

# Discernment Meeting

February 18, 2024

Discernment in the midst of disagreement requires empathy.

**Discernment** is important in the church when facing really big decisions. It also takes time, patience, humility, letting go of control, and being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Important questions in Discernment include.

Who are we and what is God calling us to be?

Discernment...

...Is naming our FEARS.

# FEARS

- Our ministries would be diminished
- Others will not feel welcomed
- Lose current pastors
- We would be exclusive and not inclusive
- Lose members and pastors
- Consequences of unfaithfulness
- Following the world and not the word.

Discernment...

...Is naming our HOPES.

# HOPES

From February 18 meeting

- Get past the situation and distraction
- Spiritual growth, unity, and harmony
- Revival
- Renewed trust in leadership
- Renewed sense of trust in the denomination
- Rise above differences and focus on love
- Base decisions on will of God
- God will take care of us
- Honoring God
- God will lead our decision and soften hearts
- Continue current leadership
- Keep sense of family

# JOHN 17:20-23

[Jesus prayed, ] “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, **that they may all be one**. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, **that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**”

Jesus is praying that the church be completely one so that this witness to the world would be the evidence of the truth of Jesus' ministry and that the Father loves the world just as the Father loves Jesus.



There will be opportunity for  
questions afterwards.

What does it mean to be United  
Methodist  
and how did we get here?

# HOW Did we get here?

Methodists have struggled to hold together the tensions inherent in Wesleyan theology without simply embodying one end or the other. Therefore, we have always had room for traditional, progressive and centric people and will continue to do so in the future.

We have always lived at the intersections of American religious life—evangelical/mainline, piety/social justice, authority/democracy.

We are a connectional, global, democratic church of 12 million people.

# John Wesley

“the distinguishing marks of a methodist”

“The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or of another, are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever, therefore, imagines that a Methodist is a man of such or such an opinion, is grossly ignorant of the whole affair; he mistakes the truth totally...”

# John Wesley

“the distinguishing marks of a methodist”

“We believe, indeed, that ‘all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God;’ and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels. We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish Church. We believe Christ to be the eternal, supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians...”

# John Wesley

“the distinguishing marks of a methodist”

“But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think. So that whatsoever they are, whether right or wrong they are no distinguishing marks of a Methodist.”

From “The Character of the Methodist” –John Wesley

We have never defined ourselves by one issue or another.



# Major Beliefs

## Articles of Faith

### Article V — Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation

The Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation...

# Some Stats about the UMC?

We are in mission to **136** countries, with **677** missionaries, **125,000** volunteers in mission, and **550** refugee and relief workers.

**52** hospitals and health care facilities, **92** colleges and universities

An average of **6.3 billion** in generosity and outreach annually

Some estimate we keep **2,000,000** children alive each day as a denomination



# How is the umc governed?

There are parallels with our nation's structure

JUDICIAL COUNCIL – Supreme Court

GENERAL CONFERENCE – Legislative Body

COUNCIL OF BISHOPS - President

# General conference

*The* **BOOK** *of*  
**DISCIPLINE**  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**2016**

Meets every 4 years (normally)

The only group that can speak for the denomination

Responsible for the Book of Discipline

# General conference

We send one laity representative for each clergy in our church to the Mississippi Annual Conference

Clergy Vote for clergy delegates to General Conference. Laity vote for lay delegates – equal representation.

Bishops preside at General Conference but have no vote.







# Some history of Human Sexuality in UMC

1972: “the church does not condone the practice of homosexuality” statement added to the book of discipline

1976: funding for caucuses and organizations associated with gay and lesbian support is terminated

1980: “no self-avowing, practicing homosexual shall be ordained or appointed in the united methodist church”

## Some history

1984: “Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.” (p. 402.2)

1996: “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”

2016: bishops create the commission on a way forward, and call for 2019 general conference

## Some history

2019: Special called General Conference endorses Traditional Plan by a voting percentage of 438-384, enforces new penalties for clergy who perform same-sex weddings

+ Paragraph 2553 also passes, to create an exit path for progressives before December 2023

January 2020: Protocol for Grace and Reconciliation announced, initiated by Bishop Yambasu and mediated by Kenneth Feinberg

# Some history

COVID Happens and with the delay of General Conference in 2020 and 2022, churches begin to leave the UMC using the disaffiliation paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline.

The fear is that if they do not leave by the end of 2023 (when 2553 ends) and before General Conference of 2024, then there would be no way to leave if General Conference of 2024 changes the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality.



## Some history

March 2022: General Conference is postponed to 2024. Protocol Agreement loses support of key authors.

October 2022: Mississippi Conference Trustees create pathway to exit using the church closure process in paragraph 2549 through June 30, 2025.

By the end of 2023 over 7600 churches left while over 22,000 remain or about 75% remain and 25% have left. In MS, 38% have left but 62% remain.

# Question:

How can we be reading the same  
Bible  
and not read it the same?

# How do we read Scripture

Scripture is primary and we use

Tradition

Reason

Experience

as lenses through which we  
understand Scripture

# THINGS TO REMEMBER

We are talking about people who matter to God and are of “sacred worth.”

Everyone who reads Scripture interprets Scripture, and we all come with an agenda. Yet we seek to exegete (to read out of), not isogete (read into or proof texting) the scripture.

In the midst of disagreement, how to understand our differing convictions a little better.

# THINGS TO REMEMBER

Rhetorical arguments stop conversation.

Theological arguments take time.

Examples: “Who would Jesus tell us not to love?”

“The Bible says it, that settles it.”

# THINGS TO REMEMBER

Our church is not completely of one mind about the issue of homosexuality and the church.

Some of us are Traditional when it comes to understanding homosexuality.

Some of us want to be more inclusive when it comes to understanding homosexuality.

Some of us are in the center and want our church to stay together and can live together amidst differences.



# The concerns of traditionalists

“This is a slippery slope. What’s next?”

All homosexual acts are sinful by their very nature, and the Biblical injunctions against them are clear.

Do we set aside the authority of scripture? Is this a consistent biblical ethic that we’re establishing?

Do we ignore biblical passages we don’t like? Where does this stop?

Marriage between a man and a woman (and procreation) is the building block of society. To alter this is to shake the very foundations of stable society.

# The concerns of CENTRISTS/MODERATES

Afraid of taking a vote that would split a church they love.

“Is this really worth dividing the church over? Can't we just live with our differences?”

A worry for how this conflict will affect our gospel witness to younger generations, and no sense that this will “fix” what is broken with the modern church.



# The concerns of PROGRESSIVES

“Homosexual acts are not in themselves immoral or sinful but, like heterosexual acts, are good or bad depending on the context that defines and gives meaning to them.”

We have to pay attention to how Jesus paid attention to those on the margins of society.

We have a prophetic calling from God to speak for those who are most vulnerable.

We already have passages that we disagree on, and passages (divorce, female leadership, slavery) that we believe are re-interpreted in light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and have stayed together.

# How Methodist Read and Interpret Scripture

Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit

When written

And when read.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/OLD TESTAMENT

Part of the Holiness Code of the Old Testament that defined Israel as a distinct people. Among the 600+ laws we find:

Leviticus 18:22

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

Leviticus 20:13

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

We also find laws like these which are part of the dietary laws of Israel.

Leviticus 11:6-8

The hare, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is **unclean** for you. The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is **unclean** for you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are **unclean** for you.

Leviticus 11:9-10

But anything in the seas or the streams that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and among all the other living creatures that are in the waters—they are **detestable** to you and **detestable** they shall remain. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall regard as **detestable**.



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT – SOME CONTEXT

Pederasty in Ancient Greece/Rome

“Arsenokoitais” and “Malakos”

Male and Female Prostitution were part of ancient Greek/Roman worship of fertility Gods. Men could engage with either sex as part of pagan worship. Christians who engaged in either could be participating in idolatry.

Pederasty in Ancient Greece/Rome, often depicted in writings and artwork, was a “mentoring relationship between an older man and a teenage boy. Often there was a sexual component with the older man always being in the dominant role

Arsenokoitais- A Greek word Paul created that means “people of the man-bed”

Malakos – a common Greek word that means “soft” or “effeminate.”

Paul, and we, would see big problems with both practices.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor **effeminate (malakos)**, nor **abusers of themselves with mankind (arsenokoitai)**, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10, KING JAMES VERSION

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

In the Original King James Version – Malakos and Arsenokoitais are both translated individually in 1Cor. 6:9-10. John Wesley in his Notes of the New Testament (an official part of our Methodist theological doctrine) speaks of “Malakos,” where the KJV translates Malakos as “effeminate,” as “Who live in an easy, indolent way; taking up no cross, enduring no hardship.”

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10, KING JAMES VERSION

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

For the first time, the newly created word “homosexual” is used to translate both malakos and arsenokoitai and treat them as one.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor **homosexuals (malakos + arsenokoitai)**, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10, REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1946)

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE: “homosexual perversion”

REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1971): “sexual perverts”



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, **for those practicing homosexuality (arsenokoitais)**, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine...

1 TIMOTHY 1:9-10 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)

KING JAMES: “them that defile themselves with mankind”

REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1971): “sodomites”

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

### The Letter to the Romans

Paul, speaking to the largely Jewish church in Rome, is speaking about the Roman culture in Romans 1:18-32. He piles on one sin after another but then shifts to the Jewish members of the church saying they are doing the same things and that they have no excuse to judge another. He goes on to say, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.

ROMANS 1:18-21

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!  
Amen.

ROMANS 1:22-25



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.

ROMANS 1:26-28

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

29 They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

ROMANS 1:29-32

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. You say, “We know that God’s judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.” Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?

ROMANS 2:1-3

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## “PROHIBITION” TEXTS/NEW TESTAMENT

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, 22the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. **For there is no distinction, 23since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;** 24they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; 26it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

ROMANS 3:21-26



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## CREATION ORDINANCES

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

GENESIS 1:27-28

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## CREATION ORDINANCES

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

GENESIS 2:19-25

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## A SAMPLE INCLUSIVE ARGUMENT:

Covenant fidelity, not sexual difference, is the foundation of marriage.

One can have a marriage without children, but not without covenant fidelity.

The Biblical texts are not addressing same-sex monogamous relationships, but exploitative expressions of sexuality.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## A SAMPLE TRADITIONAL ARGUMENT:

Marriage between one man and one woman is a “creation ordinance,” and therefore has nothing to do with cultural relevance. It is also an important image for the union of Christ and the Church.



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Stories Where The Church “Changed Its Mind” about who could be included.

Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10)

The Jerusalem Council and the Gentiles (Acts 15) – Follows Peter’s encounter with Cornelius, a Roman, who is given the Holy Spirit.

Peter said: “God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

See Also: The Ethiopian Eunuch and Philip (Acts 8) A Eunuch is given the Holy Spirit and is included in the church. Eunuchs were previously forbidden to be included according to Deuteronomy 23:1

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ISSUES WHERE WE HAVE DISAGREED AND CHANGED OUR MINDS

### SLAVERY

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. EPHESIANS 6:5-6

We do not endorse slavery of any kind even though scripture speaks into the practice.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ISSUES WHERE WE HAVE DISAGREED AND CHANGED OUR MINDS

### FEMALE LEADERSHIP

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man;  
she is to keep silent. 1 TIMOTHY 2:12

Even though this scripture speaks, We now allow females who are called into ministry to serve as Pastors/Preachers in the UMC which is now included in our Discipline. Other denominations do not allow women to be called into pastoral ministry.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ISSUES WHERE WE HAVE DISAGREED AND CHANGED OUR MINDS

### DIVORCE/REMARRIAGE

Jesus said, “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.” MATTHEW 19:9

Before the 1950's the Methodist Church did not allow people who were divorced to marry in our churches or pastors to perform such weddings unless the couple involved were victims of adultery.

By the late 1960's with extremely high divorce rates in our country the Methodist Church recognized that we needed to help people who have been divorced to experience the covenant faithful relationship provided by marriage despite the prohibitions of scripture. The church stayed as one and did not divide.



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? IN SIMPLE TERMS

Progressives ask,

“Where is the evidence to place such an impossible burden on someone, that we would ask a person to give up a full relationship with someone they love for the sake of full relationship with the church?”

Traditionalists ask,

“Where is the Biblical proof that God ordains these practices?”

Those in the Middle ask,

“Can we just live together with these differences, and how do we create the space for us to fulfill our shared mission in Christ?”

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## TWO LAST SCRIPTURES

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

According to Jesus, this is how the world will distinguish Christians from other people in how we sacrificially love each other just as Jesus loved us on the cross.

JOHN 13:34-35

# JOHN 17:20-23

[Jesus prayed, ] “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, **that they may all be one**. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, **that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**”

Jesus is praying that the church be completely one so that this witness to the world would be the evidence of the truth of Jesus' ministry and that the Father loves the world just as the Father loves Jesus.