

Listening Session on the Commission on a Way Forward and the One Church Plan

Broadmoor UMC

December 2, 2018

Note by Rick Wright

without so many editorial comments

- outline of the listening session
 1. introduction + prayers + litanies
 2. why we are here
 3. overview of how we got here
 4. overview of the three plans
 5. table discussion
 6. Bishop Harvey addressing questions
 7. Bishop Harvey states clearly where she stands
- this is “worshipful work”
- (prayers + litanies)
- governing metaphor = gnarly root systems in a redwood forest
 - o we are connected to each other in ways that are sometimes messy (but essential)
- do we feel threatened? by whom or what?
- 2019 -> **things will look different**
- important to be prepared to help interpret for one another
- “interpret for yourself”
- Anatomy of Peace (book recommended by Bishop Harvey) – to see others as people not objects
- historical overview
 - o General Conference = 600-1000 delegates – every 4 years
 - o additions/changes to Book of Discipline?
 - o equal lay + clergy representation
 - o 4 + 4 delegates from Louisiana (4 + 4 delegates then another 4 + 4 alternates)
 - o 1972 the statement on “homosexuality”
 - LGBT persons welcome – participate in life of church
 - but not weddings or ordinations
 - (Rw –it’s unclear if simply “being gay” [same-sex attraction] means you cannot be ordained – what about LGBT persons who are celibate? who affirm + follow traditional teaching

- regarding sexuality + marriage? people need to be more precise with their language)
- for past 47 years this issue has taken up large amounts of time + energy + discussion
 - finally in 2016 delegates together said “bishops – please lead us on this”
 - 1st time ever such a request
 - “unity with a variety of expressions”
 - Judicial Council provided guidance
 - (Rw – this is important. The Judicial Council is like the Supreme Court for the United Methodist Church. They decide what is “constitutional” or not. if certain proposals also require changes to UMC constitution – see below)
 - very difficult to change UMC constitution
 - special session in **February 2019** – will be 3 days not the usual 2 weeks
 - a very important question is the scope of the Special Session
 - there are 51 petitions (!!!)
 - (Rw – Bishop Harvey during Annual Conference said that the Special Session will consider only the One Church Plan. My understanding is that someone... the Judicial Council? said “no – it has to consider all three plans” and then “it could consider other proposals” although see below – there is a committee that decides what the business of the Special Session will be)
 - there is a committee that decides – following very precise language for General Conferences – whether a proposal, amendment, petition is “in harmony” with the purpose of the Conference
 - (Rw – there is concern that if the Special Session can’t focus on one or three of the plans... if they have to consider the other 51 petitions... then they will not resolve this)
 - (Rw – a key issue is “so what exactly can/will the Special Session consider? one plan? all three plans? or three plans plus a bunch of other petitions?)
 - the bishop explained that if the Special Session doesn’t reach a resolution then that puts the UMC in a bind
 - very small time frame in which to get ready for 2020
 - and this issue would still be unresolved! argh!
 - (Rw – it is very clear that a top concern is that the UMC no longer spend so much time and energy debating this... they

want this “behind” us... so we can get on with the work of mission + ministry... so we can get back to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”)

- (Rw – and how/why did the UMC become so divided over this issue? how well did the overview address that?)

- **Overview of the three plans that the Commission on a Way Forward considered**

- Connectional Plan

- basically divides UMC into three jurisdictions = “progressive”, “centrist” and “traditional”
 - some boards + agencies must be closed + reformed (one new one for each jurisdiction)
 - some can continue as is or with some changes
 - most of its elements are unconstitutional
 - which means the UMC can do this but it requires many changes to UMC constitution
 - basically divide the UMC into three new organizations which cooperate at some level
- Traditional Plan
 - basically stay with the Book of Discipline statement on homosexuality
 - and enforce it
 - those who act contrary suspended for one year w/o pay
 - 2nd offense = loss of credentials
 - conferences(?) have to verify + certify they are following the BOD statement
 - seems rather harsh
 - some parts require changes to constitution
 - 8/17 elements are unconstitutional, 1 partly unconstitutional
- One Church Plan
 - each conference, each church, each clergy decides where they stand / what is their policy
 - this is called “contextualization”
 - (Rw – which raises questions about just what is “contextualization”)
 - bishops can decline to ordain – so another bishops comes in to ordain the “practicing homosexual” clergy candidate
 - clergy + churches can decline to perform/allow same “gender” weddings

- (Rw – this is important – basically “you don’t have to participate in something to which you object”... however it is still going to happen... might be another bishop, might be at another UMC church or UMC clergy down the road or in the next town – see below how the bishop answered questions)
 - 17/17 constitutional
 - 3/17 partly constitutional
 - Different plans have different “gracious exit” plans for clergy + churches that can’t live with the results
 - Generally speaking churches cannot leave the UMC
 - a point of some controversy (whether and to what extent different plans allow clergy + churches to leave)
 - Rw - “traditional” Methodists argue the One Church Plan does not have a “gracious exit” plan for clergy/churches
 - churches would have to cover pension liabilities (not sure exactly what that means or how that works)
- Table discussion
 - (Rw – this part did not go well in my opinion)
 - several questions to guide the table discussion = how will each plan impact you? your church? the mission of the UMC?
 - (two people dominated the conversation – and this was not supposed to be a debate over homosexuality or interpretation of Scripture... but some of the conversation went in that direction – I thought the purpose was to discuss the plan(s) not our views of theology or Scripture)
- Bishop Harvey fielded a small stack of questions submitted on index cards
 - quick and efficient answers
 - (Rw – I would take issue with some of her answers but she handled this well – some answers were interesting and important
 - for example that “homosexual” clergy would be expected to follow the same rules for celibacy, fidelity, monogamy as anyone else
 - one important detail – theoretically an LGBT clergy could be appointed to a “traditional” church and vice versa = a “traditional” clergy appointed to a “progressive” church
- Last part of listening session was Bishop Harvey making clear where she stands
 - clearly supports the One Church Plan
 - (Rw - I believe she was the chairperson of the Commission)
 - Ephesians 4 has been the passage she consults every day through this process

- *anachomanoi* (“bearing with...”) in [Ephesians 4:2](#)
- different Methodists have different ways to interpret Scripture regarding sexuality and marriage
 - we have these verses + interpretations, they have those verses + interpretations
 - (Rw – whether that is a fair characterization of the different viewpoints, that is not necessarily the issue when it comes to the three plans – how one understands sexuality + marriage overlaps with how one will view the plans... but we need to distinguish the two issues in our thinking + talking together
 - Rw- people can be “progressive” or “traditional” on the theological/biblical questions... and that doesn’t necessarily decide the relative merits/flaws of the three different plans
- invokes her background as example of “exclusion” (woman + Hispanic)
- a key element of her appeal for the One Church Plan is that the UMC can continue doing the ministry it does
 - feed, heal, provide relief, and so on
 - so many ministries would stop if the One Church Plan is not approved