

Presentation: The Future of the UMC (for Arvada United Methodist Church, October 16, 2019)
by Ben Roe

There is a lot of creativity in the denomination called United Methodist. Depending on how you count there are between 8 and 14 different plans or ideas about the future of the UMC. And that is just as of the middle of October. What's driving this burst of creativity?

As we've talked about in previous sessions, it is the desire to end the 47-year overt disagreement about the place of LGBTQ persons and their relationships in the UMC. But the larger disagreement behind it has been described as a disagreement about: the Bible and what responsible interpretation means; the history of the Christian movement, and the importance of previous decisions about critical parts of the Christian Way or belief; and the relative importance of reason and science, as well as the experience of Christian believers. You might notice these are the categories of what is called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, the four sources for theological reflection in the Methodist Movement begun by John Wesley: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience.

The majority of the plans are centered around what to do with LGBTQ persons. Several don't mention this, but develop structures which allow the warring factions of the UMC to separate into separate "rooms," "camps," or even "continents"!

The reason for the urgency is two-fold: the impasse that happened at the 2016 General Conference in Portland which led to the formation of a Commission on a Way Forward, and the subsequent special called General Conference of February 2019 in St. Louis. The outcome of the 2019 General Conference was that the most conservative side of the argument "won" a big victory, but not a complete one: it has been said, they won the war but cannot govern, since a huge number of churches, organizations, and clergy in the USA (mostly) rebelled and said, "hell no, we won't go" (the phrase from the upheaval of the 1960s in the US over the war in Viet Nam).

So I've prepared a one-page summary of highlights of 13 of the plans and ideas that have been published as being submitted to the upcoming General Conference of May, 2020, or are being talked about as alternatives to what might happen at that Conference. As a quick reminder, a General Conference is the every-four-year gathering of the worldwide UMC to decide the priorities of mission, rules, and laws that govern the denomination.

Remember, depending on the outcome of the 2020 General Conference, we will be making decisions around one or more of these plans!

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