North Carolina Conference
The United Methodist Church

History Of The UMC & Human Sexuality

An official document from the NC Conference on the background and history of the church's debate on human sexuality.

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Background

Inclusion

- **¶ 4. *Article IV.*** *Inclusiveness of the Church*—The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection
- Everyone is welcome to worship and actively participate in the life of our churches. Laypersons may become members and live out their faith through their local church *without respect to sexual orientation or practice*.

Human Sexuality

- The Church affirms that all people are of sacred worth and are equally valuable in the sight of God. It is committed to be in ministry with all people. "We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons." (*Book of Discipline* ¶ 161.G)
- April 1972 – General Conference added the statement to the *Book of Discipline*: the church “does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” (*Book of Discipline* ¶ 161.G)
- 1980 – General Conference added the following to the Social Principles: "We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant, which is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman."
- The church states the General Council on Finance & Administration "shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The United Methodist Church 'not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.' (*Book of Discipline* ¶ 613)

Restrictions on Pastors

- Adopted at GC 1984: as a standard for ordained clergy, commitment to "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" and the following language on homosexuality: "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted

as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church." (*Book of Discipline* ¶ 304.4)
- Adopted at GC 1996: Ceremonies to celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by UM clergy or in UM Churches.
- Adopted in 2019: a more specific definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual," to say it includes people "living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union or is a person who publicly states she or he is a practicing homosexual." (from the approved Traditionalist Plan, upheld by the Judicial Council)
- Adopted in 2019: a minimum penalty for clergy found guilty of performing a same-sex wedding — one year's suspension without pay for the first offense and loss of credentials for the second. (from the approved Traditionalist Plan, upheld by the Judicial Council)

Church Structure and Lawmaking

Lawmaking Process

- General Conference is the denomination's top lawmaking assembly and the only body that speaks for the full church. It generally meets every four years.
    - The last General Conference was a special called meeting in 2019 specifically to address ongoing, unresolved divisions regarding homosexuality.
    - Delegates approved the "Traditionalist Plan" which affirmed the denomination's teaching on homosexuality. It closed loopholes that traditionists believed had allowed some LGBTQ people to be ordained as clergy and some bishops to avoid enforcing the rules while also hardening the denomination's approach to rulebreakers.
    - Changes included a more specific definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual," to say it includes people "living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union or is a person who publicly states she or he is a practicing homosexual."
    - The plan also added a minimum penalty for clergy found guilty of performing a same-sex wedding — one year's suspension without pay for the first offense and loss of credentials for the second.

UMC Trust Clause

- The United Methodist trust clause is a statement included in legal documents (deeds) declaring that the property and assets of a local church or United Methodist body are held "in trust" for the benefit of the entire denomination. The trust clause ensures that United Methodist property will continue to be used for the purposes of The United Methodist Church.
- Trust clauses in Methodism go back to John Wesley himself in mid-18th century England. He wanted to make certain that Methodist properties were used only and always to teach established Methodist doctrine and be available to Methodists for their ministries.

- In 1796, a form of these deeds, referred to as “The Model Deed,” was approved by the General Conference for American Methodists. This Model Deed and the mandate for a trust clause in all church property documents first appeared in the *Book of Discipline* in 1797.

Post-2019 General Conference

- In late 2019, a group of diverse traditionalists, centrists, and progressives met to share ideas on how The UMC could navigate the persistent conflict within the denomination. The group met for three two-day sessions with a mediator. The result of these meetings was the *Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation*, a proposed amicable agreement for the separation of the UMC.
- Leaders of the UM Church’s Council of Bishops signed the *Protocol* and advocated for it. And leaders of centrist, traditionalist, and progressive UM advocacy groups did likewise. The hope was to present the *Protocol* to the 2020 General Conference for approval.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 General Conference has been postponed three times and will not take place before 2024, so the *Protocol* proposed legislation has not been officially presented to nor approved by the General Conference and cannot be implemented.

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https://www.umnews.org/en/news/gc2016-tackling-44-year-stance-on-homosexuality-new-2022

1968
Union of the Methodist Church & the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form The United Methodist Church

1972
First public debate within the UMC concerning homosexuality

1984
Adopted standard for clergy commitment to "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" and self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church." (*Book of Discipline* ¶ 304.4)

1996
Added a declaration that ceremonies to celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by United Methodist clergy or in United Methodist churches. (*Book of Discipline* ¶ 341.6)

2019
Delegates to a special-called General Conference adopted a stricter definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual" and designated exact penalties for clergy found guilty of officiating a same-sex wedding. (from the approved Traditionalist Plan, upheld by the Judicial Council)

2020
General Conference postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

2022
A new conservative/traditionalist denomination – the Global Methodist Church – determined that it would not wait for a General Conference to approve the *Protocol* and launched the new denomination on May 1.

2024
Anticipated date for next General Conference. Planners have created two teams. One is focused on an in-person gathering, and the other is tasked with developing an online option in the event that the pandemic or other circumstances make it impossible to meet in person.