

# Unity Task Force Meeting

## Dialogue with Renewal Leaders

**Meeting with The Council of Bishops Unity Task Force**  
**Lake Junaluska, N.C.**  
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## Biographies of Renewal Delegation

**William J. Abraham** is the Albert Cook Outler Professor of Theology and Wesley Studies and Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas. He is widely known as a theologian, philosopher, and scholar of Methodism, most recently as co-editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). He is a member of the Southwest Texas Conference and is a United Methodist Representative to the Faith and Order Committee of the National Council of Churches and has served on the General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Concerns. He is on the teaching staff of Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas and is extensively involved in missionary training in Malaysia, Costa Rica, Kazakhstan, Nepal, and Romania.

**Larry R. Baird** is in his seventh year as District Superintendent for the Cornerstone District of the Western New York Conference. He has served on the General Board of Discipleship (Curriculum Review Committee, Ethnic Minority Local Church Committee), the Northeastern Jurisdiction Episcopacy Committee and New ACT—the body responsible for enabling leaders in four Annual Conferences to create a new upstate New York Conference.

**Eddie Fox** is one of Methodism's foremost evangelists. He has been the World Director of Evangelism for the World Methodist Council since 1987. His efforts at linking Methodists through the "Connecting Congregations" program have resulted in some 140 New Testament-modeled partnerships between established churches and newly formed congregations. Dr. Fox also directs the activities of sixteen regional evangelists worldwide and has been a strong advocate for training indigenous people to reach their fellow citizens with the gospel. A member of the Holston Conference, Dr. Fox has served as a General Conference Delegate for the past two decades.

**Tom Harrison** is in his seventeenth year as the Senior Pastor of Asbury United Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The congregation has a membership of 7,677, worship attendance of 3,400, and pays close to a million dollars in apportionments. Dr. Harrison has been a General Conference delegate and alternate. He currently serves as chairperson of the Oklahoma Annual Conference Council on Finance and Administration.

**Liza Kittle** is a member of Trinity on the Hill United Methodist Church in Augusta, Georgia, is the current President of the RENEW Network, the women's ministry program arm of Good News. She has been an active member in her local church as a United Methodist Women leader for fifteen years and then as a founding leader of Women of the Vine, the current women's ministry at Trinity. Liza has represented her local church as a lay delegate to the North Georgia Annual Conference for the past five years. She has served as a member of the Renewal and Reform Coalition for the past two General Conferences. Liza feels a passionate calling to minister to the women of the United Methodist Church and to be an advocate for the establishment of alternative women's ministry programs within the denomination.

**Tom Lambrecht** has been in ordained ministry since 1982 in the Wisconsin Annual Conference. He has served as senior pastor of a large church, medium-size church, and three-point charge, as well as associate pastor of a large church, all in Wisconsin. He was elected as an alternate delegate to Jurisdictional Conference in 1992, 1996, and 2000. His annual conference involvements include: Chairperson of the District Council on Ministries, Chairperson of the Conference Hunger Task Force, Vice-chairperson of the Conference Board of Discipleship, Registrar and member of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, member of the Conference Evangelism Committee, member of the Conference Mission Motivation Committee, member of the Conference Board of Church and Society,

and member of the Rural Crisis Task Force. Rev. Lambrecht has also served as a member of the Board of Directors of Good News since 1993, holding the position as Chairperson from 2005-08. He served as the coordinator of the Renewal and Reform Coalition efforts at the 2008 General Conference.

**Senator Patricia Miller** has been the Executive Director of The Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church since 1997 and has served as a General Conference delegate from South Indiana five times. She has served as a lay member to her Annual Conference since 1972. For the past nine years she has been a member of the Executive Committee of the World Methodist Council. Senator Miller served as a member of the Indiana House of Representatives in 1982-83. Patricia became a State Senator in 1983 and continues to serve in that capacity.

**Rob Renfro** is the President and Publisher of Good News and previously served as the Chairperson of the Confessing Movement Board of Directors. He is the Pastor of Adult Discipleship at The Woodlands United Methodist Church, north of Houston, Texas—a congregation of 8300 members. Rob speaks to five hundred men weekly in a men's ministry he created called Quest and is most proud of the thirty homes which Quest has built for persons living in poverty in the desert slums of Juarez, Mexico. Rob has previously served on the General Board of Church and Society.

**Chuck Savage** is the Senior Pastor at Kingswood United Methodist Church in Dunwoody, Georgia. He has been in full-time ministry for sixteen years, the first seven as a local pastor. Chuck graduated from the Candler School of Theology in 2001 and was ordained as an elder in 2004. He was elected as a delegate to the 2008 General Conference and currently serves on the Board of Trustees of the Board of Church and Society. Prior to entering the ministry, Chuck spent 32 years with IBM where he served in many capacities. Upon departure from IBM, he was the General Manager of a business unit that dealt with some of the corporation's largest customers across the world.

**Steve Wende** is the Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Houston, one of our denomination's leading congregations. It was the first large church in Houston to stand against the Ku Klux Klan and then to integrate, and now draws members from all backgrounds, races, and economic classes. Its services are telecast live throughout the Houston area every Sunday morning, with an estimated sixty thousand homes watching. Steve has served this church for the past eight years, has a daughter who just graduated from Duke and is also a member of the Texas Conference, and has served as a General Conference delegate five times.

**Alice Wolfe** has served as a pastor in the West Ohio Conference for twelve years and is currently serving as Senior Pastor of Anna United Methodist Church. She served as a delegate to the 2008 General Conference and to the North Central Jurisdictional Conference in 2008 and 2004, where she also served on the Committee of Nominations. Alice has also been an active member of West Ohio's Unity Task Force since 2005.

**Steve Wood** is the Senior Pastor of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church, a 9000 member congregation in the Greater Atlanta area. Since 1983, he has served as a church planter, the pastor of a multi-ethnic church, and the pastor of two of the largest churches in Methodism. Steve has served in various positions of leadership at the Conference, Jurisdictional, and General Church level and as a delegate to both General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference. Steve has led mission teams to eleven countries and has taught in leadership conferences and Methodist seminaries in Venezuela, Costa Rica, Nigeria, Brazil, and Monterrey, Mexico.

## **I. OPENING STATEMENT**

We are so grateful for the opportunity to have this discussion. Speaking on behalf of the others invited to be here today, we are deeply appreciative of the initiative the Bishops have taken to explore the critical issue of unity. It is crucially important to us to lift up the unity of the church. We love the United Methodist Church, are committed to it, spend time defending it, and have served and supported it throughout our professional lives. We have come both to listen and to speak, and to join with the Bishops in seeking to keep our hearts open to the Spirit throughout the afternoon – for division within the Body of Christ breaks the heart of God and weakens our witness in the world.

Please know that we have come to be honorable partners in this process. Whether this conversation goes beyond this day or not, we cannot now say, but we seek to open ourselves not just to the Spirit but also to you, our Bishops. We want to be as honest with you as we can possibly be about tension points we see within the denomination, about dangers our church may face if they are not addressed, and about ways forward through them. We do this for the sake of working together so that these points of difficulty can be addressed. We also know that you have perspectives you would share with us, and we will be honest and thoughtful in our responses, and will handle information shared in this conversation within the boundaries established before we leave.

I think it important also to say that we do not perceive ourselves as representing a fringe group. As we think of the people we serve, they form the core of the people in the pews: who pay the bills, build new congregations, support missions, love the Lord and love His church. While they form a working majority at General Conference, the numbers they represent in the local church are even more significant. Therefore, it is doubly important to us that we are here, so that we can reflect to you with a significant degree of accuracy the feelings and thoughts of much of the heart of the membership of the United Methodist Church.

Again, thank you for this opportunity and your hospitality.

## II. THE THEOLOGY OF UNITY

We come here representing a network of renewal groups some of which have been in operation since the nineteen sixties. We do not see ourselves as a minority within United Methodism. We are rank and file United Methodists, representing hosts of folk across the church as a whole who yearn for an authentic expression of the Christian faith, living and active today. We intentionally reach back into the classical faith and heritage of the church as we work enthusiastically for a better future.

We are not a monolithic group. We are committed to the mainstream generous orthodoxy of the church catholic and of classical Methodism. The focus of renewal movements varies, of course, according to the renewal movement. We have worked diligently for a deeper commitment to and immersion in scripture, to the retrieval of our doctrinal heritage in the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith, to the development of comprehensive mission that includes evangelism, disciple-making, church planting, social engagement, and to a fresh and continuous Pentecost in our midst. More specifically, we are committed to the transmission of the Christian faith as bequeathed to us through the Wesleys and Methodism. We believe that Methodism has inherited a viable and precious version of the Gospel (in its doctrines and in its practices) that was birthed of the Spirit and that is vital to the church catholic in the future. Of course, folk disagree on what they think that legacy is, but we cannot but be faithful to the light as we see it.

We have no interest in dividing the church. Our aim is the renewal of the church not its division. It is daft to seek to fix or renew something in order to divide it. On the contrary, division would be a very messy and unmanageable development. It will consume precious energy and massive resources that we want to use in sustaining healthy churches, in renewing the denomination, and in carrying out mission and evangelism. We have in fact been vital in enabling many United Methodists to stay within our church, especially those who have felt alienated for various reasons (some healthy and some unhealthy). We love our church – warts and all – and have absolutely no interest in causing schism.

We believe that our unity is both a gift and task. It is a work of the Spirit, and it demands constant effort. Unity is fragile today. The evidence from other mainline Protestant traditions (Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian) is obvious and compelling on this front. We support both the teaching and canon law of our *Book of Discipline* on homosexual practice. Contrary to what is often thought, this is not the primary issue for us. It has been made a primary issue by those desiring to change our teaching and discipline; we cannot ignore it because it simply keeps recurring again and again. Our primary

commitments are scriptural, doctrinal, and missional. We place these in a theological vision of the Methodist Tradition that is committed to the divine revelation enshrined in scripture. So the bigger issues are those of faithfulness to our Lord and to the church as a community of Word and Sacrament rightly ordered in faithfulness. These are not matters that can be resolved by political slogans like “the extreme center” or “the middle way” or “inclusivism.” Theological and missional integrity under the authority of divine revelation are vital to us.

We are realists about the future. Should the worst happen and The United Methodist Church go the way of the Episcopal Church and the Lutheran Church on homosexual practice, we will not stand idly by. We feel a clear responsibility on two fronts. First, we have a responsibility to take care of the millions of sheep that will find this development unacceptable. Second, we have a responsibility to preserve a living edition of the work of the Holy Spirit developed doctrinally and evangelistically within Methodism across the centuries. Should these necessitate the formation of a new Methodist/Wesleyan church, we will deal with that if and when it arises. If necessary, we will take on that responsibility in fear and trembling, trusting in providence to supply what we need in that hour.

In the meantime, we would be cheered if the leadership of The United Methodist Church, not least its bishops, would acknowledge our place in the church as a whole and find ways to harvest the best fruits of our work and ministries across the last generation.

### III. TENSION POINTS OUTSIDE OF GENERAL CONFERENCE

As we in the renewal groups seek what will make for unity in the church, we find a number of tension points that we believe are disruptive of the unity that we all seek.

- A. Some leaders of the church seem to be promoting an agenda of changing the United Methodist Church's position on human sexuality. This is being done both overtly and more subtly. Examples include the following:

1. Bishops who speak at Reconciling Ministries events, including celebrations at Reconciling Congregations within their annual conferences.
2. Bishops who participated in an "extraordinary" ordination of a self-avowed practicing homosexual person who was denied acceptance into ministry in the UMC.
3. A bishop taking the microphone on the floor of General Conference and haranguing the delegates about how our votes on this issue were contrary to the will of God.
4. The utilization of "testimonies" by self-avowed practicing homosexuals during worship services and other programs sponsored by boards and agencies and annual conferences, in an attempt to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.
5. Placing self-avowed practicing homosexuals or vocal proponents of the acceptance of homosexual practice in positions of high visibility in the church, for example music leaders at General Conference.
6. Articles printed or promoted by general boards and agencies contradicting United Methodist positions, such as a recent article on the General Board of Church and Society website that promoted the acceptance of sexual relationships outside of heterosexual marriage, with no commitment or covenant expected.

These and many similar activities are corrosive to the unity of The United Methodist Church. They represent a minority of the church attempting to force its agenda on the majority. We believe the leaders of the church, including its bishops, should promote and defend the church's position on issues, not a minority agenda that alienates people in the pews and fosters division in the church.

- B. On the flip side of the coin, there is often a deafening silence when it comes to promoting and defending the United Methodist Church's position on doctrinal and social issues that are controversial in the church. There have been times when a bishop has spoken out in defense of the church's position, but then pressured by colleagues into subsequent silence. It seems that it is acceptable for bishops and others to speak out against the church's position, but it is not acceptable for bishops and others to promote the church's position.
- C. It is our perception that the renewal group constituency—theologically orthodox, evangelical, or conservative—is not adequately represented on boards and agencies and other denominational

decision-making bodies. Several general boards have fewer than 10% of their directors voting in a theologically conservative direction, whereas recent Barna surveys and others have identified that over 50% of United Methodists consider themselves to be conservative theologically. Numerous surveys over the past 20 years have demonstrated that General Conference delegates, general board members, and agency staff are not (as a group) representative of the opinions of grassroots United Methodists. The Byzantine nominations process used to constitute boards and agencies, including the Connectional Table, are so convoluted that it is nearly impossible for us to gain fair representation on these decision-making bodies. Even within various boards, classically orthodox members are often excluded from strategic committee assignments.

There is great concern about diversity of externals, such as race, gender, age, or those differently abled, but there is very little attention paid to insuring the presence and participation of those committed to the historic doctrines and mission of the UMC. This lack of proportional representation leads denominational decision-making bodies to speak and act in conflict with the beliefs and values of many grassroots United Methodists, resulting in a widespread lack of trust by laity in these church bodies. Inasmuch as bishops are heavily involved in the nominations process at the Jurisdictional level and at the various boards and agencies, we believe that bishops could exercise leadership in assuring that orthodox United Methodists are proportionally represented at the various tables where the current and future ministry of our church is being set.

- D. To us, there seems to be a misuse of the principle of accountability within the covenant of ordained ministry. On the one hand, there is little or no accountability exercised over bishops, elders or deacons who contradict the church's doctrinal standards or moral positions. On the other hand, there have been instances over the past ten years of leaders using the complaint process to silence or expel classically orthodox voices in some annual conferences. While we sympathize with the desire to eliminate the guaranteed appointment, we are afraid that its elimination will provide one more tool for the marginalization of solid, loyal classically orthodox clergy within annual conferences.

These are some of the items we have identified as leading to a fracturing of our United Methodist body and increasing the tensions that lead to disunity among us. They are reflective of the polarization of our church and society at large. They also reflect a struggle for power within the church that seems to be more about a certain agenda or vision of the church, than about promoting the unity and mission of the church. We are alarmed that some pursuing this power and control agenda disregard the consequences of their approach to the unity and vitality of the church. It seems as if they would rather have their way in the church, even if it leads to widespread membership losses or even outright separation.

#### **IV. TENSION POINTS AT GENERAL CONFERENCE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

We as pastors, laity, delegates, and renewal group leaders recognize the many administrative hours and great financial resources are required to plan and convene General Conference every four years. We also seek to be good stewards of all God's resources and to help make this global assembly an efficient and effective time of substantive legislative action through holy conferencing, spiritual renewal, and vision casting for the future. We present to you some areas of tension with the process of General Conference that we believe hinder the effectiveness, efficiency, and fruitfulness of this historic body.

##### **A. Sufficient time for debate and legislative action.**

While we understand that worship is a vital part of General Conference and that some speakers and reports are informative, paragraphs 15 and 16 of the Discipline state that the responsibilities of the Conference are primarily legislative. We believe that sufficient time for debate and action on all the legislation that delegates are charged to address should take precedent over other matters such as special reports, guests, and speeches. This was especially evident at the 2008 General Conference in light of the fact that the conference was shortened by one full day. Some examples of problems associated with time constraints included:

1. Near the end of the 2008 GC, many pieces of legislation which had been pulled from the consent calendar were placed back on the consent calendar without time for delegates to know which petitions were affected by this action. Much work goes into getting legislative pieces pulled from consent calendars in order for them to be discussed before the entire body. Suspending this important tool for delegates due to time constraints seems to violate the integrity of the legislative process.
2. Towards the end of the 2008 GC, the numbers of speeches and length of speeches allowed for legislation were shortened due to time constraints, leaving many important pieces of legislation, such as constitutional changes, without proper debate before voting. Only a few minutes of debate were given for important constitutional amendments.

##### **B. Placement of "controversial votes" in the calendar agenda.**

We believe that placement of controversial issues on the calendar agenda should be done with great care in order maximize the number of delegates present at optimal times of the day for attentive and thorough debate.

1. While it is each delegate's responsibility to be present for all business conducted, it is sometimes difficult for everyone to return on time. It appeared to some delegates and observers that many of the votes on controversial issues took place immediately after a break time or meal recess, when the entire body of delegates had not returned to their seats. The intense daily attendance requirements (some 14-16 hours) over eleven continuous days is grueling for anyone, especially international delegates. Calendar placement to ensure maximum participation and attentiveness should be prioritized over celebrations, speeches, and non-essential matters.

2. Arrangements should allow international delegates to remain until the end of General Conference. Some important and controversial legislative issues were scheduled on the last day of conference when many international delegates had already left. Over 100 African delegates missed the votes during the final afternoon on the issue of the church's continued participation with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice due to early travel departures. The African delegates, unlike the U.S. churches, could not afford the expense of sending alternates. All delegates should be required to stay for the entire duration of General Conference and special consideration should be given to international delegates to ensure their attendance.

**C. Translation concerns for delegates who do not speak English.**

1. Delegates who do not speak English should have an equal opportunity to review documents before the start of General Conference. This can only happen if General Conference materials are translated and provided to those delegates in advance, allowing for an adequate amount of time for review. Financial resources must be provided to ensure accurate and timely translations. Improper translations don't just create problems for non-English speaking delegates, but for all delegates. If we do not allow time for review of these documents, particularly those related to voting procedures and issues, our actions imply that the opinions and input of our international brothers and sisters is unimportant. It is in the best interest of The United Methodist Church to ensure that every delegate is voting based on a complete understanding and prayerful consideration of the issues presented as well as the procedures followed.
2. Providing translators at all legislative committees as well as general sessions should be a priority. In at least one case during General Conference 2008, one legislative committee had to wait two and a half hours for a translator to arrive.
3. In other cases, some translators were not fluent in the dialects spoken by our delegates. This caused confusion and misunderstanding when words in different dialects had different meanings. The use of double negatives when voting caused much confusion and should be avoided. In some languages, double negatives cancel themselves out, in others, they emphasize meaning, and in all, they are confusing.
4. Prior to voting, non-English speaking delegates should be given the opportunity to ask questions if clarification about issues and procedures is needed. In 2008, there were constant and consistent complaints about translations into certain languages while others went well.
5. Non-English speaking delegates should be equally informed. According to the 2009 Rules of Order, "The Commission shall take the necessary measures to assure full participation of all General Conference delegates including but not limited to providing accommodation for language and physical challenges.

#### D. Protests and violations of the bar of General Conference.

##### Rule 11: Bar of Conference

***“The bar of the conference shall provide for the integrity of the General Conference. It is for delegates, pages, and others who have been granted access to the area for General Conference business as provided through the Rules or through the suspension of the Rules.”***  
**Suspension of the rules requires a two-thirds vote of the delegates.**

1. Because representatives of our total connection come together only at General Conference what is done and what is allowed to occur at the conference presents a dramatic statement about the unity of the church—and how those presiding over the conference understand unity and holy conferencing. In the past protests have been allowed on the floor of General Conference both in session and in recess and these actions have broken the rules and the spirit required for mutual trust and true unity. Allowing anyone on the conference floor without the prior consent of two-thirds of the voting delegates is in direct violation of the rules by which all General Conference delegates agree to abide.
2. When protests that violated General Conference rules were allowed, it gave the impression that those who allowed the protests condoned both the action and the message of the protest. And the message, intended or not, is that the presiding officers of the conference are no longer functioning as non-biased arbiters—but as part of an agenda belonging to a special interest group. The actions that occurred at the last several General Conferences appeared preferential to one group at the expense of the integrity of unity at General Conference.
3. The question remains of who and how the protest was allowed to take place. Certainly, this raises questions of unity, holy conferencing, integrity, and trust of the whole process. Those of us who wished to obey the rules were not offered an opportunity to present an opposing viewpoint.
4. If protests or demonstrations are to be allowed on the floor of General Conference then the rules should be changed and other groups, including renewal groups, should be allowed equal opportunity to conduct their own “silent witness”. However, the renewal groups have no intention of staging a protest at present as we believe violating the rules of the General Conference are not conducive to holy conferencing. We also don’t desire to usurp the trust of our fellow delegates or desecrate the altar of God. We are asking that no protests be allowed on the conference floor without the authorization from the voting body of General Conference. Even “reserve delegates are to function within the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference (Rules 27 and 31)” and do not have access to the floor except as allowed by rule.
5. Order within the conference facility should be maintained at all times so observers are not distracting delegates from doing the work of General Conference. After the vote was passed to maintain the current language regarding homosexual practice, observers in the

stands began singing and shouting so that the delegates at the back of the conference floor couldn't hear the comments or instructions of the presiding elder. When order cannot be maintained, the rules allow for: "The presiding officer [to] have the right to recess the session of the body at any time at the presiding officer's discretion and to reconvene at such time as the presiding officer shall announce. Consistent with the spirit of ¶721 of the Book of Discipline, in rare circumstances the presiding officer shall also have the right to stipulate that the session shall reconvene in closed session with only delegates, authorized personnel, and authorized guests permitted to attend such a session following recess (Section VII.E.1.)". We believe the use of these rules would improve the integrity of the conference.

6. Another violation of the bar of the conference was the distribution of a list of endorsements for judicial council elections. The distribution of such materials was a clear breach of the rules of General Conference.
7. All efforts should be made by the presiding officers of General Conference to ensure that holy conferencing, unity, integrity, trust, and rules of order are followed to strengthen the entire legislative process of General Conference. This will help us to fulfill the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

#### **E. Leadership and comments of Bishops.**

Part of our covenanting together for holy conferencing is to follow Robert's Rules of Order, which calls for the presiding officer to remain unbiased and impartial when facilitating discussions. We very much appreciate the fine work that was done by the bishops who spoke to the conference to not "take sides" or use their position of influence to try to sway the body's decisions.

However, there were exceptions. Comments that are condescending, scolding, or judgmental to the delegates who uphold the current language in the *Discipline* simply should not be made by our Episcopal leaders. Elders and deacons in the United Methodist Church are *required* to vow to God and the United Methodist Church that they "approve of our Church government and polity" and "will support and maintain them" (¶ 330.5d and ¶ 336). We deserve to be treated with the same respect as those who disagree with the church's stated position.

#### **F. Influence of some boards and agencies over General Conference.**

Many delegates and observers have expressed frustration at how a few of the boards and agencies of the church (particularly the General Board of Church and Society, the General Board of Global Ministries, and the Women's Division) seem to control much of the legislative process of General Conference, especially at the committee and sub-committee level. Several examples seem to bear this out.

**1. Women’s Division Orientation for female delegates.**

While this orientation for female delegates should be an impartial time of fellowship and general information concerning the process of General Conference, it has been observed that the Women’s Division spends the majority of the time telling the delegates their positions on key votes and also coaching them on getting particular delegates in positions of leadership in committees and sub-committees. These practices are a clear violation of the spirit of holy conferencing, especially when only 15% of the women in the UMC are involved in United Methodist Women. (Numbers from GCFA data are available.) This puts women who are advocating for the establishment of alternative women’s ministries within the UMC at a clear disadvantage right out of the starting gate of General Conference.

**2. Unlimited access of board and agency staff during committee meetings.**

Many delegates and observers have reported that several staff persons of the boards and agencies routinely sit right at the periphery of committee and sub-committee groups and give unhindered input in legislative discussions. These persons are strategically placed throughout the legislative process, almost guaranteeing the endorsement of petitions authored by their perspective board or agency, clearly an unfair advantage to other individuals and groups at General Conference.

**3. Time spent on the voluminous Book of Resolutions.**

In 1960, the Book of Discipline carried only 6 resolutions. A separate Book of Resolutions has been published after every General Conference since the 1968 church merger. It has grown exponentially over the years and become the mouthpiece for political and social advocacy for a few of the boards and agencies of the UMC. By 1980, there were 221 pages to this book. By 1984, it had doubled to 451 pages. By 2008, we are at 1009 pages! Countless hours are spent at General Conference on the political and social agendas of a few boards and agencies. Their success is staggering and warrants examination.

In the 2008 Book of Resolutions, out of 352 resolutions passed, the origin of these legislative pieces are the Board of Church and Society (31.5%), the General Board of Global Ministries (27.6%), and the Women’s Division (8.5%). These three groups work on many of these resolutions together, so together these three boards are responsible for 67.6% of the total Book of Resolutions. The policies, programs, and resolutions of these agencies tend to be politically partisan, theologically “progressive”, and socially liberal. When you add three other boards which also work closely with these three agencies (General Commission on Christian Unity, and Inter-Religious Concerns, the General Commission on Religion and Race, and the General Commission on the Status of Women), these six groups are responsible for 79.5% of the entire volume. Resolutions authored by individuals and conferences have a successful passage rate of only 7.4% each. There is only one resolution authored by a local church. (A complete report of this statistical analysis is available.)

Perhaps limiting the scope and influence of a few boards and agencies over the process of General Conference would enable the church to participate in the legislative outcomes of the conference in a more equitable fashion.

## **V. WORST CASE SCENARIOS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM**

Our intent is not to be caustic, hostile or divisive; but simply to be honest. We acknowledge that our major problem within our local congregations is not with the practice of homosexuality, but with heterosexuality run amuck. Nevertheless, we strongly support our current stance on this issue. Simply put: we welcome all people, but we do not approve all behavior.

If there was a change in the position of our denomination in regards to the practice of homosexuality no longer being incompatible with Christian teaching, it obviously would have a devastating impact on The United Methodist Church. The experience of the Episcopal Church in America (and that of a Presbyterian congregation in Tulsa which withdrew from their denomination over this issue) is an example and should serve as a warning to us. Very serious and dire consequences would in all likelihood ensue for The United Methodist Church as well. Membership and worship attendance loss, apportionments withheld and unpaid, and litigation would occur in local congregations and within entire Annual Conferences. It is not only large congregations which would be adversely affected by a change in our stance, but churches (and Conferences) of all sizes.

An interesting book which predicts the ultimate demise of The UMC is Lyle Schaller's [The Ice Cube is Melting](#). He believes that our differences are so overwhelming that it is only a matter of "when?" we will split, not "if" we will split. It is our hope that this will not happen.

At a meeting the last week in August, the senior pastors of 92 of the 100 largest United Methodist Churches in the United States had a discussion about this matter in relationship to General Conference. These churches have over 150,000 in weekly worship attendance, and pay between \$45-50 million in apportionments each year. While we vary significantly in ministry and theological styles, we left that meeting with a definite consensus that it is imperative that the 2012 General Conference focus on our pathways in worship, prayer, and mission planning, and to defer all legislation concerning human sexuality.

In the strongest possible language we can use, we would ask that the Bishops actively work to help avoid changing the current stance on sexuality.

## **VI. CLOSING STATEMENT-THE CENTER OF GOD’S WILL AND A WAY FORWARD**

Again, we want to thank you for the invitation to dialogue and to discuss issues that are dear to all of our hearts.

Hopefully, you have heard how much all of us and those we represent love the United Methodist Church and our Wesleyan heritage. We are committed to preserving the wonderful gift God gave the world through the Wesleyan revival – its doctrines, disciplines and spirit.

How do we move forward as a church together in mission?

One way that we are convinced will not work for the long term is finding “middle ground.” We disagree with that concept (1) theologically and (2) practically.

(1) Theologically, the goal should not be to take a poll of all views within the church and land somewhere in the middle of the most extreme views – mistakenly thinking that such an approach is unity. It is not. It’s little more than a politically expedient way to ignore the deep issues that divide us.

The goal is to be faithful to what God has revealed. Where we in the renewal movements are wrong, we want to be corrected. Where we are right, we cannot deny what God has said simply because others see matters differently.

Though our disagreements as a church often center on sexuality, we know that the real issues that divide us are much deeper and more important – issues such as the authority of the Scriptures, the present work of the Holy Spirit, and the uniqueness of Christ (whether his work on the cross is the sole means of salvation for all the world). Even on matters we consider essential, we know that United Methodists are not of one mind. And our differences on these issues do raise the question of what kind of unity is truly possible for the people called Methodist.

We can disagree amicably and with respect. We can look for points of agreement and celebrate those. And we can believe the best about each other. But our goal is not to find a middle ground. Our goal is for the church theologically and missionally to be faithful to what God has revealed and to live in the center of God’s will.

(2) Practically, we are uncomfortable with the concept of finding middle ground because we don’t believe that’s what the other side desires. In Pittsburgh the motif that was chosen by the Reconciling Movement was “like water on a rock.” It’s a great metaphor and one that is telling. The goal of the

Reconciling Movement is not to agree to disagree – it's to wear away at least some of the long-standing, traditional Christian beliefs regarding human sexuality. Simply stated, it's to change the views which have been in The Discipline for decades and in the Church for centuries.

Any movement away from the current positions and towards what some might describe as middle ground will simply create a new starting point for further dialogue – again with the stated goal of trying to reach new middle ground. Only this time we will begin even further from where the church has always been theologically and closer to a view that the majority of United Methodists hold to be incompatible with Christian teaching.

Practically, finding middle ground will become nothing more than a series of steps, with the goal of each time taking us further from traditional beliefs and closer to views that the church has rejected. Like water on a rock, the ultimate goal is to wear away our resistance to a cultural flood that rejects traditional Christian teaching. And the other side will not be satisfied until this end has been reached.

We don't fault those with whom we disagree for promoting their beliefs. They have every right to do so. But we're not naive. "Middle ground" is only a step toward changing the church's views and it's best to admit so at present and acknowledge that we can't take that journey together.

How do we move forward?

One way is to watch our language. It's hard to believe we can move forward together when we are likened to the KKK by persons representing the other side. It's hard to believe we can work together when we are called racists as we were at General Conference. Or when Bishops refer to us as sinners because we have voted our conscience.

I respectfully ask that if leaders of our renewal groups have ever used derogatory language to refer to persons whose beliefs or practices differ from ours that I be given that information. I will personally ask them to apologize and make whatever amends are necessary.

How we can move forward together?

The best way I know is to agree that The Book of Discipline will be our guide and for our Bishops not only to enforce it but also promote it. It should not fall upon the renewal groups to defend and promote the position of the church regarding sexuality or any issue. That is the charge given to our Episcopal leaders. And yet, when have we ever heard our Bishops give a thoughtful, substantive defense and rationale for

our views? The loudest voices are those that speak in favor of changing the church's position. That does not create unity; and it does not assure our church members that the leadership of the church represents them and their beliefs.

Finally, unity would be greatly helped by a moratorium on the issue of sexuality at General Conference. The renewal groups do not bring up this issue. We would be happy never to discuss it again. Our Discipline holds a gracious and biblical position. The only reason the church is divided on this issue is because various groups repeatedly and passionately try to change the church's views. If we bemoan the fact that our time at General Conference is consumed with this issue every four years and that we should "major on the majors" instead of the "minors" that divide us, let us ask those who force this issue upon us at every General Conference, not to insist on dividing us with the promotion of an agenda that the church has rejected for forty years.

Again, we are grateful for the invitation to meet with you. And we pray God's wisdom and courage for you as you move forward.