of a pastor who was admittedly “polyamorous,” having both a wife and a girlfriend. But this plea to at least continue drawing a clear line against adultery, polyamory, and pre-marital sex among clergy was overwhelmingly rejected, by over 71% of delegates. See the record here:

<https://twitter.com/UMNS/status/1786469521735221342>

<https://twitter.com/UMNS/status/1786469716329902159>

<https://twitter.com/UMNS/status/1786473114324361715>

The Committee Report amended this petition to say “This petition becomes effective at the close of the 2024 General Conference and applies retroactively to any pending complaints under the applicable subsections.”

So this arguably means that any clergy who, when this General Conference began, were in the process of being investigated or disciplined for pre-marital sex or adultery, could now be off the hook!

It is highly misleading to claim that this deleted language was not needed because these matters were addressed elsewhere – considering how celibacy in singleness was removed as a standard for clergy and a clear ethic of marital fidelity was rolled back within the Social Principles (see below).

Petition #20173: "Chastity" instead of "Celibacy"

The official legislative tracking and plenary floor debate were a bit confusing to follow. But basically, this petition was heavily amended from the floor to removed the expectation the clergy refrain from pre-marital sex.

<https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org/en/legislation/petition/173/20173-FO-%C2%B6304.2-G>

Texas delegate DeAndre Johnson proposed to amend by substitution, with the new words saying that as part of UMC ordination standards, clergy are called to “social responsibility, and faithful sexual intimacy expressed through fidelity, monogamy, commitment, mutual affection and

respect, careful and honest communication, mutual consent, and growth in grace and in the knowledge and love of God.”

<https://twitter.com/UMNS/status/1786460352386920896>

Since 1984, these Ordination Standards had included the requirement of “fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness.” But in a speech in favor of the Johnson amendment, delegate Brady Whitton of Louisiana (apparently wearing a button for the liberal “Mainstream UMC” caucus) declared that this longstanding phrase “is part of the legacy of harm and exclusion done to our LGBTQ+ siblings and so should be removed” by passing the Johnson amendment.

<https://twitter.com/UMNS/status/1786460813600993464>

The new language’s vague mention of “fidelity” does not bar sex by unmarried clergy, as long as they don’t cheat on their girlfriends or boyfriends. And note that even this minimal new standard of vague fidelity is applied only to clergy, while it has been removed from the Social Principles (which are moral standards promoted for the whole church as well as wider society).

Here is how official UMC sources are reporting this change:

In their qualifications for ordination, clergy are no longer asked to agree to exercise “fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness”

<https://advocatesc.org/articles/day-10-gc2020>

Cf.

<https://www.minnesotaucm.org/newsdetail/friday-wrap-up-ncj-to-wedding-ban-bishops-quadrennial-budget-18356448>

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/may-3-wrap-up-historic-conference-comes-to-a-close>