

**“I BELIEVE
I AM BEING LED
BY THE HOLY SPIRIT”**

Laity and clergy

coming to

differing conclusions

regarding homosexuality

The title of the book is placed within quotation marks since it represents what persons in The United Methodist Church often say, even when they have differing points of view.

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I am a member of an Annual Conference.

I am a delegate to General Conference.

I am being led by the Holy Spirit.

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I am a member of an Annual Conference.

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I am a delegate to General Conference.

I am a Bishop.

I am being led by the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Earlier in my life I became acquainted with a college student who believed another man was following him everywhere he went. In several conversations he told me about his experiences in great detail.

One day he asked, “Do you believe me? Do you believe what I’m saying?”

I paused, and then replied, “I believe that you believe a man is following you everywhere you go.”

I don’t think my response satisfied him, but I do think he understood.

* * * * *

When you say, “I believe I am being led by the Holy Spirit,” do you assume others believe you?

When you hear someone who has a view different from yours say, “I believe I am being led by the Holy Spirit,” does that person assume you believe him or her?

If you do not agree with the view this person is expressing, are you willing to say, “I believe that you believe you are being led by the Holy Spirit?”

* * * * *

Do you believe that some people in The United Methodist Church who believe the practice of homosexuality is compatible with Christian teaching believe they are being led by the Holy Spirit?

Do you believe that some people in The UMC who believe the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching believe they are being led by the Holy Spirit?

* * * * *

Do you believe that being convinced of one of these two possibilities is the only interpretation that is possible?

Or, do you believe there might be other options between the two, perhaps a person who leans toward one of them, or the other, but is not convinced of that view? Or, a person who might be ambivalent?

* * * * *

Does the following spectrum clarify the possibilities?

The practice of
homosexuality is
compatible with
Christian teaching

The practice of
homosexuality is
incompatible with
Christian teaching

1 2 3 4 5
convinced leaning ambivalent leaning convinced

* * * * *

Since some persons in The UMC follow each of these interpretations, and since they believe they are being led by the Holy Spirit, does there need to be room for all of them in The UMC of 2019 and 2020?

* * * * *

Are there ways we can try to understand such perspectives? Will looking at them first through the eyes of a lay person, and then through the eyes of a clergy person, be helpful?

* * * * *

Will reflecting on the options through the positions persons hold in the life of the local congregation and the annual conference help us to think through what this would look like?

- Pastor of a local congregation
- Member of a Staff-Parish Relations Committee
- Member of a governing entity of a local congregation
- Member of a Board of Ordained Ministry
- Member of an Annual Conference
- Delegate to General Conference
- District Superintendent
- Bishop

* * * * *

I AM A LAY PERSON

- I am a follower of Jesus, who has been baptized, and who has become a member of a local UMC.
- I support this congregation with my prayers, my presence, my gifts, my service, and my witness.
- I believe in the authority of the Bible as defined in *The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church* and *The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church*.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- I prayerfully discern where I am on this spectrum of possibilities.
- I diligently attempt to understand the other four possibilities.
- I prayerfully share my viewpoint with those who are at other places on the spectrum, and prayerfully listen to them.
- I admit I might be wrong in my viewpoint, but this is what I believe.
- I am open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, even if it means modifying my viewpoint.

I serve on a Staff-Parish Relations Committee.

- I have been invited by the committee on nominations and leadership, and elected by the Charge Conference, to serve on the S-PRC.
- Among its responsibilities, the S-PRC participates in the process of securing clergy leadership, consulting with the district superintendent and the bishop regarding the qualities sought in a pastor (when a change is forthcoming).
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I, and other members of the S-PRC, will spend the time needed to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- Other members of the committee and I share our individual understanding of each of the five possibilities, and indicate the possibility (or possibilities) that best represents our individual viewpoints.
- Other members of the committee and I share our perceptions of the congregation, attempting to discern approximate levels of support for each possibility.
- Other members of the committee and I discuss, decide, and then notify our district superintendent regarding the possibility (or possibilities) we want for the clergy of our local church.
- Other members of the committee and I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout our process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

I am a member of a governing entity of a local congregation.

- I realize in all UM churches the overall responsibility for governance is the Charge Conference. However, in most local congregations another functional group carries out many of its responsibilities—the Board of Trustees, or the Governing Board, or another group by a similar title.
- Whatever its title, I understand that this governing entity is responsible for determining policies governing the use of the congregation's facilities.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I, and other members of this group, will attempt to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- Other members of the group and I share our understanding of the five possibilities, and indicate the possibility that best represents our individual viewpoints.
- Other members of the group and I share our perceptions of the congregation, attempting to discern approximate levels of support for each of the possibilities.
- Other members of the group and I discuss, and then decide, what policies will govern the use of our congregation's facilities.
- Other members of the group and I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout our process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

I am a lay member of a Board of Ordained Ministry.

- I have been elected by my Annual Conference to serve on the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, with others identified in ¶635 of the Book of Discipline, including clergy and lay persons.
- Among its duties, the board examines all applicants as to their qualifications for ordination.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I, and other members of the board, will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- Other members of the board and I discuss our individual understanding of each of these five possibilities.
- Other members of the board and I recognize we can approve a candidate for ordained ministry if the qualifications for ordination are met. (If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual—including same-gender marriages, or the ordination and appointment of married lesbian or gay persons—qualifications for ordination would be revised in *The Book of Discipline*.)
- Other members of the board and I make recommendations to the Executive Session of the Clergy, and through them, to the Annual Conference session, for the approval of candidates.
- Other members of the board and I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout our process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

I am a lay member of an Annual Conference.

- I have been elected by the Charge Conference of the local congregation of which I am a member.
- I cast votes on motions that come before the Annual Conference.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I, and other members of the conference, will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- Other members of the conference and I discuss our individual understanding of each of these five possibilities.
- Other members of the conference and I recognize the Executive Session of the Clergy approves candidates for ordained ministry if the qualifications for ordination are met. (If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual—including same-gender marriages, or the ordination and appointment of married lesbian or gay persons—qualifications for ordination would be revised in *The Book of Discipline*.)
- Other members of the conference and I receive a report from the Executive Session of the Clergy.
- Other members of the conference and I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout our process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

I am a lay delegate to General Conference.

- I have been elected by a vote of the lay members of my Annual Conference.
- I diligently attempt to understand the issues that will come before General Conference, reading and reflecting on those resources that I receive from The UMC, being careful not to be unduly influenced by caucus groups seeking to convince me of their particular viewpoint.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I, and other members of the conference, will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- Prior to attending the General Conference, other members of the delegation and I discuss with each other our understanding of the five possibilities, and indicate the possibility that best represents our individual viewpoints.
- Other members of the delegation and I share our perceptions of the views of the members of our Annual Conference, and the local congregations with which we are familiar, attempting to discern approximate levels of support for each possibility.
- Although members of our delegation may vote according to their perspectives, each of us attempts to represent our constituents in as thoughtful a manner as possible.
- Other members of the delegation and I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout our process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

“I BELIEVE I AM BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT”

- This statement is what I—a lay person—say.
- But how do I know whether or not I am right?
- Could it be that I am right, but only to some extent?
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, how will I respond?
- Am I willing to accept such diversity even if that is not what I prefer?
- Do I believe other disciples of Jesus Christ in The UMC have an interpretation that differs from mine?
- Do I believe that those disciples believe that they are being led by the Holy Spirit?
- Do they believe that I—an individual who has a different interpretation—believe that I am being led by the Holy Spirit?
- Do I need to spend considerable time in earnest and fervent prayer for myself?
- Do I need to spend considerable time in earnest and fervent prayer for others with whom I differ?
- Will I spend that time, even now in the middle of reading this booklet?

I AM A CLERGY PERSON

- I am a follower of Jesus, who has been baptized, and who has become a member of a local UMC.
- I have been called by God to serve as an elder or deacon, have completed the requirements leading to ordination, and have been approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry in my Annual Conference.
- I believe in the authority of the Bible as defined in *The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church* and *The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church*.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- I prayerfully discern where I am on this spectrum of possibilities.
- I diligently attempt to understand the other four possibilities.
- I prayerfully share my viewpoint with those who are at other places on the spectrum, and prayerfully listen to them.
- I admit I might be wrong in my viewpoint, but this is what I believe.
- I am open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, even if it means modifying my viewpoint.

I serve a local congregation.

- If I am an elder (or in some situations a deacon), I am appointed by my bishop to serve in a particular place of ministry—in most instances a local congregation.
- I meet with my district superintendent on a regular basis, particularly when I am considering a change in appointment.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- I carefully think through where I am located on this spectrum.
- I meet with my DS and share where I locate myself on the spectrum.
- At the invitation of my DS, I meet with the S-PRC of the potential new appointment.
- I inquire of the committee regarding their location on the spectrum, and then discuss the understanding to which they have come.
- I share with them my location on the spectrum, discuss what I believe this will mean in my life and our joint ministry, and confer with my DS following the meeting.
- I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout this process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

I am a clergy member of the Board of Ordained Ministry.

- I have been elected by my Annual Conference to serve on the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, with others identified in ¶635 of the BOD, including clergy and lay persons.
- Among its duties, the board examines all applicants as to their qualifications for ordination.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I, and other members of the board, will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- Other members of the board and I discuss our individual understanding of these five possibilities.
- Other members of the board and I recognize we can approve a candidate for ordained ministry if the qualifications for ordination are met. . (If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual—including same-gender marriages, or the ordination and appointment of married lesbian or gay persons— qualifications for ordination would be revised in *The Book of Discipline*.)
- Other members of the board and I make recommendations to the Executive Session of the Clergy, and through them, to the Annual Conference session, for the approval of candidates.
- Other members of the board and I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout our process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

I am a clergy member of an Annual Conference.

- I have been admitted to full connection in my Annual Conference and ordained as an elder or a deacon—after fulfilling the requirements set forth in ¶335 or ¶330 of the BOD.
- I cast votes on recommendations that come from the Board of Ministry during the Executive Session of the Clergy.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I, and other members of the conference, will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- Other members of the conference and I discuss our individual understanding of each of these five possibilities.
- Other members of the conference and I recognize the Executive Session of the Clergy approves candidates for ordained ministry if the qualifications for ordination are met. (If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual—including same-gender marriages, or the ordination and appointment of married lesbian or gay persons— qualifications for ordination would be revised in *The Book of Discipline*.)
- Other members of the conference and I receive a report from the Executive Session of the Clergy.
- Other members of the conference and I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout our process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

I am a District Superintendent (or a person in a related conference position)

- I am already dealing with a complexity of issues—in collaboration with my bishop and my colleagues on the cabinet—in working out the appointments of pastors to churches.
- My colleagues on the cabinet and I, together with the leadership of my bishop, attempt to match the unique opportunities of a local church with the abilities and experiences of the pastor to be appointed.
- Some of the current issues include: working spouse, geographic needs for elderly parents or children, theological preferences, cultural adaptability, size and complexity of congregations, and pastoral experience with those issues.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, that will add another area of complexity to my work as a district superintendent.
- I trust that the appointment process can accommodate those increased complexities, just as we have done with issues like women in ministry, and cross racial appointments.
- I believe I can be led by the Holy Spirit to carry out these responsibilities.
- The matching of pastors and churches is the most important work on an appointment, and great care is already being taken to make the best matches.

I am a clergy delegate to General Conference.

- I have been elected by a vote of the clergy members of my Annual Conference.
- I diligently attempt to understand the issues that will come before General Conference, reading and reflecting on those resources that I receive from The UMC, being careful not to be unduly influenced by caucus groups seeking to convince me of their particular viewpoint.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, I, and other members of the conference, will try to understand the five possibilities described on page 5.
- Prior to attending the General Conference, other members of the delegation and I discuss with each other our individual understanding of each of the five possibilities, and indicate the possibility that best represents our individual viewpoints.
- Other members of the delegation and I share our perceptions of the views of the members of our Annual Conference, and the local congregations with which we are familiar, attempting to discern approximate levels of support for each possibility.
- Although members of our delegation may vote according to their perspectives, each of us attempts to represent our constituents in as thoughtful a manner as possible.
- Other members of the delegation and I spend time in earnest and fervent prayer—throughout our process—that we might be led by the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.

I am a Bishop.

- I am already dealing with a complexity of issues in making appointments of pastors to churches.
- The district superintendents and I attempt to match the unique opportunities of a local church with the abilities and experiences of the pastor to be appointed.
- Some of the current issues include: working spouse, geographic needs for elderly parents or children, theological preferences, cultural adaptability, size and complexity of congregations, and pastoral experience with those issues.
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, that will add another area of complexity to my work as a bishop.
- I trust that the appointment process can accommodate those increased complexities, just as we have done with issues like women in ministry, and cross racial appointments.
- I believe I can be led by the Holy Spirit to carry out these responsibilities.
- The matching of pastors and churches is the most important work on an appointment, and great care is already being taken to make the best matches.

“I BELIEVE I AM BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT”

- This statement is what I—a clergy person—say.
- But how do I know whether or not I am right?
- Could it be that I am right, but only to some extent?
- If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual, how will I respond?
- Am I willing to accept such diversity even if that is not what I prefer?
- Do I believe other disciples of Jesus Christ in The UMC have an interpretation that differs from mine?
- Do I believe that those disciples believe that they are being led by the Holy Spirit?
- Do they believe that I—an individual who has a different interpretation—believe that I am being led by the Holy Spirit?
- Do I need to spend considerable time in earnest and fervent prayer for myself?
- Do I need to spend considerable time in earnest and fervent prayer for others with whom I differ?
- Will I spend that time, even now as I conclude reading this booklet?

QUESTION

If The UMC decides to allow greater diversity in dealing with persons who express a sexual orientation and practice other than heterosexual—including same-gender marriages, or the ordination and appointment of married lesbian or gay persons—how will I respond?

ADDENDUM

I've written these pages to show one way United Methodist laity and clergy might carry out their responsibilities if the proposed "one church" model is adopted (without a move to a congregational form of governance).

If The UMC adopts a different model, the organizational layout delineated in this booklet might still be useful.

My deepest hope is that all of us who are a part of The UMC will find a resolution that will enable us to expend our full energy on leading persons to become disciples of Jesus Christ, for the transformation of the world.

Adolf Hansen, PhD

Theologian in Residence
St. Luke's United Methodist Church
Indianapolis, Indiana

Author: *Is It Time? Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question at a Time* (Abingdon, 2017)

adolf.hansen@comcast.net