



# Finding Our Path in The United Methodist Church



How Can We Talk & Listen?  
What Can We Do?

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“How can congregations in The United Methodist Church prepare for and navigate the tension and divisiveness around the General Conference’s decisions regarding the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ clergy and congregants?”



# INTRODUCTION

Congregations are wrestling with how they might respond to decisions being made by The United Methodist Church (UMC) General Conference (GC) regarding full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, asexual, intersex, gender-fluid, pansexual (LGBTQIA+) persons in the life of the church. The GC is considering several restructuring options in light of disagreement about the full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ clergy and congregants regarding marriage and ordination. While awaiting these decisions, congregations find themselves navigating tensions around what values are important to them and their church. The tensions center on what it means to be a Christian and a United Methodist, and what changes could result if the UMC reorganizes.

Historically, Methodists have fiercely debated issues such as whether to have bishops, views on slavery, whether to ordain women, and whether to have racially integrated churches. For more than 50 years, the UMC has achieved unity by addressing important issues in the world around us through serious theological reflection and the use of the resources of Christian faith that help us discern Christian truth in ever-changing contexts.

Notably, the denomination has consistently held together when it comes to questions about people's basic humanity regarding gender and race because of the equality of all persons in Jesus Christ. Today, the issue of LGBTQIA+ inclusion once again raises a possibility of a denominational rupture, this time regarding sexual orientation.



To be clear, this guide is not about debating people's humanity. Those who participate in this dialogue will locate themselves somewhere along the spectrum of human sexuality and have friends, family members, or co-workers who identify as LGBTQIA+.

So this dialogue is not designed to deal with questions about their worth as human beings in the eyes of God and the church. Rather, this guide is to be used as a tool for listening deeply, sharing respectfully, and discerning what it means to be the church together in the midst of these important issues.

This guide will ask questions such as: Is the cost of unity greater than the cost of division? Is the connectional system of The United Methodist Church greater than our differences? Is a split worth sacrificing unity? In other words, it's about identifying our core values as Christians and United Methodists in order to think and talk about who we are and how we might respond.

Some are concerned that their core values could be violated and decisions imposed on them. They value freedom to practice their faith and live as God has created and called them. Others worry that they will lose their identity as United Methodists and that the ministry of the global denomination may be weakened or less effective.

And for many, there is concern about the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental harm that may result from this churchwide turmoil over issues that are deeply personal and yet affect entire congregations and the denomination as a whole.

## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE: WHY THIS GUIDE NOW?

This issue guide was developed by the Great Plains Conference of the UMC to help clergy and congregations in a time of ecclesial discernment and possible restructuring in light of the eventual decisions of the General Conference.

The purpose is to provide a tool for creating respectful, structured, and productive space for listening and sharing, praying and discerning.

This guide suggests three approaches for being the church in this time of waiting for the decision of GC. One option is to equip individuals and congregations to make informed and compassionate decisions that will allow for the greatest autonomy and freedom of choice. A second option is to concentrate on our Methodist identity and decide what that means for us as a church and as individual Christians. A third option is to prioritize protecting vulnerable people from harm and cultivating compassion as we struggle with the ramifications of these decisions.

The hope is that respectful and grace-filled conversation will undergird all three approaches.

It is important to note that this guide is not asking participants to choose which option they prefer or which one they would like their church to pursue. No one is being asked to vote on these options or on what position they think their church should take on LGBTQIA+ issues. Other options could be proposed as well. This guide is simply a starting point to create space for listening, respectful sharing of ideas and experiences, and discerning how the Holy Spirit might be working among us as we are in this time of waiting.

As we engage in this deliberation together, we recognize that no matter our views, we are each created and redeemed by God. Regardless of the decisions we make around how we serve God, we know that we do not nullify God's decision to love us. Christ's life, death, and resurrection has power to heal and cast a vision for the future of God's Kingdom, even if we cannot immediately see what the future holds.

## BACKGROUND INFO ON THE UMC AND SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

The UMC currently bars the practice of presiding over same-sex marriages and ordaining pastors in same-sex relationships. And same-sex weddings are not allowed to be performed in United Methodist churches or on church property.

At the 2019 special session of General Conference, the denomination's "Traditional Plan," which enhances current policies about homosexuality and strengthens enforcement, passed with 438 votes in favor and 384 against (53% to 47%).

In Pew Research Center's 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, 60% of U.S. United Methodists said homosexuality should be accepted by society — a clear majority, and a substantial increase from 2007, when 51% said this. In addition, about half of U.S. United Methodists (49%) said they favored legal same-sex marriage. That survey was conducted nearly seven years ago, and Americans' views about homosexuality have shifted further toward acceptance since the U.S. Supreme Court's 2015 decision to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide. Members of all major religious traditions have become even more likely to favor legal same-sex marriage, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2017, the most recent year for which data are available.

"Rift over gay rights comes as United Methodists in U.S. have become more accepting of homosexuality,"  
Pew Research Center, Feb. 26, 2019

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/26/rift-over-gay-rights-comes-as-united-methodists-in-us-have-become-more-accepting-of-homosexuality/>

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Language about homosexuality first appeared in the UMC Book of Discipline in 1972. It affirmed the sacred worth of all people but stated that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Despite ongoing appeals for full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons, this stance has been consistently upheld by subsequent General Conferences.
- The 2012 Edition of the Book of Discipline states that while God's Grace is available to all, the UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers it incompatible with Christian teaching (¶1161f). Further, ¶ 304.3 states, "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."
- While the Church is not permitted to fund any project that would "promote the acceptance of homosexuality," this restriction does not apply to funding for "dialogs or educational events where the Church's official position is fairly and equally represented" (¶ 613). Thus, the use of this guide for dialogue is permitted under the current rules of the Book of Discipline.



## What is The United Methodist Church?

The United Methodist Church is an international denomination founded in 1968 comprised of churches from around the world. There are nearly 44,000 congregations and more than 13 million members in this global denomination. The UMC Mission is “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

## What is the General Conference?

The General Conference consists of lay and clergy representatives of the churches that make up the UMC and functions as the final governing body for the denomination. About 41% of delegates to GC come from churches outside of the United States, with Africans making up the largest part of the international contingent.

## WHAT IS DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE?

Deliberative dialogue is a form of civil discourse that brings people together from diverse experiences and viewpoints to share their concerns about an issue, weigh the benefits and drawbacks of different approaches to the issue, discern their shared values, and suggest steps for moving forward. This is not a debate, and there is no predetermined outcome. Rather, this is an opportunity to listen deeply, share openly and respectfully, and build community together, even when there are strongly held opinions from many perspectives.

Before delving into the three options, we recommend that groups begin with prayer and establish ground rules for having respectful conversation. On the next page are suggested ground rules for discussion, and your group is welcome to add more.



## IDEAS FOR USING THIS GUIDE IN CONGREGATIONS, NETWORKS, AND DISTRICTS

This issue guide can be used by groups of many different configurations and over different lengths of time.

- A group of pastors and laity could be trained how to moderate deliberative dialogue with this guide to facilitate discussions with their congregations. The Great Plains Conference is offering opportunities for such training. Please contact Rev. Dee Williamston, director of Clergy Excellence and assistant to the bishop, for more information at [dwilliamston@greatplainsumc.org](mailto:dwilliamston@greatplainsumc.org).
- A congregation, network, or district could conduct a single two-hour event to work through the issue guide spread out the discussion over a series of sessions to allow more time for dialogue.
- The issue guide could be discussed in two to five sessions spread out over several weeks or during a retreat. For example, a three-session series could begin with 1) Introductions, Ground Rules, What’s at Stake; 2) Option 1, Option 2, and Option 3; and 3) Shared Values and Next Steps.
- A congregation could do a five-week Lenten study using the guide with the following sessions:
  - Session 1 – Introductions, Ground Rules, and What’s at Stake
  - Session 2 – Option 1
  - Session 3 – Option 2
  - Session 4 – Option 3
  - Session 5 – Shared Values and Next Steps

# SUGGESTED GROUND RULES FOR DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE

## Choose for yourself when and how to participate

Participants are invited to join in the discussion, never required or pressured to do so. This is not a “share-or-die” event! Being fully present and listening with care is as important a contribution as speaking with care.

## Listen to hear; listen with empathy

Remain respectful and remember that maintaining relationships is a priority.

## Make space for silence and reflection

The discussion should not be fast and furious. Slow down and pay attention to the “inner teacher” that is trying to speak in you and in others. You can “press pause” to cool off, if needed.

## No debating

Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one’s convictions does not mean interpreting, correcting, or debating what others say. Seek instead — through listening deeply and asking honest, open questions — to help each participant find their own clarity and resourcefulness.

## Embrace differences

Speak from your experiences and viewpoints with “I statements,” not mountain-top declarations or overgeneralizations. Listen with an open mind to others’ experiences.

## When the going gets rough, turn to wonder

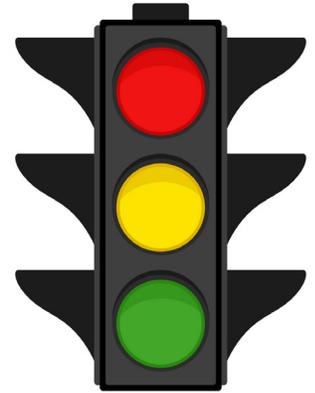
Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and compassionate inquiry: “I wonder why he or she feels/thinks this way?” “I wonder what pushed my buttons in what he or she just said?”

## Learn to ask honest, open questions

Instead of judging or debating what people say or asking leading questions, ask questions that are free of judgment or advice, questions that come from a simple desire to help the speaker explore more deeply what he or she has said. “Is there a story from your life that helps explain why you feel or believe what you do?” is an honest, open question. “How could you believe something like that?” is not!

## Be clear about what you would like to stay within the group

This is a public discussion, but if you are sharing personal information that you would like to stay within this forum, be clear about that. By the same token, if you hear a story or personal information that another shares in this discussion, ask permission first if you wish to talk about it outside the group.



— Adapted from The Center for Courage & Renewal

# STEPS FOR CONDUCTING A DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE

1

**Opening prayer and ground rules** — Begin the session with prayer and review the ground rules together one by one.

2

**Personal Stake** — After agreeing to the ground rules, invite participants to very briefly (one or two sentences) answer the question, “What are your concerns for your congregation related to denominational decisions around LGBTQIA+ marriage and clergy?” Or, “What is at stake for you in this discussion?” Responses should be from the heart and no more than about 30 seconds so that everyone has time to share. Record these concerns on a large sheet of paper for the group to see (or on a Google document with a shared screen if the discussion happens via Zoom).

3

**Discuss the Options** — Take equal time discussing the Actions and Trade-Offs for each Option, again, having someone write them down for the group. It’s best to discuss each option one at a time and give equal attention to both the pros and cons of each. What are some benefits that you could see with this option, but what are drawbacks that could result if a church put most of its time and resources into this? Even if you dislike an option, what are positives you could see within it? Likewise, even if you are drawn to an option, what might be downsides to this approach?

4

**Shared Values and Common Ground** — Once you have worked through the Options, take some time to think about the underlying values your group seems to share, regardless of where people locate themselves in terms of their politics or positions on the issue. Where is our common ground? What are our common values? What are biblical and theological principles that we can agree are important to consider?



5

**Next Steps** — Brainstorm about what next steps your congregation could take based on the dialogue. Were there actions that seemed to generate interest and energy? Are there other ideas that came up during the discussion? Would it be beneficial to continue the conversation around these suggestions?

6

**Final Prayer & Evaluation** — End the dialogue with prayer giving thanks for the guidance of the Holy Spirit during this dialogue. Ask participants to fill out the evaluation form either online or on paper. Send paper forms to your district superintendent.



# OPTION 1

## ENSURE FREE CHOICE AND AUTONOMY FOR INDIVIDUALS AND CONGREGATIONS

“In these we may think and let think; we may ‘agree to disagree.’ But, meantime, let us hold fast the essentials of ‘the faith which was once delivered to the saints.’” (John Wesley, Sermon 53)

### Option Summary

Option 1 concentrates on preserving the freedom of individuals and congregations to make autonomous decisions whether or not they align with the denominational stance. Given how divided the church is on this issue, different perspectives rather than requiring adherence to a single, unified denominational stance.

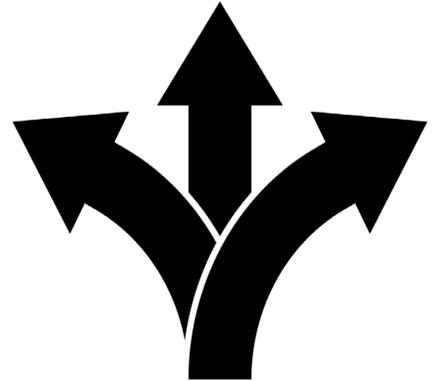
Some who favor this option fear being forced into decisions that go against their conscience, as in, “We don’t want others to make our decisions for us or to shove their ideas down our throats.” Others may express, “We want the freedom to be who we are, value what we value, and love who we love without coercion or force.” Still others may see this issue as non-essential to the core of the Christian faith and United Methodist identity, so they may agree to disagree.

This option prioritizes the local congregation as best positioned to make decisions of conscience that affect their community of faith and recognizes that different congregations (and congregants) may come to different conclusions. This approach values the freedom of individuals and congregations to decide differently on this issue and yet remain connected to each other in faith and through the denomination.

Proponents of this option may favor entering a congregational discernment process that collectively explores complex questions around human sexuality, identity, and faith that have been under-explored by the church. In walking through this process together, we can share our lived experiences, learn from stories and Scripture, and trust that we will be guided by the love of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

This option seeks freedom to ask those questions for ourselves as well as make decisions that align with the convictions, the relationships, and direction that emerges. We recognize that while we may not all make the same decisions, and this may lead to apparent division, we still trust that Christ is able to hold us together, even if that looks differently than it has in the past. We may not resolve all our differences, but we can come together in love and understanding of each other to provide a way forward for the congregation together.

Finally, this option recognizes that autonomy may not be guaranteed in the GC decision-making process and that local churches may have to decide whether to accept the GC decision, whatever it is, or to leave the denomination. In this case, churches will need to provide consistent communication about denominational processes and opportunities for congregants to more fully understand the options available to them. In this way, people will be informed about the possible ramifications of these options for church finances, leadership, and congregational life.



### A POSSIBLE DRAWBACK

In the UMC connectional system, we do not make decisions in a vacuum. The lack of a unified approach may diminish our unity and collective impact as a denomination. How do we present a coherent global witness as a church when we are allowing so much freedom of choice?

# OPTION 1

## ENSURE FREE CHOICE AND AUTONOMY FOR INDIVIDUALS AND CONGREGATIONS

Below are possible actions and potential trade-offs that might be required if that action would be pursued. After discussing one or more of these, think together about what the benefits would be for a congregation focusing their efforts on this option. Conversely, what would be some downsides?

ACTION	TRADE-OFF
Churches could conduct member surveys and listening sessions to gather concerns and experiences of members about LGBTQIA+ issues.	Participation may be highest from those who have the most power within the church and may not capture underrepresented voices, e.g. youth, LGBTQ+, elderly, etc.
Churches could launch a series to explore various historical and contemporary perspectives on faith and sexuality, particularly within the Wesleyan tradition.	This may seem to legitimize perspectives that some consider inappropriate.
Churches could create space to highlight and share the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ clergy and laity.	Non-LGBTQ+ individuals may not feel their experiences or concerns matter.
Churches could dialogue with other United Methodist congregations that hold differing views on these questions.	Congregants may focus on what separates them from others rather than what unites them.
Churches could provide regular updates from the Bishop and provide clear, consistent communication about options within the denomination.	This may bias some toward leaving the denomination if GC decision goes against their convictions.
Other potential actions/ideas?	Other trade-offs to consider?

### WHAT IS "CONNECTIONALISM" IN THE UMC?

Methodism's founder, John Wesley, recognized the need for an organized system of communication and accountability and developed what he called the "connexion," a network of classes, societies, and annual conferences. Today, our denomination continues to be organized in a "connectional" system, which "enables us to carry out our mission in unity and strength" (Book of Discipline, ¶ 701). Every local church is linked to an interconnected network of organizations that join together in mission and ministry, allowing us to accomplish far more than any one local church or person could alone.

(From "Organization: The Church as Connection,"

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/organization-church-as-connection.>)

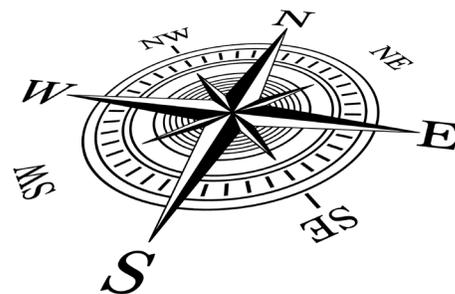
## OPTION 2

### PRESERVE OUR METHODIST IDENTITY & WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHURCH TOGETHER

“Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.” (John Wesley, Sermon 39)

#### Option Summary

When clergy and congregations keep the church at the center and what it means to be United Methodist and Christian as their core focus, this can help clear up confusion about who we are and what we are to do. Preserving Wesleyan theology, remaining loyal to biblical teachings, and deeply understanding the history and polity of the UMC can provide the compass points necessary for navigating this difficult time.



At the same time, this option may raise more questions than answers, such as: How will we navigate different interpretations of Scripture and Wesleyan theology? Given our many differences, why is LGBTQ+ inclusion the defining issue for us? How does our connectional structure square with those who have a more congregationalist ecclesiology (i.e., granting more authority and decision-making power to the individual congregation)?

People also have questions about what might happen to the UMC and its ministries if the denomination restructures. For example, what will happen to the UMC’s good work of caring for those in need through UMCOR disaster relief and local congregations that provide services to their communities? How will under-resourced churches here and abroad carry out their ministries if the UMC restructures? How would a church split impact evangelism and mission both for local congregations as well as the global church? For those who favor this option, it is important to preserve this good work, the strength of the UMC network across the world, and the care that it provides.

Many who favor this option might point to the Book of Discipline which has been a long-trusted resource on church doctrine and the Christian life. The General Conference has been the dependable leadership structure to make doctrinal decisions and resolve any number of contentious issues. This option takes the position that we should trust them now to lead the way in resolving this issue, regardless of our personal preferences or convictions. Churches and congregants should be able to look to the denomination for guidance on how to resolve these issues to ensure a consistent witness within the church and church polity.

In UMC polity, individual congregations do not decide who is eligible to serve as clergy or what marriages may be sanctioned or blessed by the church since this is decided by General Conference. Therefore, this option holds that local churches act in ways that are consistent with denominational doctrine and leadership decisions. Regardless of personal beliefs or divergent views within a church, the congregation is aligned with the global church policies rather than subject to variances based on geography, political climate, or personal biases or prejudices. Those who cannot in good conscience abide by this stance may have to go their separate ways — and do so as amicably and with as much fairness as possible in stewarding our resources.

#### A POSSIBLE DRAWBACK

Focusing on denominational identity may lead to arguments about who has the authority and the right to define that identity and impose it on others. Those whose moral convictions differ from their church or denomination may resent calls for unity and feel they are being pressured or coerced into sacrificing their personal values and integrity.

# OPTION 2

## PRESERVE OUR METHODIST IDENTITY & WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHURCH TOGETHER

ACTION	TRADE-OFF
A congregation could host a study on the history of the Book of Discipline, how it has functioned, and what it means for the United Methodist denomination.	Some may feel that a focus on the Book of Discipline imposes a “party-line” view and ignores the injustices suffered by the implications of this history.
Congregations could use resources such as “Courageous Conversations” from Discipleship Ministries to highlight the connectional work of the UMC. This would emphasize the benefits of what the denomination can offer that solo congregations cannot.	Some may suspect that the idea of connectionalism is being used to coerce congregations to remain in the UMC against their strongly held convictions.
Congregations could host a panel of speakers from different perspectives sharing what is important to them about their United Methodist identity.	Those who do not see their perspective represented may resent the event, causing even more division in the congregation.
Following the decision of the GC, churches could incorporate a rite affirming the GC decision that invites clergy and lay leaders to explicitly affirm their commitment to following GC guidance.	This rite of affirmation may alienate those with differing points of view and force clergy and lay leaders to act against their conscience.
Congregations that want to follow the current Book of Discipline, which excludes ordination and marriage, but also affirms the “sacred worth” of all persons, can welcome LGBTQIA+ persons by offering them other opportunities to serve besides leadership positions.	This action may feel unsafe and disingenuous because, as many who identify as LGBTQ+ have expressed, such actions would lead to them being regarded as “second-class citizens.”
Other potential actions/ ideas?	Other trade-offs to consider?

### CHANGING TRENDS IN UMC MEMBERSHIP IN THE U.S. & AFRICA

According to the Pew Research Center, United Methodists have been shrinking considerably as a share of the U.S. population, part of a broader trend among U.S. Christians and particularly mainline Protestants. A 2014 study found that United Methodists make up 3.6% of the U.S. adult population — down from 5.1% in 2007. (Mainline Protestants as a whole declined from 18.1% of the adult population to 14.7% over that seven-year period.) In the United States, both church attendance and offerings have declined by 8% since 2005.

At the same time, the denomination has reportedly been growing elsewhere around the world — particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where views on homosexuality tend to be very conservative. (“Rift over gay rights comes as United Methodists in U.S. have become more accepting of homosexuality,” Pew Research Center, Feb. 26, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/26/rift-over-gay-rights-comes-as-united-methodists-in-us-have-become-more-accepting-of-homosexuality/>).

# OPTION 3

## PRIORITIZE EMOTIONAL & SPIRITUAL CARE, PROTECT AGAINST HARM

Wesley's General Rules: First: Do no harm, avoid evil of every kind. Second: Do good; by being in every kind merciful after your power; as you have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all people.

Third: Attend upon all the ordinances of God.

### Option Summary

This third option acknowledges the need for spiritual care and healing for United Methodists troubled by the denomination's struggle with human sexuality and those hurt by the church as a result of these decisions. In our nation's current climate, many issues become politicized. Grounded in Christ's unconditional love and God's grace, the church can choose "a more excellent way," as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:31. Love and caring for one another is the way to address disagreement, hurt, division, and hard feelings. Once more, the local congregation is a place where relationships are formed and nurtured and life experiences are shared. What would it take for the congregation to be a center for healing?

Those who favor this option urge us to consider several essential questions: How will we care for one another while entering the denomination's future? What does "doing good" look like when there appear to be irreconcilable differences in the church? How do we navigate relationships with deep moral divides? How can we provide compassionate support and guidance for individuals and congregations who care deeply about United Methodism and each other as siblings in Christ?

This option acknowledges that in both church and society, many feel forsaken. Many LGBTQIA+ persons and their advocates, as well as those who hold traditionalist viewpoints, are sensitive to being labeled as less than compassionate to those with differing convictions. Vulnerability and emotional harm are experienced by many. Jesus' ministry calls for radical love and a church that helps bring Christ's grace and redemption to our relationships and, yes, even the public square. Those who support this option see this time of divisiveness as an opportunity for the UMC to channel God's grace and be a model of redemptive love and compassion.

This option would prioritize care for all those who feel emotionally or spiritually hurt by the divisions, including clergy who love and serve their congregations and the surrounding community. Congregations could turn to those who work in the fields of social work, counseling, and community support to provide a network of care. Congregations could draw from their pool of care-giving people, resources, and organizations in providing support. Wesleyan theology values grace as "the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit." Therefore, those who support this option concentrate on supporting and equipping bishops, district superintendents, clergy, and congregations to understand the dynamics of trauma and grief and use compassion, support, and guidance during this anxious time, especially for vulnerable individuals and congregations.



### A POSSIBLE DRAWBACK

Our efforts to care for those who feel vulnerable may be perceived as avoiding the difficult decisions and necessary actions for the good of the wider church. Focusing on care and spiritual support may distract us from necessary discussions about ethics, church polity, and practical issues of church restructuring.

# OPTION 3

## PRIORITIZE EMOTIONAL & SPIRITUAL CARE, PROTECT AGAINST HARM

ACTION	TRADE-OFF
<p>Congregations could organize opportunities for one-to-one conversations between LGBTQIA+ affirming individuals and those who hold traditionalist views so that people could share their personal stories and nurture relationships.</p>	<p>Participants will likely feel anxious or fearful.</p>
<p>Congregations could strengthen the counseling and mental health resources they provide to congregants.</p>	<p>Providing individual care does not address reduction of harm or the root causes of harm to individuals.</p>
<p>Congregations could ask their districts and networks to create resources for practicing concrete acts of love and prayer for friends and neighbors regardless of their beliefs and convictions.</p>	<p>Such activity could be perceived as avoidance of the core issues with which the church struggles. It may also be interpreted as biased to one particular perspective and, thus, coercive.</p>
<p>Clergy and worship leaders could work together to develop worship rites for the time before and after General Conference to prayerfully discern congregational decision-making.</p>	<p>Some may feel that worship is not the place to deal with these “political” issues.</p>
<p>Congregations could request their districts to contract with counselors to provide support for congregations where conflict exists among members and relationships are ruptured.</p>	<p>Conflict resolution could exacerbate raw emotions and drive members away from the church.</p>
<p>Other potential actions/ ideas?</p>	<p>Other trade-offs to consider?</p>

### ADDRESSING HARM TO LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

Protecting LGBTQIA+ youth from spiritual and physical harm is a concern for many in the UMC as bullying, family and church rejection, and suicide are realities for this group. What is our church's role in addressing these harms? How can we best serve and care for LGBTQIA+ youth?

## OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER AND QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- Many people perceive tension between younger and older generations about LGBTQIA+ inclusion and the ministry of the church. Who gets to decide the direction of the church — those who have spent decades building the denomination and protecting its structures, or those who are coming into leadership positions but have different values than their predecessors? How do we honor needs, contributions, and vulnerabilities of different generations?
- Many who are more conservative have strong religious convictions about marriage and sexuality. At the same time, many who are more progressive also have strong religious convictions about marriage and sexuality. What is our church's theology of sexuality? What might sexual integrity and faithfulness look like for both LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ Christians?

## SHARED VALUES & COMMON GROUND

Now that we have considered some approaches and options to thinking about finding our path in the UMC, let's give some consideration to these questions:

1. Were there particular areas of agreement or common ground in our dialogue?
2. What common values did we identify?
3. What were biblical and theological values you detected in our discussion?
4. What about tensions? Are there issues requiring more consideration?

## NEXT STEPS

Given the different viewpoints and experiences each of us has brought to this dialogue, the benefits and drawbacks we saw in each of the options, and our shared values, what next steps might we take to move forward on this issue?

Brainstorm some ideas for things we might do.

## FINAL PRAYER

Conclude the dialogue with a prayer giving thanks for the movement of the Holy Spirit during this important conversation and ask God's blessings on all participants, your congregation, the conference, and The United Methodist Church.

## POST-FORUM QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill out the questionnaire at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/UMCIssueGuide> or see your forum moderator for a printed version.



