

## Emmanuel's Way Forward: An Introduction

The Church has a long history of selective biblical literalism that takes certain pieces of the Bible and severs them from the heart and example of Jesus and then uses that selective literalism to hurt people by excluding them. The Bible has been used to justify harming and excluding people in many different ways: anti-Semitism, sexism, support for slavery, colonialism, segregation, even the exclusion of divorced people from the church. It is interesting to note that on many of the above issues Christians eventually realized that a change of heart and mind was necessary. Right now, the main debate within the UMC is over the inclusion or exclusion of LGBTQIA people. This current debate takes place in the context of a larger historical debate within Christianity: inclusion or exclusion.

### So, what happened at the Special General Conference in February 2019?

- The "Traditionalist" Plan passed, a plan which in reality is not traditional but rather it changed the fabric of the United Methodist denomination in a variety of ways including:
  - The "Traditionalist" Plan concentrated power in the hands of the few with no room allowed for dissent. The Plan greatly diminished the historic and constitutional authority of the annual conferences and of the bishops, an authority that has been in place for over two centuries.
  - Prohibitions against LGBTQIA persons were upheld and strengthened to prevent their service in ministry and ordination at all levels (local pastor or bishop)
  - **For the first time ever**, there is now a mandatory minimum penalty for breaking the Book of Discipline:
    - Pastors that perform a wedding for a same-sex couple will be removed from their post and placed on leave without pay for one year. If they perform another wedding they then have their ministerial license and ordination revoked (defrocked).
    - Officiating a same-sex wedding is the only "crime" to which this mandatory minimum applies. A pastor could embezzle church money or physically/sexually assault church members and still not be subjected to a mandatory minimum penalty according to the Book of Discipline.
  - Those who bring charges against clergy for performing same-sex weddings now hold most of the power in church court trials. Namely: the accuser must sign-off on the "just-resolution" intended to resolve the complaint.

### Why is this a big deal for Emmanuel?

- Emmanuel's clergy could be tried, convicted, and removed from their positions for performing marriages for same-sex couples.
- Current LGBTQIA people and allies may leave Emmanuel for a church that is part of an affirming denomination
- Currently two people who are LGBTQIA in our congregation and have experienced a call to ministry will not be considered for ordination by the denomination.
- If this can happen with one issue and set of people it can and will happen to others.

### What could happen to the United Methodist denomination?

- Option 1: Established churches and ministries could continue to resist from within.
- Option 2: Hybrid approach: churches and ministries could work within and outside denominational structures.
- Option 3: Churches and ministries could join together to create a wholly/holy new Methodist connection with other like-minded communities across the United States.

### What is Emmanuel doing?

- We have convened "Emmanuel's Way Forward Committee" to begin the discernment process to determine the best faithful response for Emmanuel.
- We sent three members of Emmanuel's congregation to the Our Movement Forward Conference in Minnesota in mid-May. It was a conference led by and centered on people of color, queer, and trans voices that addressed faithful ways forward for the denomination.
- We have chosen to continue to pay our denominational apportionments. This is part of a larger strategy. If the discernment process leads us to leave the UMC, we will need to be current on our payments and pay twelve months in advance. This is the minimum requirement to leave in good standing with our building and property (which is currently owned by the annual conference).

**What can I do as an individual?** - Stay informed by following our website, social media pages, e-news, and events.

Reach out to us online on our website: [www.eumclaurel.org](http://www.eumclaurel.org), Facebook: [www.facebook.com/eumclaurel/](https://www.facebook.com/eumclaurel/)