

PETITIONS TO GENERAL CONFERENCE

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DIVERSE BELIEFS REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY - Approved

Financial Implications None

Rationale Since 1972 the United Methodist Church has taken increasingly firmer positions opposing non-heterosexual orientations. Attempting to make all United Methodists conform to traditional beliefs has not decreased denominational tension. This petition attempts to relocate decision making to the appropriate level, i.e. Annual Conference and Pastors, and ease tension.

Whereas the United Methodist Church has been gradually centralizing control in matters of ordination, candidacy, and pastoral authority as regards “self-avowed, practicing homosexuals,” and

Whereas the 2012 Book of Discipline (BoD) asserts that pastors have the authority to determine who to marry (¶1340.2a3) and Annual Conferences have the authority to determine who is qualified for ordination (¶1330, ¶1335), and

Whereas our Doctrinal Standards are silent on sexuality but explicit in quoting John Wesley that “As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think,” (BoD, ¶1102) and

Whereas scholars in the United Methodist and other Christian traditions have made coherent cases that loving, monogamous relationships including same-sex relationships can be affirmed without jeopardizing the authority of Scripture or “striking at the root of Christianity.”

Therefore, be it resolved that the Great Plains Annual Conference petition the 2016 General Conference to amend the Book of Discipline as follows:

1. Paragraph 161F: “...We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. **While a significant majority of United Methodists continue to hold the long-standing belief that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching, we acknowledge and respect differences in opinion on human homosexuality.** We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. 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. Paragraph 304.3: “While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world.
3. Paragraph 310.2d footnote 3: delete paragraphs 1-3, (ending with “...affirms its high standards) and 8-9 (from “The General Conference has made it clear...” and ending with “...against persons because they are single.”). The remaining footnote references Wesley’s Questions and the final two paragraphs.
4. Paragraph 2702.1: “1 A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶1370), local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶2702.4) with one or more of the following offenses: (a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in (b) crime; (c) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church; (d) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (e) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor; (f) child abuse; (g) sexual abuse; (h) sexual misconduct or (i) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; or (j) racial or gender discrimination.”

GEOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATION FOR ELECTION OF BISHOPS - Approved**Financial Implications** None

Rationale In addition to consideration for sex and gender diversity, there needs to be consideration for geographic and cultural diversity in the election of bishops.

Whereas The South Central Jurisdictional Conference has historically elected bishops equitably from the eight states within the jurisdictional boundaries. From 1968 to 1992, 11 bishops were elected from Texas annual conferences and 15 from the annual conferences in the other seven states.

Whereas However, there has been a significant shift in elections since 1992. Beginning in 1996 and through 2012, bishops have been elected from Texas annual conferences at nearly a three to one pace, with 11 bishops elected from Texas and just four from the rest of the Jurisdiction. Further highlighting this trend, since 2004, there have been 9 bishops elected from Texas and only one from any of the other seven states.

Whereas The result of this shift is that as of 2012 all 10 active bishops in the South Central Jurisdiction are from Texas annual conferences.

Whereas More troubling still is that the elections are further concentrated with the election of three bishops each from only three annual conferences: Texas, North Texas and Southwest Texas. The Central Texas Annual Conference currently has one active bishop serving in the Jurisdiction. Rio Grande and Northwest Texas Annual Conferences, like the rest of the annual conferences in the Jurisdiction, have none.

Whereas there must be checks and balances in place to ensure that the culture and value diversity of the entire Jurisdiction is represented in the College of Bishops.

Therefore Be It Resolved That ¶ 405.2 (a) shall be amended to read:

“Jurisdictional and central conference delegates, in electing bishops, shall give due consideration to the inclusiveness of The United Methodist Church with respect to sex, race, geography, cultural values, and national origin...”

HOLY CONFERENCING FOR THE ELECTION OF BISHOPS - Approved**Financial Implications** None

Rationale This petition encourages Holy Conferencing over political strategy in the election of bishops. The last three quadrennia have seen a significant change in climate in the South Central Jurisdictional Conference with these important elections.

Whereas There has been a significant concentration of power in the South Central Jurisdictional Conference since 2004 resulting today in all 10 active bishops being elected from Texas annual conferences. Further, nine of the active Bishops were elected (three each) from just three annual conferences: Texas, North Texas and Southwest Texas.

Whereas This concentration of bishops correlates with literally hundreds of votes at a time being cast for non-candidates on episcopal ballots during the 2004, 2008 and 2012 Jurisdictional Conferences. A non-candidate is someone who was not previously nominated and receives fewer than 10 votes on a ballot. (Ten is the threshold for a “nomination by ballot” according to ¶ 405.1). There may be many reasons why someone would vote for a non-candidate and it has been going on for many years — but not in these large numbers.

Whereas Intentionally voting for a non-candidate on an episcopal ballot statistically strengthens a single vote. This limits votes going to your candidate’s “competitors.”

Whereas When there is more than one bishop to elect, voting rules require that each ballot have the full complement of names in order for the ballot to be considered valid. For instance, if there are three bishops to elect, a ballot with only one or two names is thrown out.

Whereas It is not in keeping with the spirit of the rules to pick one legitimate candidate and then intentionally waste the other one or two votes by casting them for a non-candidate who has no chance of election. This is no different than

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leaving names blank, which should make the ballot invalid. This is especially impactful on the first ballot to artificially place someone's name higher in the vote tally. These large numbers of "wasted" votes, if placed with legitimate second and third choice candidates, could easily change the initial rankings and thereby change the outcome of elections.

Whereas Intentionally voting for non-candidates puts political strategy ahead of Holy Conferencing. Voting for two or three candidates on a single ballot is a time honored tradition that provides a better platform to lift up leaders for our church. If voting for only one candidate at a time were more beneficial, the rules would reflect that.

Therefore Be It Resolved That ¶ 405.2 (c) be added to read: "Prior to casting an episcopal ballot for more than one candidate, the presiding bishop is to remind the delegates, 'In the Wesleyan tradition of Holy Conferencing, please do not intentionally vote for non-candidates for strategic purposes.' "

LIMIT THE NUMBER OF BISHOPS FROM INDIVIDUAL ANNUAL CONFERENCES - Approved

Financial Implications None

Rationale There need to be checks and balances to prevent the majority of bishops in a Jurisdiction from being elected from only a few annual conferences, as is the case currently in the South Central Jurisdiction.

Whereas The South Central Jurisdictional Conference has historically elected bishops equitably from the eight states within the jurisdictional boundaries. From 1968 to 1992, 11 bishops were elected from Texas annual conferences and 15 from the annual conferences in the other seven states.

Whereas However, there has been a significant shift in elections since 1992. Beginning in 1996 and through 2012, bishops have been elected from Texas annual conferences at nearly a three to one pace, with 11 bishops elected from Texas and just four from the rest of the Jurisdiction. Further highlighting this trend, since 2004, there have been nine bishops elected from Texas and only one from any of the other seven states.

Whereas The result of this shift is that as of 2012 all 10 active bishops in the South Central Jurisdiction are from Texas annual conferences.

Whereas More troubling still is that the elections are further concentrated with the election of 3 bishops each from only 3 annual conferences: Texas, North Texas, and Southwest Texas. The Central Texas Annual Conference currently has one active bishop serving in the Jurisdiction. Rio Grande and Northwest Texas Annual Conferences, like the rest of the annual conferences in the Jurisdiction, have none.

Whereas There must be checks and balances in place to ensure that the culture and value diversity of the entire Jurisdiction is represented in the College of Bishops.

Therefore Be It Resolved That ¶ 405.2 (d) shall be added to read:

"There shall be no more than two active bishops elected from any one annual conference serving in a jurisdiction at any given time."