

## **What, if any, changes to the UMC Book of Discipline may be approved in General Conference 2024, or sometime thereafter, regarding human sexuality?**

This is a common question from those considering disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church (UMC), and one that cannot be answered today, and will not be known for certain until General Conference 2024. The question is particularly important because Paragraph 2553 of the 2019 UMC Book of Discipline, which provides UMC churches the option to leave the denomination, but keep their property and resources, **will expire December 31, 2023**. While some in the UMC suggest that a similar separation protocol may be adopted in General Conference 2024, this is only a suggestion, and many believe it is unlikely. As such, UMC churches who are considering disaffiliation “*for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals...(Paragraph 2553, 2019 Book of Discipline)*” must make this decision without knowing what changes may actually occur in the future. Thus, churches must make a critical decision—which will certainly impact the future of their church and ministries—with incomplete knowledge. Nevertheless, many UMC churches are still considering disaffiliation because they may be able to do so while keeping their property and resources, and this option may not be available in the future. Because of the importance of this question, we have attempted to collect various information sources that may help members of the congregation in understanding what changes, if any, could develop in the future.

### **Background**

For many years, the United Methodist Church (UMC) has experienced a deep conflict around the issues of human sexuality, particularly as it applies to the ordination of LGBTQIA+ individuals and the marriage of same-sex individuals. This conflict became pronounced in the 2016 General Conference where, after significant debate, the traditional language in the Book of Discipline pertaining to marriage and qualifications for ordination were reaffirmed. However, leaders in the UMC recognized that the conflict was not going away and needed to be resolved. As such, the “Commission on the Way Forward” was formed shortly after General Conference 2016. This Commission comprised 32 members including bishops, clergy, and lay members, representing progressive, centrist, and traditional factions of the UMC. The Commission was charged with proposing a solution to the ongoing conflict such that the UMC could stay together. In the end, the Commission developed a report entitled, “The Way Forward Report”, which proposed three plans: (i) the One Church Plan, (ii) the Connectional Conference Plan, and (iii) the Traditional Plan. The One Church Plan proposed general loosening of standards related to human sexuality while providing latitude for jurisdictions and conferences to decide these matters for themselves. The Connectional Conference Plan focused on restructuring the UMC into conservative and progressive connectional conferences. Finally, the Traditional Plan proposed upholding current teachings but with mechanisms for increased rules enforcement. To vote on these plans a special session of the General Conference was held in 2019. In the end, the Traditional Plan was approved with a vote of 53% to 47%. However, following 2019 General Conference, many UMC Jurisdictions, including various bishops and church leaders, in the United States publicly declared that they would not enforce the Book of Discipline regarding ordination of LGBTQIA+ individuals or marriage of same-sex individuals. Thus, the problem had not been solved. Recognizing the persistent great divide on this matter, UMC leaders, including progressives, centrists, and traditionalists, met to formulate a plan for separation. The result was entitled, “A Protocol for

Grace and Reconciliation Through Separation”. This plan had widespread support and was expected to be passed in 2020 General Conference. The plan proposed an amicable means for churches to leave the UMC and provided financial resources for establishing new denomination(s). However, due to COVID 19, 2020 General Conference was postponed until 2021, then 2022, and ultimately General Conference was postponed to 2024. In the meantime, those supporting the separation plan have withdrawn support and it is no longer considered an option. After it was announced that General Conference would be postponed until 2024, several traditionalist churches have elected to leave the UMC based on Paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline, which was approved at the 2019 General Conference and contained as part of the Traditional Plan. The original intent was for the paragraph to be used for more progressive churches to disaffiliate; however, the language is now being used by traditionalist churches to depart.

**This brings us to the question:** What, if any, changes to the UMC Book of Discipline may be approved in General Conference 2024, or sometime thereafter, regarding human sexuality?

The truth is that no one knows the answer to this question for sure. Some Church leaders suggest that no changes will be made in General Conference 2024 and possibly not even in 2028. Others suggest that the most likely proposal to be passed at General Conference would be similar to the “One Church Plan”. The changes to the Book of Discipline proposed in the One Church Plan are provided at the end of this document. The general theme from those opposing disaffiliation is that the UMC has always been a “big tent” that engages people from all walks of life and supports disparate views on many topics, including human sexuality. Thus, opponents of disaffiliation urge that the “big tent” philosophy will continue and the UMC will be welcoming to progressives, centrists, and traditionalists alike.

On the other hand, proponents of disaffiliation suggest that the UMC will become increasingly progressive prior to 2024, owing to the most recently elected bishops and a reduction in traditionalists in the UMC due to disaffiliation. They also cite recent resolutions that have been passed in all five United States jurisdictional conferences, which support ordination of LGBTQIA+ individuals and the marriage of same-sex individuals. It should be noted that these resolutions simply place these matters “in abeyance” or resolve to delay pursuing disciplinary measures in cases where the Book of Discipline rules have not been followed on issues related to human sexuality until after the next General Conference. They also include aspirational statements such as supporting the election of UMC bishops who will “*further justice for and empowerment of LGBTQIA+ people*”. Nevertheless, proponents of disaffiliation look to messaging from the various jurisdictions as a suggestion that the UMC will become increasingly progressive in a variety of areas (e.g., theology, political advocacy) and more progressive language related to human sexuality will be passed in 2024 or shortly thereafter.

Thus, to help you make this judgment for yourself, the following information has been provided. Please note, the opinions and conclusions provided in the resources below are those of the authors of each source and do not necessarily represent the views of the FUMC leadership council. They have simply been provided to the congregation in the spirit of sharing information on this topic.

## **1.0 What is the UMC saying about human sexuality and what changes might occur in 2024?**

**1.1 Article 1:** The first article is from UMC communications which provides responses to various questions and is entitled, “Is the UMC Really...?”. The article indicates that it is unlikely that there will be sufficient support to make substantial changes to the Book of Discipline in General Conference 2024. See below for the link to this article.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-is-the-umc-really-part-2>

**1.2 Article 2:** The next article is from UMC News and entitled, “What is the Church’s Position on Homosexuality”. This article provides a description of the current position on human sexuality in the UMC and provides some additional context on this matter.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-churchs-position-on-homosexuality>

## **2.0 What are other people saying on this topic?**

**2.1 Video 1:** Adam Hamilton, a UMC Pastor and Leader from the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, MO, provided a series of six videos responding to Rob Renfro on the topic of disaffiliation. The link below is for Adam Hamilton’s video on the topic of human sexuality. In the video (roughly minute 11:52), Adam Hamilton states the future UMC will be a church for traditionalists, progressives, and centrists. He also states that there will be options for progressives to ordain self-avowed gay and lesbian clergy and perform same-sex weddings. Finally, he mentions that going forward “...we will remove the language from the Book of Discipline that states the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching...and we’re going to make it possible for traditionalists to be traditionalists, progressives to be progressives, and centrists to be somewhere in between...” The link for this video is included below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI0Keo9h5E8>

**2.2 Video 2:** Bishop Scott Jones, who served as UMC Bishop for 18 years and recently withdrew from the denomination and was received as an elder in the Global Methodist Church on January 9, 2023, presented a question-and-answer session for Cornerstone UMC in Houston, TX on August 8, 2022. The link for this video is provided below. During the presentation, (roughly minute 18:37) Bishop Jones states “...it’s pretty clear that the United Methodist Church is going to be moving in a more progressive direction. It’s widely expected that when General Conference meets, they will change the teaching so that marriage is between any two adults and that self-avowed practicing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer persons can be ordained and appointed as clergy.” He goes on to say that “...the United Methodist Church is going to be moving toward a more progressive stance, the only question is how far will they go and how fast will it happen.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdYtHOtv13I>

**2.3 Article 1:** The article below is written by the Pastor of Mt. Zion United Methodist Church in Atlanta, GA. The article suggests that it is unlikely that any changes will be made to the Book of Discipline in 2024. However, in 2028, changes may be made but most likely they will resemble the “One Church Plan” that was proposed at 2019 General Conference. The relevant changes to the Book of Discipline proposed by the One Church Plan are provided at the end of this document.

<https://mtzumc.org/the-future-of-the-united-methodist-church/>

**2.4 Article 2:** The next article is written by Chris Ritter where he compares (**in his opinion**) the current state of the UMC versus the GMC.

<https://peopleneedjesus.net/2023/01/19/two-methodisms-a-comparison-chart/>

**2.5 Article 3:** The next article, which was written by Lonnie Brooks and published on UMC News, provides yet another assessment of the future of the UMC after 2024. The article suggests that “*progressives are poised to make a triumphal display at the upcoming General Conference in which they will move forward with the entire agenda of the progressive moment.*” The article goes on to say “...it most likely will mean the end of any dream of a big-tent church with room for dissent on the agenda of progressives, which means for all practical purposes, turning the agenda of the Methodist Federation for Social Action (<https://www.mfsaweb.org/>) into the law of The United Methodist Church.” This article, like others, is the opinion of one person but is being provided for reference.

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/centrist-progressive-coalition-could-soon-unravel>

### **3.0 Resolutions and Public Disclosures by UMC Jurisdictions**

There are five jurisdictional conferences of the UMC in the United States. The Dakotas Conference is part of the North Central Jurisdictional Conference. Provided below are several links for various resolutions and other public disclosures by UMC Jurisdictions that may or may not provide insight into the future direction of the UMC.

**3.1 Article 1:** The following article was released by UMC News and states, “*Even amid mounting church disaffiliations, those who plan to remain United Methodist showed signs of greater unity — collaborating across jurisdictional lines in trying to set the direction of the denomination’s future. For example, all five jurisdictions approved similarly worded petitions that aspire to a future United Methodist Church “where LGBTQIA+ people will be protected, affirmed, and empowered in the life and ministry of the church.”*”

The petition referred to above is formally a “resolution” entitled “Queer Delegates’ Call to Center Justice & Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC”. The resolution “*resolves that jurisdictions affirm the spirit of the abeyance or moratorium...until changes can be made in The United Methodist Book of Discipline*”. The resolution calls for annual conferences to either not pursue, or resolve without discipline, complaints against clergy regarding their sexual orientation or officiating same-sex weddings. The resolutions also commit to a future UMC where “...*LGBTQIA+ people will be protected, affirmed, and empowered in the life and ministry of the church...including as laity, ordained clergy, in the episcopacy, and on boards and agencies.*” Finally, the resolutions support the election of episcopal leaders (i.e., bishops) who will “*further justice for and empowerment of LGBTQIA+ people*”. Regarding the latter, several proponents of disaffiliation—while recognizing these resolutions have been passed in all five UMC jurisdictional conferences in the United States—have pointed to this language as evidence that traditionalist bishops will no longer be elected in the UMC and the denomination will become increasingly progressive.

The links for these resolutions have been provided in Section 3.2-3.6 below. The link for this article is listed below.

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/jurisdictions-see-shift-in-bishops-more-cooperation>

**3.2 North Central Jurisdiction:** The North Central Jurisdictional Conference, to which our Dakotas Conference belongs, has passed the resolution listed above as well as a “covenant” entitled “Covenant to Build a BeLoved Community.” The links for these documents are provided below.

<http://www.ncjumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/QUEER-DELEGATES-Resolution.pdf>

<http://www.ncjumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NCJ-Covenant-to-Build-BeLoved-Community-2.pdf>

**3.3 Western Jurisdiction:** Provided below is the link to three resolutions passed by the Western Jurisdictional Conference during the 2022 Western Jurisdiction Conference held November 2, 2022. The resolutions include (i) WJ22-01 “Endorse Christmas Covenant Legislation” (pg 147-148), (ii) WJ22-02 “Rejection of the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation”, and (iii) WJ22-03 “Queer Delegates’ Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC”. The Christmas Covenant is one that proposes a United States Regional Conference that would allow the UMC jurisdictions in the United States to operate more independently from the broader, worldwide UMC. These three resolutions can be found on pages 147-153 in the link below.

<https://westernjurisdictionumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/PreConference-Packet-WJ22.pdf>

In addition, the link provided below is to an information page on the “NextGen & Inclusiveness Ministries” provided on the Mountain Sky Conference website. The Mountain Sky Conference includes churches in Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, and a small section of Idaho.

[https://www.mtnskyumc.org/files/websites/mountain/2022+Guide+to+Pride+\(1\).pdf](https://www.mtnskyumc.org/files/websites/mountain/2022+Guide+to+Pride+(1).pdf)

**3.4 South Central Jurisdiction:** Provided below is the link to a resolution passed by the South Central Jurisdictional Conference.

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d38c95dfaa31100010b2f1b/t/636444a5849f9b7d5b87d10b/1667515558052/SCJ\\_delegates+call.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d38c95dfaa31100010b2f1b/t/636444a5849f9b7d5b87d10b/1667515558052/SCJ_delegates+call.pdf)

**3.5 Southeastern Jurisdiction** - Provided below is the link to a news article highlighting the passage of the resolution described in Section 3.1 above.

<https://www.flumc.org/newsdetail/17115217>

**3.6 Northeastern Jurisdiction** - Provided below is the link to a news article highlighting the passage of the resolution described in Section 3.1 above (among others).

<https://www.wpaumc.org/newsdetail/northeastern-jurisdictional-conference-wrap-up-17122015>

#### 4.0 Recent Bishop Elections and Future Direction

In November 2022, thirteen new U.S. bishops were elected during the UMC episcopal election process. Some believe these elections signify a shift in the future direction of the UMC. There are many articles on this topic. Provided below are a few of these articles.

**4.1 Article 1:** The following is an article in UMC News on the recent bishop elections.

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/jurisdictions-see-shift-in-bishops-more-cooperation>

**4.2 Article 2:** The following is an article written by Thomas Lambrecht, who is VP and General Manager of Good News and proponent of the Global Methodist Church, on the topic of the recent bishop elections.

<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/a-new-direction-for-the-umc>

**4.3 Article 3:** The following is an article by the Reconciling Ministries Network regarding the recent (November 2022) bishop elections.

<https://rmnetwork.org/summary-of-jurisdictional-conference-outcomes/>

#### 5.0 What are the UMC Seminaries Saying?

**5.1 Article 1:** The article provided below is entitled “Seminary leaders stress inclusiveness after GC2019”. The article was written by Jim Patterson and published in UM News on March 28, 2019. In the article, the authors states that after the passage of the Traditional Plan at the 2019 Special General Conference, which affirmed the traditional views of marriage and qualifications for ordination, “*Most of the 13 United Methodist seminaries posted notes on their websites saying that their policies of inclusion — including LGBTQ individuals — will continue.*” The article is provided below.

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/seminary-leaders-stress-inclusiveness-after-gc2019>

**5.2 Article 2:** The article provided below is written by Matt Jameson “*a concerned United Methodist layman*” and is entitled, “The Truth about United Methodist Seminaries”. The article was published on September 14, 2022, and the author states “*As congregations face a rapidly narrowing window to decide whether or not to stick with the United Methodist Church, they should consider the truth about United Methodist seminaries.*” A link for the article is provided below.

<https://juicyecumenism.com/2022/09/14/united-methodist-seminaries/>

#### 6.0 The One Church Plan

It is possible, and some believe likely, that modifications to the Book of Discipline that will be approved at the 2024 General Conference (or possibly 2028) will reflect that proposed in the One Church Plan. The One Church Plan was one of three proposals put forward by the Council of Bishops at the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference. To summarize, the One Church Plan proposed a general loosening of standards related to human sexuality, while providing latitude for jurisdictions and conferences to decide these matters for themselves.

Please note, the One Church Plan was only a proposal and these changes have not actually been implemented. If the plan was put forward in 2024 General Conference (and we do not know if it



will be proposed at all), it would need to be approved by the General Conference by a majority vote. All text provided below has been transcribed directly from the “Way Forward Report”. Finally, if you are interested in reading all three plans that were proposed as part of the “Way Forward Report”, please see the link below.

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/way-forward-commission-report>

The specific changes proposed in the One Church Plan are included below. New text is provided in underlined text with **BLUE FONT**. Text that is removed from the Book of Discipline is crossed-out with **RED FONT**. The rationale that was included in the One Church Plan, to provide context for the changes, but would not be included in the Book of Discipline are provided in **Green Font**.

## **Disciplinary Changes for the One Church Plan**

### **Amend ¶ 105 - Our Theological Task- The Present Challenge to Theology in the Church**

We agree that we are not of one mind regarding human sexuality. As we continue to faithfully explore issues of sexuality, we will honor the theological guidelines of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience, acknowledging that God’s revelation of truth and God’s extension of grace as expressed in Jesus Christ (John 1:14) may cause persons of good conscience to interpret and decide issues of sexuality differently. We also acknowledge that the Church is called through Christ to unity even amidst complexity. We affirm those who continue to maintain that the Scriptural witness does not condone the practice of homosexuality. We believe that their conscience should be protected in the church and throughout society under basic principles of religious liberty. We also affirm those who believe the witness of Scripture calls us to reconsider the teaching of the church with respect to monogamous homosexual relationships.

*Rationale:* This addition acknowledges the common theological guidelines that are the sources of the diverse views in our global church regarding human sexuality. It recognizes the desire of the church to fulfill Christ’s call to unity while holding a convicted humility toward one another as we honor religious liberty for all.

### **Amend ¶ 161.C- Social Principles**

C) *Marriage*—We affirm the sanctity of the monogamous marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity, traditionally understood as a union of one man and one woman. ~~between a man and a woman.~~ We believe that God’s blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. Where laws in civil society define marriage as union between two adults, no United Methodist clergy shall be required to celebrate or bless a same-sex union. ~~We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.~~

*Rationale:* The traditional understanding of marriage is honored. Religious liberty is intentionally protected for those whose consciences would be impinged if they celebrated a same-sex union in societies where it is allowed.

## **Amend ¶ 161.G - Social Principles**

G) *Human Sexuality* —We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, ~~heterosexual~~ marriage between two adults. We deplore all forms of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused children. All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults. We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. ~~The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.~~ 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.

*Rationale:* Sexuality is affirmed as a good gift to all people. Sexual relations are bound by the covenant of monogamous marriage between two adults. The elimination of this language is in recognition that we are not of one mind.

**Important Note:** According to ¶31.5, ¶101, and the action of the 2016 General Conference, central conferences, through the work of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters on a *General Book of Discipline*, will have the authority, in paragraphs after ¶ 166, to continue the present language of *The 2016 Book of Discipline* or adopt such other wording in these paragraphs that best serves their missional contexts.

## **Amend ¶ 304.3 - Qualifications for Ordination**

3. While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The responsibility for determining how standards, including standards related to human sexuality, may apply to certification or ordination in a given annual conference falls to the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference. The bishop may choose to seek the non-binding advice of an annual conference session on standards relating to human sexuality for ordination to inform the Board of Ordained Ministry in its work. ~~The practice of homosexuality incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexual persons are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as minister or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.~~

*Rationale:* The Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference set standards of holy living for clergy. By expanding this responsibility to include standards of human sexuality, they can best serve their missional context. Bishops can seek the non-binding input of the annual conference session.



### **Amend ¶ 310.2.d footnote - Candidacy for Licensed and Ordained Ministry**

The General Conference, ~~in response to expressions throughout the Church regarding homosexuality and ordination,~~ reaffirms the present language of the Discipline regarding the character and commitment of persons seeking ordination and affirms its high standards.

...

~~In~~ The Social Principles, ~~the General Conference has said that we “do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” Furthermore, the Principles~~ state that “we affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two adults ~~between a man and a woman.~~”

*Rationale:* This footnote is adjusted to reflect proposed changes in ¶ 161.C and ¶ 161.G.

### **Add new sub-paragraph after ¶ 329.3 - Ministry, Authority, and Responsibilities of Deacons**

¶ 329.4 In conferences where civil law permits a pastor to perform a same-sex marriage service, no deacon in full connection shall at any time be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union or blessing of same-sex couples, or of any couples. Each deacon shall have the right to exercise his or her conscience to refuse or agree when requested to perform any marriages, unions, or blessing as a matter of his or her individual religious liberty.

*Rationale:* Deacons currently have the ability to decide whether or not to perform a marriage, union or blessing of heterosexual couples. This ability would be extended to these services for same-sex couples where legal. The right to refuse such a service due to conscience is expressly protected.

### **Add new sub-paragraph after ¶ 334.5 - Ministry, Authority, and Responsibilities of an Elder**

¶ 334.6 In conferences where civil law permits a pastor to perform same-sex marriage services, no elder shall at any time be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union or blessing of same-sex couples, or of any couples. Each elder shall have the right to exercise his or her conscience to refuse or agree when requested to perform such marriages, unions, or blessing as a matter of his or her individual religious liberty.

*Rationale:* Elders currently have the ability to decide whether or not to perform a marriage, union or blessing of heterosexual couples. This ability would be extended to these services for same-sex couples where legal. The right to refuse such a service due to conscience is expressly protected.

### **Add new sub-paragraph after ¶ 340.2 - Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors**

¶ 340.3 a. Each clergy shall have the right to exercise his or her conscience when requested to perform such marriages, unions or blessing as a matter of his or her individual religious liberty.

b. In conferences where civil law permits a pastor to perform same-sex marriage services, no clergy shall at any time be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples, or of any couples.

c. Clergy who cannot in good conscience continue to serve in a conference based upon that conference’s standards for ordination regarding practicing homosexuals, may seek to transfer under ¶ 347, and shall be supported and assisted in that process. Similarly, clergy who cannot in

good conscience continue to serve a particular church based on unresolved disagreements over same-sex marriage as communicated by the pastor and Staff-Parish Relations Committee to the district superintendent, shall be reassigned. All clergy with security of appointment shall continue under appointment by the bishop of the annual conference.

*Rationale:* Clergy would be allowed to perform or not perform a marriage, union or blessing of same-sex couples where legal. Clergy who desire transfer from conferences that ordain gay persons could transfer. Continued security of appointment for clergy is affirmed.

#### **Amend ¶ 341.6 - Unauthorized Conduct**

6. Ceremonies that celebrate ~~homosexual unions~~ same-sex marriage shall not be performed conducted by clergy ~~our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches~~ on church-owned property unless the church decides by a majority vote of a Church Conference to adopt a policy to celebrate same-sex marriage on church property.

*Rationale:* This provision allows local church members to decide what is best for their congregational and missional context related to ceremonies of same-sex marriage on church property. A called Church Conference requires due notification of the meeting and invites all members to participate.

#### **Amend ¶ 415.6 - The Superintendency, Specific Responsibilities of Bishops**

Add: No bishop shall be required to ordain an elder or deacon, commission a deaconess, home missionary, or missionary, or license a local pastor who is a self-avowed practicing homosexual. The Jurisdictional College of Bishops shall provide for the ordination, commissioning, and licensing of all persons recommended by the Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference in the bounds of its jurisdiction. All clergy with security of appointment shall continue under appointment by the bishop of the annual conference.

*Rationale:* The religious liberty of bishops who cannot in good conscience commission, license or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals is protected. Provision is made for such persons in annual conferences where they are deemed to be duly qualified and approved candidates. Security of appointment for appointed clergy is continued.

#### **Add new sub-paragraph in ¶416 - Specific Responsibilities of Bishops**

Add: 8. The bishop shall neither require any pastor to perform nor prohibit any pastor from performing any marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples.

Add: 9. The bishop shall neither require any church to hold nor prohibit any church from holding a same-sex marriage service on church property.

*Rationale:* Clarity related to the boundaries of authority for bishops related to marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples enables clergy and congregations to know that their religious liberty will be affirmed in the future without penalty or unforeseen consequence.

#### **Add new sub-paragraph in ¶419 - Specific Responsibilities of District Superintendents**

Add: 13. The superintendent shall neither require any pastor to perform nor prohibit any pastor from performing any marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples.

Add: 14. The superintendent shall neither require any church to hold nor prohibit any church from holding a same-sex marriage service on church property or otherwise coerce, threaten, or retaliate against any pastor who exercises his or her conscience to perform or refuse to perform a same-sex marriage.

*Rationale:* Clarity related to the boundaries of authority for district superintendents related to marriage, union, or blessing of same-sex couples enables clergy and congregations to know that their religious liberty will be affirmed in the future without penalty or consequence.

**Add new sub-paragraph to ¶605 Annual Conference - Business of the Conference**

Add: 10. At any clergy session of an annual conference, the chairperson of the Board of Ordained Ministry shall, if directed by a vote of the Board of Ordained Ministry, present a motion regarding certification, ordination, and appointment of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Provided, however, that any clergy session of an annual conference that votes on such matters shall not, without the consent of the presiding bishop, take up any subsequent motion on that issue during any called or special session of annual conference held within 30 full calendar months from the date of such vote regardless of the outcome.

*Rationale:* After receiving a motion from the Board of Ordained Ministry related to the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals, the clergy session will not re-address this matter unless, the Bishop sees a critical need to re-address the question sooner.

**Amend ¶2702.1 – Chargeable Offenses**

¶ 2702. 1. A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶ 370), local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶ 2702.4) with one or more of the following offenses: (a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual a monogamous marriage; (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, ~~including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies;~~ (c) crime; (d) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church; (e) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (f) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor; (g) child abuse; (h) sexual abuse; i) sexual misconduct including the use or possession of pornography, (j) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; (k) racial or gender discrimination; or (l) fiscal malfeasance.

*Rationale:* The language is adjusted to reflect proposed changes in ¶ 161.C, ¶ 161.G, ¶ 304.3, and ¶341.6.