

Healthy Conversations Toward the Way Forward

Discernment & Conversation Guide

Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church

Welcome

Our purpose for gathering is to cultivate fertile ground for conversations that need to take place in our congregations over the coming months as we prepare to receive the recommendations from the Council of Bishops based on the work of The Commission on a Way Forward. The UMC is at a crossroads in regards to homosexuality, same gender marriage, and ordination of LGBTQ clergy. We need to be educated about where we've been and where we're headed next and be open to listening for God's voice and hearing one another.

We will begin with a video by Tom Berlin, a member of The Commission on a Way Forward, which provides a good overview of the current reality in the UMC. We will then move into a time of prayer and thoughtful reflection on scriptures selected by Bishop Leeland. This period of centering will be followed by a brief presentation about the history of homosexuality and the UMC and a summary of the work of the Commission on a Way Forward. After that time, we have questions to discuss in small groups as we gather together around the table.

In all of our interactions, we are reminded to converse with each other in a spirit of love and utmost respect for our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a hospitable space which will maintain a core value of mutual respect towards those made in the image of God. We will explore questions that matter and connect different perspective in a biblical framework that is true to our United Methodist and Christian tradition, our use of reason, our own experience and the experience of the Holy Spirit.

We will listen together for Insights, seeking to get to the heart of the matter. When the going gets tough, we will turn to wonder. We will reflect on what we've learned and give thanks for the "take a-ways" we receive from God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Will refrain from vocalized reactions like groans and applauses. We are listening to each other and beaming God's affirmation toward each person, even though we might disagree heartily.

A helpful reminder might be to use "S.T.A.T.E." tools when talking about sensitive or emotionally charged topics:

Share our facts-- what we see and hear; sharing vital information we have applicable to the situation at hand

Tell our story – share your feelings; give your opinion

Ask for others' paths – invite others to share their facts and opinions

Talk tentatively - our motive is to seek a solution

Encourage testing – be open to challenge and compromise

*(Summarized from [Guidelines for Healthy Conversations](https://www.wnccumc.org/healthyconversationsresources) developed by WNC Justice and Reconciliation Team.
<https://www.wnccumc.org/healthyconversationsresources>)*

The resources you will need as you lead these conversations can be found at
<https://www.wnccumc.org/healthyconversationsresources>

Tom Berlin “Sugar Packet” Video

Call to Silent Prayer (4-5 minutes)

One: God, show us a way forward.

MANY: God, show us a way forward.

One: We love you, Holy God. We love your people, our siblings in Christ.
We love your Holy Church.

MANY: We are redeemed, set free and forgiven by Jesus the Christ.

One: We are inspired by the lively Holy Spirit.

MANY: God, show us a way forward.

Silence is maintained for 3 minutes.

One: God, show us a way forward as the Body of Christ in the world.

MANY: God, show us a way forward as the Body of Christ in the world.

Scriptures and Reflection Questions

In small groups around the tables, read these passages of scripture together and spend no more than 5 minutes discussing each question listed.

- (1) *“Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.

Question: How can we embrace differences while still being of one heart in Christ?

Responses will be received without reactions, affirmation or disagreement.

After people have shared their responses, take 30 seconds of silence.

End silence by saying, “God, show us a way forward. AMEN.”

- (2) *“I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”* Ephesians 4:1-6.

Question: Through Baptism, we all become part of God’s family. How might our inclusion as just one of many members in God’s family shape this conversation?

Responses will be received without reactions, affirmation or disagreement.

After people have shared their responses, take 30 seconds of silence.

End silence by saying, “God, show us a way forward. AMEN.”

(3) *“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”* John 17:20-23.

Question: How do we want the world to know about Jesus by the way we, as United Methodists, deal with difficult decisions?

Responses will be received without reactions, affirmation or disagreement.

After people have shared their responses, take 30 seconds of silence.

End silence by saying, “God, show us a way forward. AMEN.”

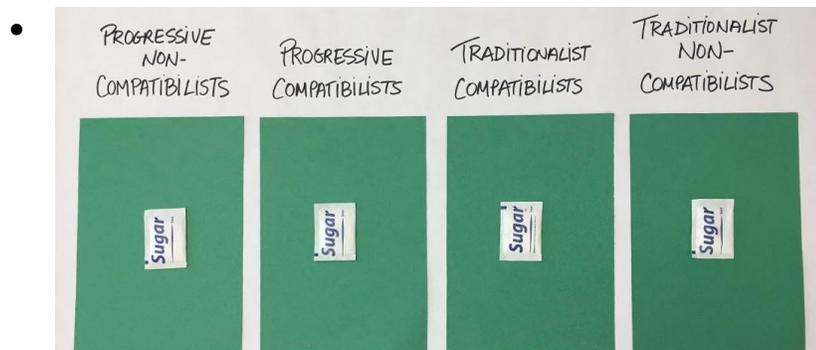
Break (10 minute)

Information Sharing (Power point presentation)

History of Homosexuality and the UMC

Commission on a Way Forward

Small Group Discussion (Please discuss the following questions in small groups around your tables.)



Where is your church’s center of gravity on this continuum?

- Is diversity within The United Methodist Church a strength or a weakness?
- Is diversity within your local church a strength or a weakness?
- Are our common commitments more important than our differences?
- In what ways does your church’s mission statement guide the decisions made within your congregation?
- What does it mean that the commission sees “mission” at the heart of the way forward for our denomination?

- What is a way forward that would reach the most non-religious and nominally religious (or the “nones” and “dones”) in our communities?
- What 3 words would express your prayer for the church in the present moment?

Closing

End the time of discernment & conversation with the Apostle’s Creed Traditional or Ecumenical Version from the United Methodist Hymnal and/or the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer in traditional or modern language. Then complete your time with passing of the peace.

Traditional Version

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Ecumenical Version

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside by thee.
Exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition (Contemporary Version)

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,
Praised for you or criticized for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.
And now, O wonderful and holy God,
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
you are mine, and I am yours.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it also be made in heaven. Amen.

Passing of the Peace