

Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer."
(Amos 7:8)

MFSA NCC—The Plumb Line

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The Simple Plan

ONE CHURCH PLAN

A. Codifies identity-based discrimination

Sanctions path for conferences, bishops, congregations, and pastors to choose discrimination against LGBTQIA+ clergy and laity (Petitions 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)

B. Forced migration/exile

Forces LGBTQIA+ clergy candidates from biased and segregating conferences to move to another conference or denomination in order to serve (Petition 4, ¶304.3)

C. Continues fiscal oppression

Prohibition on UM entities from using funds to educate and advocate the "acceptance of homosexuality" (¶613.19)

D. Expands discrimination

Places new restrictions on commissioning Deaconesses, Home Missioners, and Missionaries (Petition 10, ¶415.6)

E. Continues harmful language

Removes "self-avowed, practicing, homosexual" from ¶¶ 304.3 and 2702.1 but reintroduces it in new paragraphs of Petitions 10, 13 affirming discrimination with new language formalizing anti-LGBTQIA+ bias (Petitions 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12)

F. Validates exit path/schism

Alters provisions for congregations to leave the UMC (Petition 16)

SIMPLE PLAN

A. Does not condone discrimination

Removes ALL discriminatory and punitive language from the BOD

B. Most consistent with Wesleyan theology

"Do no harm."
The Simple Plan is the only plan that does not add harmful language and policies

C. Easiest way forward

No ecclesiastical restructuring required

D. No requirement of acceptance or inclusion

Nothing added to the BoD that would require any church, clergy, clergy session, conference, or Bishop, to do what they do not feel called to do

E. Does not eliminate discrimination

Removal of discriminatory and punitive language will not prohibit continuation of biased actions against LGBTQIA+ clergy and laity

F. Holds the line on unity

Maintains current process for congregations that seek to leave the UMC

1. Removes incompatibility clause
2. Allows willing pastors and congregations to perform and recognize same-gender weddings
3. Does not require pastors and congregations to perform or recognize same-gender weddings
4. Allows willing clergy sessions, Boards of Ordained Ministry, and Bishops to ordain, commission, and license LGBTQIA+ clergy
5. Does not require Boards of Ordained Ministry or clergy sessions to ordain, commission, and license LGBTQIA+ clergy
6. Ends church trials over "self-avowed, practicing, homosexual" clergy
7. Does not require churches to have LGBTQIA+ clergy

On February 23 through 26, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church will meet in St. Louis for a specially called conference on matters of human sexuality. This is a result of the church's ongoing struggle with full inclusion of LGBTQIA persons in full life and ministry of The United Methodist Church. Since 1972, the Book of Discipline has included exclusionary language regarding LGBTQIA persons. First adopted was the incompatibility clause in the Social Principles; this finds homosexual behavior incompatible with Christian teaching and tradition. Later, language was added to include prohibitions on "practicing" homosexuals from being ordained, clergy performing weddings of same sex couples and churches having same sex weddings, and any church funds being spent on advocacy of LGBTQIA inclusion.

Over the years, many attempts have been to remove the discriminatory language. Most of the attempts have failed with about a 10-point difference between those in favor and those against. Most of the opposition comes from churches in the Southeast Jurisdiction, Southcentral Jurisdiction, and in Africa. Africa currently has the fastest growing churches. At the 2016 General Conference in Portland further action on this matter was stopped and the Council of Bishops called for the formation of a special commission to provide guidance and to develop a set of recommendations for a specially called conference dealing with this one issue.

The commission, called the Way Forward Commission, took nearly 15-18 months to create three recommendations: 1) The Traditional Plan, which maintain the status quo and restrictive language in the Book of Discipline; 2) The Connectional-Conference Plan, which would create

three connectional conferences based on theology or perspective, each having clearly defined values (accountability, contextualization, and justice), and the three connectional conferences would function throughout the worldwide church with the five existing U.S. jurisdictions being abolished; 3) The One Church Plan (recommended), which would allow different United Methodists in different places to make different decisions regarding ministry with or by LGBTQ persons rather than maintaining a single standard that operates everywhere throughout the worldwide church.

The One Church plan would remove restrictive language from the Book of Discipline and give conferences, churches and pastors the flexibility to “uniquely reach their missional context in relation to human sexuality without changing the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church.” United Methodists in central conferences in Africa, Asia and Europe would retain the authority to adapt the Book of Discipline and could continue to include their traditional language and values. This plan would also protect the rights of United Methodists whose theological convictions will not allow them to perform same-sex weddings or ordain LGBTQ people. However, even though the One Church Plan looks ideal, there are petitions that actually weaken the plan and codify the discrimination of LGBTQIA persons. The Simple Plan basically removes all the discriminatory language. And there are points that it agrees with One Church Plan which is favored by the majority of the bishops. It also requires the least amount of legislating. And it is the most just plan.

Christ Was Immigrant and Refugee Too

More than two weeks ago, Samuel Oliver-Bruno, who had been living in sanctuary at City Well United Methodist Church, got tricked by immigration to leave the church to go to an appointment; once there, agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) apprehended him and have now deported him. Samuel leaves behind a family, a wife with health issues and a 18 year old son and a faith community that dearly loves him. I was present at the vigil on November 27 in front the US Customs office in Cary. The crowd there was young and old, all different colors, different Christian denominations, other faiths, probably different sexual orientations, gender identities—it looked like America.

And it was a faith-based vigil. It was all about love. That is something that has been missing in our debate over immigration. The debate has been dominated by fear of the “the other” and even outright hatred of the “other.” And some of that fear and hatred has come from those who call themselves Christians.

Let us remember that Christ was an immigrant, too. Mary and Joseph had to travel while

Mary was pregnant (Luke 2:1-5) back to their home country. Later they had to cross the border into Egypt to flee Herod's wrath (Matthew 2:13-23). And further, the Israelites were reminded how they must treat the "other": "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." –Leviticus 19:33-34.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church says this in The Social Principles-Rights of Immigrants: "We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God. We affirm the right of all persons to equal opportunities for employment, access to housing, health care, education, and freedom from social discrimination. We urge the Church and society to recognize the gifts, contributions, and struggles of those who are immigrants and to advocate for justice for all. We oppose immigration policies that separate family members from each other or that include detention of families with children, and we call on local churches to be in ministry with immigrant families."

We as United Methodists need to be there for the "other", because Christ was an "other" too, the people of Israel were "others" too.

Plans for 2019

The board of MFSA NCC decided at its fall retreat to delay the Jack Crum Conference until the fall. Instead, we will focus on two things in the spring: 1) The upcoming specially called meeting of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in St Louis concerning human sexuality February 23-26 and 2) one day work day in Robeson County which has been hit by 2 hurricanes in the last 2 years and looking how climate change and poverty intersect. Most likely it will be a Saturday somewhere between middle of March and early April.