

Thank you for the invitation to share with you today. We must keep our eyes on Jesus and the ministry of the church while we work through the situation at hand. I agree with the current wording of the Book of Discipline. I vowed to uphold it.

General Conference (GC) 1972 saw the first conversations about the practice of homosexuality that led to a statement in the Book of Discipline.

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. **The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.** We affirm that God's grace is available to all. Para. 161.G of the Nurturing Community section of the Social Principles (2016).

I believe this was an important starting point where grace and truth came together. John 1:17. Wesley has called us to spread **scriptural holiness** across the land.

GC 1984 Paragraph 304.3 The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.

Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

GC 2004 added 2702.1 **Chargeable offences:** (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, **including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies...**

Para. 341.6 Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches. (wording in BOD 2016)

October 26, 2013 retired Bishop Melvin Talbert came to the North Alabama Conference and performed a same-sex wedding for two gay men in Birmingham against the wishes of Bishop Wallace-Padgett. This was the first public same-sex marriage performed by a UM bishop. Just resolution was later broken.

GC 2016 – days before GC 2016 111 elders, candidates for ministry, etc. came out in a letter titled “A LOVE LETTER TO OUR CHURCH FROM YOUR LGBTQI RELIGIOUS LEADERS”.

In an effort to avoid a church split at GC2016, the **Commission on a Way Forward** was established to guide us forward on this issue. A special GC was recommended and took place in 2019.

Following General Conference 2016 the Western Jurisdictional Conference 2016 saw the election of Bishop Karen Oliveto an openly gay person married to a woman. On Friday July 15, 2016. <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/person-detail/2463386> “Her wife, Robin Ridenour, a nurse anesthetist, is a deaconess in The United Methodist Church.”

Judicial Council Decision 1341 declared that the **consecration of a self-avowed practicing homosexual** as a bishop was a **violation of church law**. The Western Jurisdiction would have to engage an administrative or judicial process to address the matter. A complaint was filed in the WJ. Karen Oliveto

remains in the office of Bishop in the Mountain Sky Area (Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah and a small portion of Idaho).

The Northern Illinois Conference on the evening of June 4 (2017) commissioned an openly transgender individual named M. Barclay as a provisional deacon. “Barclay is the first openly “non-binary trans person” to become a United Methodist deacon...” UM News June 5, 2017.

M. Barclay, a transgender person who identifies as neither male nor female and thus uses the pronoun “they,” **was commissioned on Sunday** (July 15, 2018) as the **first non-binary member of the clergy** in the United Methodist Church.

2019 GC saw the Traditional Plan passed by a small margin and the current language of the Book of Discipline was upheld. A disaffiliation paragraph was added to the Book of Discipline **2553** that allowed churches to leave the denomination under certain conditions.

On **November 6, 2019 the Western Jurisdiction UMC** presented a written statement signed by all its bishops that it would not uphold the teaching of the Book of Discipline with regards to human sexuality and ordination and marriage.

The **Protocol** was formed after GC2019. The Protocol is probably gone, 2022.

Hope Church UMC Illinois hosted a Drag Queen Sunday - April 11, 2021 – featuring a sermon by Isaac Simmons in drag named “ Ms. Penny Cost” a play on Pentecost. Isaac Simmons, 23, is the first openly gay man to be certified within the Illinois Great Rivers Conference and, as far as anyone can tell, the first drag queen certified candidate for ministry in the United Methodist Church Vermillion River District Committee on Ordained Ministry (DCOM). The video is still available on the church’s Facebook page. The **second Drag Queen Sunday took place June 5, 2022, Pentecost Sunday** where Isaac Simmons in full drag preached.

If the thought of Ms. Penny Cost and drag queen worship services is not, then I would encourage you to listen to the profanity laden, God’s name in vain **“The Bible is... Nothing”** slam poem which presents God as a drag queen and slams God and scripture as nothing if they do not fully support the LGBTQ lifestyle. Remember this person is a certified candidate for ministry in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

Recently, I read where someone asked how could an openly gay drag queen be a candidate for ministry and preach in a local church. The answer was that there was nothing in the Book of Discipline that says you can’t.

Bishop Laurie Haller of the Iowa Conference cast a vision titled **“Leading Now and Into the Future – Our Vision”** on 11/23/21 which allows for pastors and churches to violate the Book of Discipline’s teaching on marriage.

“To put it clearly, pastors will be able to choose which weddings they officiate, as long as it is two consenting adults who have been counseled. Likewise, church leadership, in consultation with their pastors, will be able to determine their own policy regarding weddings.”

At least 11 of 54 Annual Conferences in the US including the entire Western Jurisdiction have policies in place that will allow practicing homosexuals to be certified as ministry candidates.

In June at the Florida Annual Conference the Board of Ordained Ministry put forth two practicing homosexuals for provisional membership. Individual voting was not allowed so all 16 candidates up for a vote were denied since the two practicing homosexuals could not be given a vote as individuals.

Bishops, Boards of Ordained Ministry, churches, and pastors are acting contrary to and in violation of the General Conference and the Book of Discipline. Our Bishop has been diligent to uphold the Book of Discipline. That is not the case of many bishops and Boards of Ordained Ministry across the country.

The United Methodist Church has become ungovernable. Bishops, Boards of Ordained Ministries, pastors, and churches are not being held accountable.

Since the announcement of the postponement of the 2022 General Conference, a large group of GC delegates signed an open letter promoting upcoming GC2024 and the changes they anticipate taking place with regards to the position of the UMC on homosexuality and the implementation of something akin to the One Church Plan where churches can operate based on their context. Do what works for your context.

Since the Traditional Plan only passed by a little over 3% and conservative churches are leaving the UMC in mass along with their GC delegates, I see no reason why the Book of Discipline will not be changed in 2024 with regards to human sexuality.

United Methodist seminaries, such as Boston University School of Theology (Boston, MA), are training leaders for the Unitarian Universalist church. See: <https://www.bu.edu/sth/academics/denominational-studies/uucl/> and <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/who-we-are>.

Iliff Seminary's Student Senate (Denver, CO) has officers who profess to be pagan and wiccans. Iliff is also training leaders for the Unitarian Universalist church. See this article in Juicy Ecumenism: <https://juicyecumenism.com/2022/02/14/united-methodist-iliff-paganism/>

Claremont School of Theology (Claremont, CA) has a Master of Divinity in Islamic Chaplaincy including 15 units (5 classes) on Islam. See: <https://cst.edu/master-of-divinity-islamic-chaplaincy/>

United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy openly encourages retired UM clergy to officiate same-sex weddings and regularly features Bishop Karen Oliveto.

The current Book of Discipline is very good. The UMC in the U.S. is moving away from its guidance at a fast pace. Current petitions to GC include changes to the BOD with reference to these sexuality issues.

Like our nation, the UMC is moving quickly away from the scriptural teachings on sexuality, marriage, and gender three foundations of scripture and society since creation.

It will be very difficult to turn the tide on this movement. The President of the Council of Bishops is working to make change before General Conference 2024.

In an interview with President of the Council of Bishops Tom Bickerton, the President states that it is time to work for change in the UMC that normally only happens at GC.

A new podcast hosted by Pastor Molly Vetter of Westwood UMC of Los Angeles, CA called "So... what's going on United Methodist Church" features the newly elected president of the Council of Bishops Tom Bickerton. Pastor Molly and Bishop Bickerton talk about where the UMC is as we wait for the next

General Conference. Both express a strong desire for full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the life of the church. Bishop Bickerton states **“we have been given this gift of delay. We have been given two years to really hone our narrative, to embolden people around what mission and ministry in the church should look like. We have been given in some sense some, maybe its self-appointed permission, but permission to move ahead. If we choose not to saying well this has to happen first, we will find ourselves increasingly irrelevant and we will find ourselves in this paralyzed position for not just for a couple years but for another decade. I am choosing as a leader to say let’s reset ourselves right now. Let’s answer the questions before they are ever asked. Let’s get nimble. Let’s get fresh. Let’s get excited again about what it is to be the church and not wait for the circumstances to get right to do so...”** (begins at 9:20).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEjZXiCfWbg&t=18s>

Umarc.org – United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy – openly encourages retired pastors to perform same-sex weddings and often features Bishop Karen Oliveto.

The issues of ordination of practicing homosexuals and same-sex marriage are the presenting issues to many. The deeper issue is a difference in theology. Let me share with you a few sentences written by a progressive in 1995 and a few sentences from a progressive in 2015.

What is the hurry to leave?

Paragraph 2553 has a sunset clause – the provision ends December 31, 2023. The avenue out will end December 31, 2023, and may not be reinstated at GC2024.

We **MAY** get a new Bishop January 1, 2023, who is not as disaffiliation friendly as Bishop Wallace-Padgett. Other Bishops are adding their own list of requirements to leave that is making disaffiliation very hard and costly. One Bishop is not allowing any churches to leave the conference.

Some people want to wait and see what happens at GC2024 with regards to the Protocol and the Book of Discipline. Some of the original signers of the Protocol have died. This year several of the progressives who were signers of the Protocol issued a written statement that they no longer supported the Protocol. The Protocol may not make it to the floor of GC2024.

Paragraph 2553 gives the church the opportunity to discern where you are and determine if you are in alignment with the emerging vision of the UMC. If you are in alignment, stay with the UMC. If your vision is not in alignment, you need to prayerfully consider what God’s vision for your future is.

This is why clergy and churches alike are discerning whether, or not, they can continue with the UMC and its emerging vision for the future.

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