



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



For immediate release

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Commission ends its work; hears bishops' recommendation for a way forward

NASHVILLE – The 32-member Commission on a Way Forward for The United Methodist Church concluded its ninth and final meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, yesterday (May 16).

The Commission met nine times over 17 months. The Commission reviewed a wide variety of petitions presented as legislation to previous General Conferences regarding human sexuality and examined how other faith communities and denominations are responding or have responded to the question of inclusion of LGBTQ persons.

“The key part of the early work was to build trust and intentional community among a group of people who had good reasons not to trust each other,” said Bishop David Yemba, one of the moderators of the Commission.

At the heart of the work on relationship building was the book, *The Anatomy of Peace*, from the Arbinger Institute. The focus of *The Anatomy of Peace* is to help people build the capacity for living through conflict with a heart of peace instead of a heart at war. A heart of peace helps us to see and treat others as people while a heart at war tends to see and treat others as objects, obstacles, or problems.

“A heart at war exaggerates our differences. A heart at peace sees what we have in common,” said Bishop Yemba.

The Commission wrote a covenant with each other that both guided the work of the Commission and helped to build community and trust. Commission members focused on finding a way forward rather than on representing groups or constituencies.

“The Commission’s practice of voicing differing theological views and interpretations of scripture stands as a model for what kind of ministry we are both called and empowered by God to do,” said Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, one of the moderators. “This led us to discover the interests behind the various positions and opened up multiple possibilities for how the church can continue to fulfill the ministry of Christ in both unity and with diversity.”

The Commission spent significant time listening to the church through an open framework for receiving documents, ideas, and testimonies. The Commission received and processed feedback from boards and agencies, local churches, annual conferences, individual lay and clergy persons, candidates for ministry, and seminary students. Conversations took place with individuals and interest groups across the globe.

Along the way, Commission members worked on possible models for a way forward.

In November 2018, the Commission presented an extended interim report to the Council of Bishops. The report included three sketches: one that focused on accountability within the context of the current Book of Discipline language; one that focused on removing restrictive language and placing a high value on contextuality and protections of various perspective; and one that reimagined the church as a unified core with multiple branches.

In February 2018, the bishops held a special meeting to hear more details on the proposed plans from the Commission and to offer feedback.

With continued input from bishops and constituencies around the church, the Commission refined and adapted the models and presented its final report to the Council of Bishops in May 2018.

The Council of Bishops is in the process of revising and perfecting their report and recommendation based on the work of the Commission to the special session of General Conference 2019.

“We anticipate the report will be released in early July. Future work will be with delegations to create a culture that will listen to God, receive the report, and do this work with a heart of peace and not a heart of war,” said Bishop Ken Carter, president of the Council of Bishops.

Although their work is officially over, members of the Commission will collaborate with residential bishops in equipping delegations between now and 2019 General Conference, which will be held Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis, Missouri.

About the Commission: The Commission on a Way Forward was created after the 2016 General Conference approved a motion for the Council of Bishops to name a commission that would explore options to keep the unity of the church that had been threatened over the question of inclusion of LGBTQ persons. The Commission is diverse body that represents the global church with members coming from nine countries with a variety of theological perspectives. The Commission is one third laity, one third clergy, and one third bishops and includes younger persons, LGBTQ persons, professors, administrators, pastors, youth ministers, campus ministers, lay leaders, large church pastors, and persons identified with renewal and advocacy groups.

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