



# Commission on a Way Forward

## Council of Bishops



**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

### **Mission**

The Commission will bring together persons deeply committed to the future(s) of The United Methodist Church, with an openness to developing new relationships with each other and exploring the potential future(s) of our denomination in light of General Conference and subsequent annual, jurisdictional and central conference actions. We have a profound hope and confidence in the Triune God, and yet we acknowledge that we do this work in a climate of skepticism and distrust, from a human point of view. We are a connection, and we admit that our communion is strained; yet much transformative mission across our world is the fruit of our collaboration. The matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation that surfaces different ways of interpreting Scripture and theological tradition. The work is meant to inform deliberation across the whole church and to help the Council of Bishops in their service to the next General Conference in finding a way forward.

### **Vision**

The Commission will design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and that balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible. This unity will not be grounded in our conceptions of human sexuality, but in our affirmation of the Triune God who calls us to be a grace-filled and holy people in the Wesleyan tradition.

### **Scope**

We should be open to new ways of embodying unity that move us beyond where we are in the present impasse and cycle of action and reaction around ministry and human sexuality. Therefore, we should consider new ways of being in relationship across cultures and jurisdictions, in understandings of episcopacy, in contextual definitions of autonomy for annual conferences, and in the design and purpose of the apportionment. In reflection on the two matters of unity and human sexuality, we will fulfill our directive by considering “new forms and structures” of relationship and through the “complete examination and possible revision” of relevant paragraphs in the Book of Discipline. We will give consideration to greater freedom and flexibility to a future United Methodist Church that will redefine our present connectionality, which is showing signs of brokenness. If we ignore this work, fracturing will occur in more haphazard and even self-interested ways across the church. If we do this work only to address our preferences and self-interest, we will fail to place our complete trust in God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. If we do this work with complete surrender to God’s unlimited imagination and kingdom purposes, we will be blessed beyond our limited human imagination. God remains God; God is with us; God will never let us go. To God be the glory!

## Resources & Timeline

### Resources:

1. *Anatomy of Peace* Arbinger Institute
2. *God Unbound* Elaine Heath (Study of Galatians)
3. *Unity of the Church and Human Sexuality: Toward a Faithful Witness* (GBHEM – PDF available)
4. *Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and the United Methodist Church* (Faultlines collection – Abingdon Press)
5. *Are We Really Better Together? An Evangelical Perspective on the Division in The UMC* (Faultlines collection – Abingdon Press)
6. *Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists* (Faultlines collection – Abingdon Press)
7. *Our Purpose is Love: The Wesleyan Way to Be the Church* (Faultlines collection – Abingdon Press)
8. *The Marks of Hope: Where the Spirit is Moving in a Wounded Church* (Faultlines collection – Abingdon Press)
9. *Is It Time? Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question a Time* (Faultlines collection – Abingdon Press)
10. *Unafraid and Unashamed: Facing the Future of United Methodist* (Wil Cantrell)
11. Tom Berlin's illustration using sugar packets: <https://vimeo.com/217081225>

\*\*\* Additional resource suggestions can be found at

<https://www.wnccumc.org/healthyconversationsresources>

### Way Forward Timeline

January to May 2018 –Meetings of Commission on a Way Forward and Council of Bishops

May 2018 – Council of Bishops approves final report on the Way Forward

July 2018 – Final Report Released to the church

February 2019 – Special Session of the General Conference

### Way Forward Communication

[www.umc.org/wayforward](http://www.umc.org/wayforward)

Email: [wayforward@umcom.org](mailto:wayforward@umcom.org)

Facebook: [facebook.com/UMCforward](https://www.facebook.com/UMCforward)

Twitter: [twitter.com/UMCforward](https://twitter.com/UMCforward)

Instagram: [Instagram.com/umcforward](https://www.instagram.com/umcforward)

Praying Our Way Forward: <http://umcprays.org/>