



P.O. Box 172
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January 11, 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We at the Baltimore Washington Chapter of the Wesleyan Covenant Association (BWC-WCA) want to thank you for your dedication and hard work in this awesome task before you at the GC2019. Regardless of position or opinion, please know that we are in prayer for your health, peace, and wisdom, as you go forward in this process. We believe our God has a plan, which he will open up to you, as you seek and trust in Him.

We write to share our opinions and positions on these matters. Thank you for taking the time to consider this information. Parts of what we share may be a new perspective for some of you.

First, it is sometimes said of us that we are hateful, unloving, and uncaring for those most affected by the applicable UMC policies, the LGBTQIA+ community. It hurts, considerably, to hear such ad hominem attacks, when we hold forth a different view of God's best for that community. We believe Jesus wants the church to share the overwhelming love and power of his resurrection to lead us into victory over any and all temptations and sins. It is not disdain, but love that motivates us.

After 40+ years of debate and holy conferencing, our important theological discussions have reached a point of diminishing returns. We have two, diametrically opposed views on the relationship of the church to the LGBTQIA+ community, and the interpretation of scripture in this matter. These are entrenched, deeply held opinions, which are no closer together today, than 40 years ago. All of the UMC has sought God's guidance on how we are to move forward. After such a Biblical time frame, we believe that our God has, by voice or silence, shown us the true status of our church. We are irreconcilably separated by a core belief that is fundamental to both sides and not open to compromise. You, our delegates, are now called to determine how best to serve all of our brothers and sisters, in light of this reality. We do constantly pray for you in this endeavor.

We appreciate the long, hard work of the Commission on a Way Forward. Aside from the plans offered, the process itself has well illuminated all concerns and issues involved. We know the OCP is an attempt to hold us together in one church. However, it is predicated on a belief that people with such disparate theology can remain together and flourish in vision and ministry, which is naïve at best. Not only Traditionalists, but many Progressives have voiced

their displeasure with the OCP, as it will require them to remain in connection with those who actively deny their deeply held theology. Regardless of local church disposition, many will simply vote with their feet, as has been happening.

It's here that we need to make a *very important* point. Through writings and discussions, it appears that many progressive believers are harboring a grave miscalculation of how dearly the traditionalists hold their beliefs in this matter. Every traditional elder and leader has heard, over and over for many years, "OK, I will stay for the sake and love of our local body. BUT ... if they ever change the discipline, I'm out of here." If the OCP passes, we have every reason to believe there will be a wholesale evaporation of people from our pews.

Some have mistakenly characterized information as a threat. We have no stake in making threats. In order for you to make good decisions, you need good information with which to reason and decide. It is in this light that we do not want our delegates to be ignorant of the reality in our pews.

In order to support the OCP, one must disregard human nature and the organics of an organization. Is it reasonable to believe that a Bishop will support, with equal enthusiasm, both that for which she has a passion and that which she has not? Even with the best of intentions, there is not an endless supply of Elders. How much more complicated, or impossible, will this make the work of the Bishop's Cabinet? Will not unintentional dynamics, throughout the Annual Conference, eventually marginalize the minority position and see its support disappear through attrition? Remember, as you weigh these plans, there are both traditional and progressive conferences within the UMC.

Along these lines, one has to recognize an inherent incompatibility of the basic approaches to theology/scripture of the Traditionalist versus the Progressive. Even if a Traditionalist were to accept accommodation within the OCP, he would have to wonder about any new interpretations that would pop up in the future. And, already such new "enlightenment" is blowing in from the West, and other corners of our church, even to the challenging of Jesus' nature and resurrection. If the church is forced into some temporal unity in the current matter, how long before new divergences bring about more anxiety, complaints, church trials, and continued distractions from our vision and mission in Christ.

We are deeply disappointed that the best to be offered by the majority of Bishops turns out to be little more than a warmed-over attempt to change the Discipline, with a condescending pat on the Traditionalist's head. It will not achieve its intended results. Indeed, it simply, and irresponsibly pushes the debate and dissension down to the local church level. Also, it is perplexing that they have chosen a plan that delegates have rejected, throughout the years, and even by a majority of those who serve with you. Obviously, we urge you to reject this plan.

As the Connectional Plan has not received much attention, for various reasons, we will not address it, here.

In our opinion, the Traditional Plan* recognizes that it is quite impractical and unfair to try to govern with a two-headed monster. To that end, it drives a stake in the ground to say that the

* We understand that the Judicial Council ruled against parts of the Traditional Plan. Those details will be rewritten to come in line with judicial scrutiny. Also, The JC has been asked to reconsider an obviously errant ruling concerning the Trust Clause. We believe they will reverse that ruling.

UMC is defined by its current language in the Discipline, which does not preclude love for and ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community. It recognizes that the present state of anarchy existing within the UMC will eventually destroy it, or any organization, if not addressed. Therefore, it provides for a somewhat distasteful, but wholly necessary firming of accountability. Also, and importantly, it recognizes, with a very real and practical approach, that “we are not all of one mind in the matter”. Thus, it provides an opportunity for those local churches, who cannot in good conscience abide by these terms, to withdraw from the UMC, with their property and assets, to pursue a relationship with other like-minded churches.

In the matter of a “gracious exit”, we believe this is the right thing to do, and an absolute must for the tone of deliberations at GC2019. No matter what plan is adopted, if it is contrary to the conscience of a local church, they should be free to leave with their property, being only responsible for their pro rata share of any outstanding pension liability of their annual conference. As Jesus does not force anyone to accept his gospel, neither should a local church be forced to remain connected against their will.

We strongly urge you to support a stand-alone petition to establish a gracious exit, BEFORE any plan is considered. We support the non-partisan letter, out of the West Ohio Conference, wherein Traditionalist, Moderates, and Progressives urge the passing of a gracious exit as the first order of business. As Keith Boyette, President of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, has said, “We should be a church of the willing, not the constrained”.

We encourage you to give strong consideration to the Traditional Plan. Neither side wants to continue fighting. We believe that approach, as presented or improved, provides the best hope for all, to soon find the peace and opportunity to worship and share as they feel God leading them.

Brothers and sisters, we believe that all of you, as do we, want to see a plan of action coming out of GC2019 that serves the best interest and conscience of all United Methodists. We know you will be called-on to make some hard decisions. Take comfort in the fact that our loving and omniscient God will be present to guide you.

We are encouraging you to support a stand-alone petition for gracious exit, followed by support for the Traditional Plan. However, we know that once a motion is properly placed before the body, it belongs to the body, and no one can be sure, save our all-knowing God, what the outcome will be. If you keep in mind the reality of the state of the church, as presented above, we trust you will produce a plan of action that provides for the free association of believers and churches with other like-minded people, and does not force us together in a false and unproductive unity.

Go forth with God and our prayers,

*The Board of Directors of the Baltimore-Washington
Chapter of the Wesleyan Covenant Association*