



*1 Corinthian 12:12*

*For just as the body is one and has many members,  
and all the members of the body, though many, are one  
body, so it is with Christ.*

Greetings my brothers and sisters,

Our UMC Judicial Council met April 23-26, 2019 to review the Traditional Plan. At the conclusion of the meeting, they have affirmed the plan as a church law. It may take effect in the US as of January 1, 2020. For Central Conferences, the legislation is said to take effect twelve months after the General Conference in May 2020.

The following is a part of Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar's letter for an easy understanding of the Judicial Council's decision.

*The legislation deemed constitutional:*

- *does NOT require the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) members to certify compliance with The Book of Discipline;*
- *does NOT require charged clergy to state they will not repeat the offense*
- *DOES uphold restrictions on bishops ordaining "self-avowed practicing homosexuals," despite the recommendation of BOM/DCOM/clergy session*
- *DOES uphold restrictions on bishops consecrating of bishops who are "self-avowed practicing homosexuals"*
- *DOES add to the definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual" in ¶ 304.3 to include "or is 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."*
- *DOES add new requirements for Just Resolutions and timelines for referral or dismissal of complaints*
- *DOES add mandatory penalties for charged clergy*
- *DOES give Church the right of appeal for egregious errors of law*

Please follow the link for Judicial Council's official decision:

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/court-oks-part-of-traditional-plan-exit-plan>

When I read the decision, I felt like a melting candle in the middle of the sea trying to survive in our denomination. I asked myself why am I feeling this way? It is because as a denomination, we have again affirmed to exclude our LGBTQIA siblings. Our denomination took a stand to continue and intensify its ban on LGBTQI ordination and same-sex marriage.

My candle wicks are still burning, but for how long? Is it enough for me or for others to know that the New England Cabinet, the Board of Ordained Ministry and our Bishop's positions does not change even before the GC2019 and after the ruling of the Judicial council? They affirm our LGBTQIA siblings as part of the UMC. They affirm our LGBTQIA clergy and their gifts in ministry.

But why do I still feel I need to survive in the UMC? In as much as I want to uphold the Book of Discipline - my heart, my conviction and my whole being will never discriminate others regardless of race, gender, color, disability, education, economic status and sexual orientation.

What happens now? As a denomination we are not 'united' at the moment. Those who support the Traditional Plan is simply saying, if you do not agree - there is an exit plan. A 'gracious exit' they call it...

- a. A local congregation may leave the denomination if two-thirds of the members present vote to do so during a church conference.
- b. The local congregation shall establish an agreement with the Annual Conference Board of Trustees, including the effective date to end its official connection with the UMC.
- c. The validity to end the connection between a local congregation with the denomination shall be ratified by a majority vote of the annual conference present.
- d. A local congregation have until December 31, 2023 to consider to leave the denomination for disagreeing to church law on homosexuality.

It is heart breaking for me to think of any local congregation to actually go under this process of 'gracious exit.' A well thought exit plan because we simply cannot reconcile on church law.

Under the Social Principles ¶ 161. G) Human Sexuality - it states that,

*We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.*

Why then do we have to continue to discriminate our LGBTQ siblings?

*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.*

It is clearly stated - we are to be welcoming, forgiving and to love one another. But it is also very clear to me that we are asked to uphold a discipline that does not embody these statements at all.

*We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.*

All persons means "ALL" and not a selected few.

But in between these statement we read,

*The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.*

*We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.*

Our Book of Discipline is asking us not to reject or condemn our LGBTQIA siblings, welcome them in the church - but also letting them know that our denomination does not allow the practices of loving someone, respecting someone and caring for someone of the same sex. Is this really being welcoming? Is this the Christian way of loving them?

Rev. Adam Hamilton, senior pastor of United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas said that On May 20 - 22, 2019, a meeting is to be held in Kansas City. Those attending: ten leaders from each US Annual Conference, bishops, general secretaries and leaders

of the church. (18% of those invited are young adults, 18% are people of color, 12% are LGBT leaders in the church.) There are evangelicals and progressives, men and women, laity and clergy. They will be dreaming about what Methodism should look like going forward, and how we create a dynamic Methodism that welcomes all people, is focused on inviting them to faithfully follow Christ, and inspires them to pursue a passionate personal life of faith while also “doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. (post from his Facebook page)

I am looking forward for the outcome of this conversations. I would like to believe that in spite of our theological differences, we can still be one body in Christ. I ask all of you, to be in prayer with me for the future of the UMC, to pray for those individuals who are at the edge of leaving the denomination, to pray for those local congregation who are discerning to stay or leave the denomination, to pray for the meeting at Kansas City, to pray for our own church to continue and be inspired to do our missions, and most importantly embody the love of God to all.

I am also asking for prayers, as I try to keep my candle wicks burning.

I am longing and praying to serve an inclusive Church.

*Pastor Nory Vedan Leachon*