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## General Conference Special Session 2019 | St. Louis

February 26, 2019

### **Special Session of the General Conference Update: Updates from Tuesday**

The United Methodist General Conference 2019 delegates passed the Traditional Plan 438 to 384. Prior to the vote on the Traditional Plan, the One Church Plan was brought back to the floor as a minority report. A minority report is a substitution for the report of the legislative committee. However, the vote to substitute the One Church Plan for consideration over the Traditional Plan failed by a vote of 449 to 374. More details and statements from the Wisconsin Conference to follow. You can read a detailed summary of the day from [UM News](#).

### **Statement from the Wisconsin Board of Ordained Ministry**

*Eight members of the Wisconsin Board of Ordained Ministry attended the Special Session of the General Conference and issued the following statement on Monday, February 25. [Click here to view the statement](#) or read the text below:*

25 February 2019

In November of 2016 the Board of Ordained Ministry of the Wisconsin Conference affirmed the following statement of inclusion.

Published: 15 November 2016

After spending more than six hours in prayerful deliberation, the following statement was edited and adopted by the Wisconsin Board of Ordained Ministry: "The Book of Discipline charges the Board of Ordained Ministry to 'renew a culture of call in the church by giving strategic leadership.' Discrimination interferes with our ability to respond fairly to all whom God calls to ministry. The Wisconsin Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry recognizes that our members, our Annual Conference, and The United Methodist Church are not of one mind about credentialing LGBTQ individuals. The Board holds all candidates to high standards for fitness, readiness and effectiveness in ministry. We do not consider sexual orientation and gender identity to be sufficient reasons, on their own, to deny God's call to ministry and they will not be considered in the evaluation of candidates by the Board of Ordained Ministry. Board members conscientiously and prayerfully examine each candidate. While the Board makes every effort to reach consensus, if we cannot, members may vote their conscience."

Eight members of the Board are in St. Louis to witness the work of the 2019 Special Session of General Conference as they discuss the discrimination against the LGBTQIA community and the future of The United Methodist Church.

Each of us personally reaffirms our commitment to the board's statement and remains committed to affirming the ministry, gifts and graces of ALL qualified candidates for ordained ministry based on merit rather than

gender identity or sexual orientation.

All are welcome.

Rev. Cathy Weigand  
 Rev. Rebecca Henry  
 Rev. Krysta Deede  
 Rev. Meg Lybeck-Smoak  
 Rev. Steve Scott  
 Rev. Susan Haller  
 Rev. Dr. Mark Fowler  
 Rev. Dr. Amanda Stein

### **Special Session of the General Conference Update: Monday Summary.**

The third day of General Conference was difficult for a number of reasons. Those who know me know that my guiding principle is that we are stronger together than we are torn apart, and I use the term “torn” intentionally. I am less troubled by what we decided today than by the way it was decided. I felt we sacrificed mutuality and connectional collaboration for political process and drawing battle lines. Both Steve Zekoff, Tom Popp and I tried to speak to the assembly about our plans for a way forward, but we were not called upon. I cannot speak to what Steve and Tom had in mind, but I will share what I wanted to say. Here is my intended statement:

*There are many at this Conference, and indeed across the church, who are tired of the conversation about LGBTQ persons and their place in the church. We want this matter resolved once and for all, and we simply have no more patience with these issues. I understand the fatigue, but I would like to propose that we have yet to truly have conversation in any meaningful way. We have talked at one another, and we talk about one another, but truly talking to one another? Years ago I learned that there is a significant difference between conversation and discussion. The root of the word “converse” means “with words,” while the root meaning of the word “discuss” means “without hitting.” We have yet to master discussion – many of our words are wielded as weapons, and our intention is to strike out in order to hurt. We have never really attempted honest conversation. Our Commission on a Way Forward experienced a truly affirming, respectful and grace-filled process of getting to know each other as real people, to build relationship, and to create a common ground of mutual respect. We have not modeled such behavior in our church.*

*Some say that we are tired of struggling, that it would simply be better to go our separate ways. I believe the cost of separating far outweighs the potential benefit of staying together, even in struggle. Our life together is worth fighting for. Our witness of unity in the body of Christ is worth the struggle. When facing the cross, Jesus did not give up and go home, and neither should we when we face the pain and suffering that our disagreements and divisions cause us. God has not given up on us, and we should not give up on each other.*

*For the better part of the opening decade of this millennium, The United Methodist Church professed to be a church of “open hearts, open minds, and open doors.” We are currently considering closing the doors of our church to a significant segment of our members, friends, and those not yet reached for Christ. This is premature. We should not consider this until we have exhausted every option. We must keep our doors open that the wind of God’s Spirit might pass through. We cannot close our doors to the open hearts and minds that are God’s gifts to us. We should consider the plan that best keeps us open to God, open to each other, and open to the resurrection possibilities to give us new life moving forward.*

I have deep concerns that the decisions made today – more restrictive standards for being United Methodist, easy pathways to disaffiliate (leave) the denomination, protection of fiscal assets, less openness to differing interpretations of scripture and theological understanding – are closing doors that will not easily open again. We are on the threshold of no longer being The United Methodist Church. Some are cheering this imminent

demise; others are hopeful we can narrow our theology; and still others are seeing a simplifying correction to a too liberal polity – but without some very careful procedure, we could become something very different from what has made us United Methodist at our roots. We are The United Methodist Church when we expand our circles and make space for the broadest scope of God's people. No matter what "plan" we adopt, we must still be the denomination defined by grace. This is my hope and prayer as we enter our final day together in St. Louis.

*Submitted by Dan Dick, clergy delegate*

### **Video Interviews**

Several Wisconsin delegates were interviewed throughout the Special Session of the General Conference to share their experiences. Their interviews can be found in the [Special Session General Conference playlist](#) on the Conference YouTube channel.

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