

Analysis of One Church Plan Bishop Scott J. Jones

Summary

The One Church Plan provides a form of unity that gives conferences, churches, and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context without disbanding the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church. It removes the language from *The Book of Discipline* that restricts pastors and churches from conducting same-sex weddings and annual conferences from ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexual persons and it affirms sexual relations only within the covenant of monogamous marriage between two adults. Local churches will have the freedom to decide whether or not to allow same-gender marriages in their churches. Clergy will have the freedom to decide whether to perform same-gender marriages. Annual Conferences will have the freedom to decide whether or not to ordain practicing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer persons. Central Conferences will have the freedom to adapt the *Book of Discipline* to their context.

Strengths

- Avoids a formal division of the denomination and maintains UMC connectional structures.
- Ends the threat of church trials over clergy performing same-gender wedding ceremonies.
- General Boards and Agencies stay intact
- We continue to do mission work together despite our theological differences
- Each church can adapt its practices regarding homosexuality to its mission field.
- Takes a decisive step toward eventual, full inclusion of and non-discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer persons in the life and ministry of the UMC
- United Methodist teaching on marriage is redefined as a monogamous relationship between two adults.
- No clergy serving a United Methodist local church will have to act against his or her conscience because they cannot be required to perform a same-gender ceremony.
- No local church or annual conference will be required to vote on these possible changes and will follow the decision of their annual conference regarding ordination of clergy.
- Central Conferences will be free to take actions maintaining current teaching and standards for their contexts.
- A new funding mechanism means each episcopal area in the United States will bear the full cost of its bishop through a shared episcopal fund.
- No constitutional amendments are required for this plan.
- Clarifies that churches leaving the denomination must contribute an amount of money equal to its share of the Conference's unfunded pension liability.

Weaknesses

- Different United Methodist churches serving the same mission field will have different teaching about human sexuality. In the same city or county one UM church may perform same-gender marriages and another may not.
- Confusion over the United Methodist brand and its teaching on homosexuality may result.
- Takes a decisive step toward eventual, full inclusion of and non-discrimination against

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer persons in the life and ministry of the UMC

- United Methodist teaching on marriage is redefined as a monogamous relationship between two adults.
- Conflict over this issue is moved from General Conference to Annual Conference boards of ordained ministry, clergy sessions and local church charge conferences.
- The decision to ordain self-avowed, practicing homosexual candidates for ministry rests with the Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session of the Annual Conference. The entire Annual Conference may give non-binding advice at the discretion of the presiding bishop.
- Any lay member may seek a vote from the charge conference, and any clergy member may seek a vote from the clergy session of the annual conference.
- Many conservatives have indicated they will leave the UMC if the church's teaching is changed. Other mainline denominations have experienced significant membership losses after such changes.
- Local churches have no protection from being assigned a pastor who disagrees with their views on same-gender marriage. They must trust their bishop who is constrained by guaranteed appointment requirements for elders and associate members.
- Persons who self-identify as a practicing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or queer person after ordination cannot be removed from the ministry for that reason alone.
- Apportionment contributions to the Episcopal Fund continue to support all bishops. In the case of a conference not paying 100% of its apportioned amount to the Episcopal Fund, other conferences continue the present practice of underwriting the salary of that bishop.
- Departure of congregations, bishops, and clergy will happen episodically without provision for a gracious exit.
- United Methodist chaplains serving in the U. S. military expect that they will be required to perform same-gender marriages.