



Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 17, 2017

Bishops receive interim Way Forward report, elect new officers

WASHINGTON - The Council of Bishops (COB) met at Lake Junaluska in North Carolina last week to receive an interim report from the Commission on a Way Forward; elect new officers; and prepare for the 2019 Special Session of General Conference among other things.

From the president's address to giving feedback on the interim report of the Commission, the bishops stressed the importance of the mission of God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus Christ in The United Methodist Church.

Here are highlights of the COB meeting held from Nov. 5-10:

Presidential address

In his presidential address on Monday morning, COB President Bruce Ough challenged fellow bishops to be open to new ways that may be "off the map" as they received and discerned the interim report from the commission.

Comparing the UMC bishops to the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark who were not daunted after finding their expected canoe way to the Pacific Ocean blocked by the Rocky Mountains, Bishop Ough called on the church to find new innovative ways to navigate the "issues of same-gender marriage, the ordination of LGBTQ persons, and the underlying issues of scriptural authority and biblical obedience."

Bishop Ough, who leads the Dakotas-Minnesota Area, reminded the bishops about the painful action the church took in creating the Central Jurisdiction at the merger of three Methodist-related denominations in 1939, which ended up segregating African-Americans.

"Many historians would argue that the formation of jurisdictional conferences in the United States was a similar structural compromise that has perpetuated sectarianism and disconnect within The United Methodist Church," Ough said.

He cautioned: "And it is clear there is no way forward unless we are willing to rethink and redesign what a global United Methodist Church looks like."

The COB, which is made up of both active and retired bishops, offers oversight and leadership for the nearly 13 million United Methodists through the world. At the 2016 General Conference, the bishops were asked to find a way forward on the impasse regarding LGBTQ persons in the life of church.

To help in this mandate from General Conference, the bishops appointed a 32-member commission that has met six times since January. The commission presented its interim report to the bishops at the Lake Junaluska meeting.

"It will be our responsibility, and ours alone, to lead the adoption and acceptance of the recommendations," Bishop Ough said.

[READ BISHOP'S FULL ADDRESS HERE](#)

Commission on the Way Forward interim report

Members of the Commission a Way Forward presented an interim report of sketches of three possible models but stressed the following:

- The Commission shared three sketches of models with the bishops, with the awareness that they are not restricted to these models and are open to learning, listening and improvement.
- It is likely that additional models or sketches may emerge as the process continues.
- The Commission did not express a preference of a model in order to best serve the bishops.
- The values highlighted in any one model also live within the fabric of other models.
- The values that are present in each model can be found in two important documents
 1. [The Mission, Vision and Scope document](#); 2. [The Status Report of the Commission in July 2017](#)

The sketches of the models

- One sketch of a model affirms the current *Book of Discipline* language and places a high value on accountability.
- Another sketch of a model removes restrictive language and places a high value on contextualization. This sketch also specifically protects the rights of those whose conscience will not allow them to perform same gender weddings or ordain LGBTQ persons.
- A third sketch of a model is grounded in a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services, and one COB while also creating different branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice.
- Each sketch represents values that are within the COB and across the church.
- Each sketch includes a gracious way for those who feel called to exit from the denomination.

After receiving the interim report of the sketches of the three possible models, the bishops engaged in prayerful discerning and offered substantial feedback to the Commission. However, the bishops did not vote on any particular sketch or structural model for the future of the church; nor did they eliminate a particular sketch of a model; and they stressed that they are not planning for division.

As part of the ongoing discernment within the church, resident bishops are being equipped to lead discussions in their episcopal areas and offer feedback to the commission.

[READ THE FULL PRESS RELEASE ON THE INTERIM REPORT](#)

Election of officers

In other actions, the COB elected new officers for next two years. Florida Area Bishop Kenneth H. Carter today was officially elected as the next president of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church. Bishop Carter will take over from Bishop Ough effective at the end of the May 2018 meeting.

The United Methodist bishops also elected Louisiana Area Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey as the president-designate. She is currently serving as secretary of the Council. North Katanga-Tanzania Bishop Mande Muyombo was elected as secretary. Bishop Mande was elected as bishop early this year.

Bishop Carter, Bishop Harvey and Bishop Mande - who are active bishops - will continue in their roles as residential bishops in their areas in addition to their additional roles in the COB. Bishop Carter has additional responsibilities as one of the moderators of the Commission on a Way Forward.

2019 Special Session of General Conference

In preparing for the Special Session of General Conference that has been called for February 2019, the COB approved the following as its members of the **Design Team for the Special Session**: Julie Love, Tom Salsgiver, Bruce Ough, Bill McAlilly, Robert Farr (or designee), Sue Hauptert Johnson with Marcus Matthews, Cynthia Fierro Harvey, Sandra Steiner Ball, Rudy Juan and Warner Brown serving as ex-officio members. The COB is working in conjunction with the Commission on General Conference, which will also have its members on the Design Team.

The COB and the Commission have a series of meetings scheduled for early 2018 designed to continue the preparations for the Special Session of the General Conference in 2019. This includes Commission meetings in January and March; **an additional COB meeting in February** before a final report is discussed at the May meeting of the COB.

The bishops also approved a writing team comprising Bishops Sandra Steiner-Ball, Donna Pritchard, Cynthia Fierro Harvey, Marcus Matthews, Bruce Ough, Warner Brown and attorney Bill Waddell for the purpose of preparing documents for a possible request for declaratory decision(s) that would be submitted to the Judicial Council.

Pastoral letter to the church

In the face of acrimonious conversations permeating even the church over political religious and justices, the bishops issued a pastoral letter at the end of the meeting, calling for respectful dialogue.

“Conflict and differing opinions, a natural part of the human and faith experience, come in a variety of forms. We are called to address our differences with authenticity and respectful conversations which enrich our understanding of God and of one another,” letter signed by Bishop Ough said.

The bishops reminded United Methodists about Ephesians 4:1-2 which admonishes us “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL LETTER.](#)

In other matters:

- All bishops, retired and active, underwent further Boundary Training; and then the residential bishops had a session on how to handle sexual misconduct complaints as part of their required training.
- The bishops heard from leaders of areas which have been impacted by natural disasters such as the hurricanes in Texas and Puerto Rico. The meeting received an offering of **\$10,421.62** to help with the recovery relief in Puerto Rico.
- The bishops approved a recommendation that all bishops continue to encourage local churches to fully participate in **Global Migration Sunday on December 3, 2017**. Resources for this Sunday can be found at umcmigration.org.
- The bishops in the five jurisdictions were urged to lead their areas in establishing Justice for our Neighbors legal clinics where none have been established, and strengthening JFONs where they are already established.
- The bishops also approved the appointment of several people to ecumenical and interreligious organizations and committees.

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