

# Human Sexuality & The United Methodist Church

A Conversation About the Complex and Contentious Debates Around LGBTQ Issues within the UMC.



## Session #3 – Is Same-Gender Marriage Compatible with Christian Teaching?

### 1. Book of Discipline Statements Related to Marriage

- ¶161.G ~ “. . . though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”
- ¶341.6 ~ “. . . ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”
- ¶2702.1 ~ It is a chargeable offense for clergy and ministers to engage in “practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to . . . conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.”
- ¶161.G ~ “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.”

### 2. Rationale for the UMC’s Current Teachings on Marriage

- Scriptures appearing to speak directly against homosexual practices:
  - Leviticus 18:22** ~ You must not have sexual intercourse with a man as you would with a woman; it is a detestable practice.
  - Romans 1:26-27** ~ . . . the males traded natural sexual relations with females, and burned with lust for each other. Males performed shameful actions with males . . .
  - 1 Corinthians 6:9-10** ~ Those who are sexually immoral, . . . both participants in same-sex intercourse, . . . won’t inherit God’s kingdom.
- Bible consistently describes marriage as between a man and a woman. Marriage is considered a lifelong relationship. Also, sex outside of marriage is considered sinful.
- For most of Christian history, marriage of a man with a woman has been considered God’s intention for the state in which human sexuality is lived out.
- We should recognize and correct the Church’s historical condemnation of gay people. This can be done while we follow the lead of the New Testament in offering compassion and understanding to those struggling with sin.

### 3. Rationale for Affirming Same-Gender Marriage

- Biblical passages relating to homosexuality and marriage should be considered in light of the major themes of scripture, especially those of the Great Commandment – love God

and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. (Even the New Testament church, comprised of Jewish Christians, revised their understanding of scripture to not require Gentile converts to be circumcised.)

- Biblical marriage, particularly in the Old Testament, is sometimes problematic for Christians today. In particular: polygamy, a married man sleeping with a concubine in order to produce more heirs, and levirate marriage (marrying a late brother's wife in order to produce an heir for him).
- It is possible that God could be revealing an evolution in the nature of the marriage covenant just as we believe we have come to understand about divorce. Jesus commanded against remarriage following divorce (except for cases of infidelity, Matthew 19:3-9) and Paul argues against divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Yet, today, we do not consider divorce an impediment to new marriage.

#### **4. 2015 - U.S. Supreme Court Throws Gasoline on the Embers of Debate about Marriage**

In 2015, the U. S. Supreme Court legalized same-gender marriage. This action give new life to the debate about same-gender marriage within the UMC.

- Those seeking to retain the current prohibition against same-gender marriage argue that a change in the a national law does not change biblical truth or the church's commitment to it.
- Those seeking a change to the UMC's stand on same-gender marriage have celebrated the Supreme Court's ruling because there is no longer a conflict clergy must navigate if they believe themselves called to marry a same-sex couple. Instead, we can now sort out how to treat all people and couples equally without legal impediment. The UMC's position can now change without putting its clergy in legal peril.

Although same-sex couples are now seeking marriage, officiating a same-gender wedding is still prohibited by the UMC.

#### **5. African UMs Influence Debate & Division**

- While the UMC is in decline in the U.S., it is growing in Africa. 30% of the delegates to the 2016 General Conference were from Africa.
- 38 of 54 African nations continue to criminalize homosexuality. This is a reflection of the greater social conservatism with African societies where homosexuality is considered immoral or deviant.
- In 2015, United Methodist Bishops in Africa encouraged 2016 General Conference delegates to give less attention to debates over same-gender marriage and LGBTQ ordination, and more attention to issues of global suffering, especially those due to injustice and poverty.

Bishop Warner Brown Jr., then President of the UMC Council of Bishops, responded by arguing that debates around human sexuality gave a false impression that it is the only area of concern for the UMC. He pointed out that "Issues of justice and healing" are also discussed. [While Brown is correct, his response failed to acknowledge that debates around human sexuality have become quadrennial (perennial for Annual Conferences) and louder than any other discussion within the UMC. - MaM]

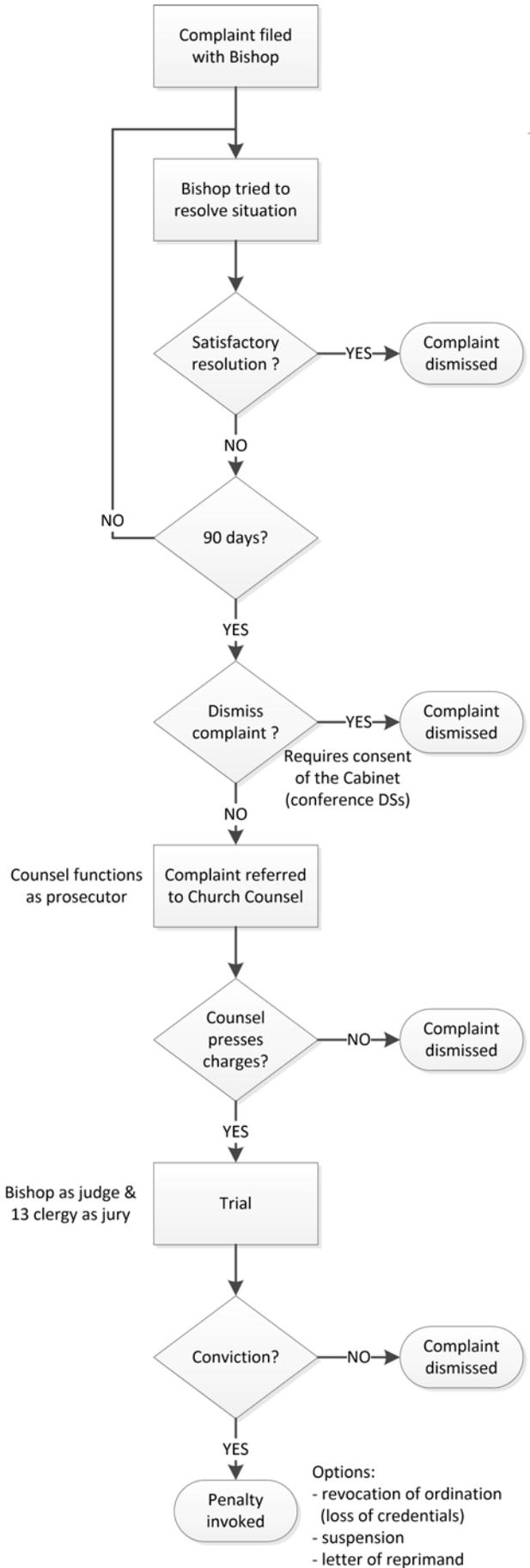
## 6. Resistance & Disobedience

The resistance of General Conferences to eliminate the prohibition against same-gender marriage since 1996 has left some believing that the only way to be biblically faithful is to violate that prohibition.

- 2012 General Conference – Revs. Adam Hamilton & Mike Slaughter make a motion to “agree to disagree” by adding a statement to The Discipline that the UMC is not of one mind in matters of human sexuality. The motion failed and the current prohibitions were retained.
- In response, retired Bishop Melvin Talbert called for disobedience to the prohibitions based on his belief that The Discipline is both immoral and unbiblical in the area of human sexuality. He announced his own willingness to perform same-gender wedding ceremonies.  
In 2013, Talbert blessed the wedding of 2 men against the request not do so by the area’s presiding bishop.
- Although he had committed a chargeable offense, Talbert was not put on trial by the church. He went through a lesser process and retained his clergy credentials.  
Rev John Miles, senior pastor of First UMC in Jonesboro AR objected to what he deemed the UMC’s light response to Talberts purposeful disobedience of The Discipline.
- 2016 General Conference – To head off gridlock, the Council of Bishops proposed, and delegates approved, the establishment of the Commission on a Way Forward to study issues of homosexuality and UMC church law and propose options to be presented at a special General Conference in 2019.
- At present, several Annual Conferences have declared that they will not uphold those parts of The Discipline that prohibit same-gender marriage.

## 7. Complaint Process When Clergy Perform a Same-Gender Marriage

[ please see next page ]



At any time Bishop may shift to **Just Resolution** process: if agreed to by person charged, Church Counsel, & complainant, then mediator guides process of developing written agreement between Church Counsel and person charged