

Evangelicals Lean to Leave, but Some Progressives Are Also Impatient

By Bruce Pettit

A special General Conference of the United Methodist Church in St. Louis in 2019 was called with a lofty expectation of settling the nearly 50-year dispute over what is acceptable in human sexuality. It didn't. But what it did settle is whether the two sides – progressive and evangelical – could still abide in the same denomination. After all of the futile tension since 1972, each side, likewise, decided it could not.

Details on separation would be settled at the “2020” General Conference to be held two years late in Minneapolis starting in August 2022 – and even then constitutional amendments that it might sanction, by a two-third vote, have to be approved by individual annual conferences by an aggregate two-thirds. Individual local churches would then vote on whether to leave, or just stay in the UMC by sitting pat.

Meanwhile, some parishes on either side of the divide have decided to jump official actions and separate now, or very soon. Four in Maine have left – feeling that they, according to the United Methodist News Service, cannot remain as part of a church that hurts LGBTQ people. So is Bering church in Houston, disembarking to the United Church of Christ. Progressive UMCs in Savannah GA and Lancaster PA are also gone.

On the evangelical side, five UMCs in Mississippi are gone, according to the Confessing Movement, one of three leading organizations of traditional views on homosexuality. A UMC in Fairview Heights IL says it will be independent of any denomination. Still, former Judicial Council member Keith Boyette is advising traditional churches to pause – first see what General Conference actually does.

Even so, it is the evangelical side that has taken steps to say it will be the one to abandon the basic denominational name – The United Methodist Church, formed in 1968. According to the Confessing Movement, the evangelicals have been wasting no time in proceeding on at least three fronts: (1) a name for a new Methodist denomination; (2) a new logo (no cross and flame) and (3) a new *Book of Discipline*.

The new proposed name for a church of “traditional” doctrine is The Global Methodist Church. Its proposed logo is a thin blue cross, encased in three blue intertwining circles. A new *Discipline* is expected to maintain the incompatibility clause – as well as ordination and same-sex weddings prohibitions.

However, the traditionalists are not expected to stand in the way of creating “a church where LGBTQ persons, their spouses, families, and friends are welcomed as siblings in Christ.” Individual evangelicals would be welcome to stay as part of The

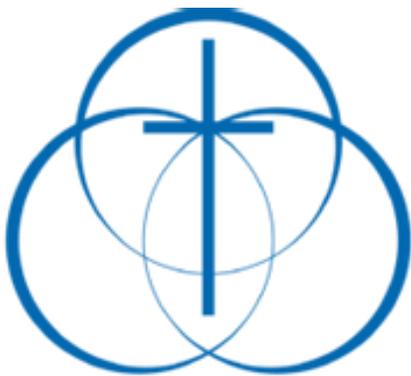
United Methodist Church “but must be willing to accept that others hold different views, and [those others] will have the right to conduct same-sex marriages and ordain qualified lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.”

This is astounding to many of us who witnessed the arrests of Reconciling Methodists at the General Conference in Cleveland in 2000, and who felt demoralized at the closing, make-believe, 95% “unity” hand-holding vote in Pittsburgh in 2004 – and who cried with the youth in Fort Worth in 2008 not understanding status quo if the UMC were honest in wanting to grow.

Yet there seems to be a measure of grace from the evangelicals in their conciliation. If grace it is, there also seems to be a consequential bowing to reality. Evangelicals surely know they have lost the battle on LGBTQ rights in the United States – as the country becomes much more secular, and as other denominations move forward.

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The proposed logo for an evangelical-proposed new denomination:



GLOBAL
METHODIST CHURCH