

Study Guide for Where Do We Go From Here? Session 2

Objective for this group:

Learn about the differing views held in the UM church after the outcome of General Conference 2019; many United Methodists have opposing opinions as to the Church's next steps.

This group discussion hopes to broaden participants' scope of compassion for differing ideas about the future of our denomination, and increase empathy for all of us as the children of God.

Equipment needs:

TV – in Asbury
Computer with HDMI Connection
WiFi connection with FUMC
White board or easel with paper and markers

Open the group with a prayer – Dag Hammarskjold

Thou who art over us,
thou who art one of us,
thou who art:
Give us a pure heart that we may see thee,
a humble heart that we may hear thee;
a heart of love that we may serve thee;
a heart of faith that we may abide in thee. Amen.

Second Session – Comment around the group to this question:

Does our church welcome those who

***Bold phrases** are included as possible items to be written on the white board or easel.

Book Discussion

Begin with 5 minute + video of highlights from the General Conference 2019:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rljzffS2QA>

Discuss this video – many opinions and stances are presented here. Think about these two comments:

As United Methodists, we know how to disagree and love.

We do not all think alike, but we have more in common than we disagree about.

**Second Discussion:
Chapter Eight – Talbot Davis**

Talbot Davis brings a very different perspective to the conflict in the United Methodist Church over same sex marriage and ordination than we hold at FUMC Ann Arbor – it may be difficult to hear his opinions. However, compassionate and caring listening is what we desire from our United Methodist family, and so this is what we must offer to Rev, Davis. Talbot’s biography is on p. 67 of the book.

**Chapter 8 – *To Redefine our Present Connectionality:
Thoughts on a Way beyond the Way Forward.***

Talbot Davis believes the United Methodist Church is in a “place of rich irony”. (p.58). He goes on to say the irony is shown in four ways (p. 58-62).

Discuss the different ways that Rev. Davis outlines:

1. It (the disagreement about the Discipline’s language on homosexuality) is a self-made crisis.

Discussion questions:

- Read the quote from Rev. James Howell of Myers Park UMC in Charlotte , NC. (p. 58-59)
Do you agree with his picture of the UMC’s future? Why or why not?
- On p. 59, Rev. Davis outlines his stance in the italicized words in the center of the page. He says that if the UM denomination had agreed with this, we would not be in this morass of sexual revisionism.
What do you think? Does he have a valid argument? How would you reply to this?

2. Make Methodism American Again (MMAA)

Rev. Davis comments about the reaction of the African UM Church to homosexuality. Read Mark Holland’s quote pp.59-60.

Discussion questions:

- Davis uses the Holland quote to emphasize the irony of progressive people in the UMC wanting diversity, yet vehemently disagreeing with the African church’s traditional stance.
What do you think about this? How do we work with the African church?

3. We have the toys, but no batteries. (p.60)

Rev. Davis laments the situation that he and his fellow traditionalists are in – they have the conference endorsement of the traditional plan, but no majority in annual conferences, district superintendents or bishops to enforce the rules.

Discussion questions:

- Davis calls the progressive desire to “redefine marriage” a “codified heresy”. How do you react to this description?
- How would you reply to Rev. Davis’s lament about the irony of traditional power to punish progressive colleagues who “proceed unimpeded with their ministry of redefinition (of marriage)”?

4. Whither E Pluribus Unum? (p.60-61)

Discussion questions:

Rev, Davis comments that, “the definition of unity changed the minute the teaching of the church didn’t.”

- Do you agree or disagree with this? If our church should choose to disaffiliate from the greater UMC, are we being hypocritical about the idea of church unity?

On pp. 61-62, Rev. Davis writes of a post from a Methodist Federation For Social Action blog that makes a case for access to birth control, with the admission of engaging in premarital sex from two UM clergy members. He calls these admissions the result of “the church of me and now”. How would you reply to this comment?

- Do we need to look at celibacy as a way of making a sacrifice for our faith?

In the second part of his essay, Rev. Davis asks: What does the journey from irony to clarity look like? He gives us three ideas of clarity for the UMC:

1. Don’t confuse doctrine with strategy.

Rev. Davis comments that he does not turn away the LBGTQA+ community from his church, even though he teaches that marriage is between a man and woman. He says that all who wish a more traditional theology are welcome at his church.

- If you were part of a same sex couple, would you be able to worship at a church like Rev. Davis’s?
- How do we welcome those people to our church who have a different view of theology?

2. Exchange Holy Conversations for Honest Declarations.

Rev. Davis tells us that they had NO church-wide conversations about General Conference 2019, unlike FUMC in Ann Arbor. On p.63, he says

- a. They assumed the Traditional Plan would pass, so they did not to make the congregation anxious with “what if” conversation.
- b. They were very clear about their beliefs on sexuality: celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage between men and women.

He says that the strategy adopted by his church in Charlotte, Good Shepherd UMC, could be summed up by this equation:

Low Anxiety + High Clarity = Zero Fallout

Discussion questions:

- How did our strategy at FUMC AA differ from Good Shepherd UMC?
- Is it better to not discuss upcoming hard decisions?
- Do we have a fallout from our stance on the General Conference 2019 decision? If so, what do we do about it, if anything?
- What does the term “holy conversations” mean to you? Do you think it is the opposite of “honest declarations”?

3. Negotiated Release Instead of Tortured Repeat?

On page 66, Rev, Davis believes “our destination is a place of mutual release...United Methodism has decided who it is again.”

Discussion questions

- What do you think about this comment?
- Is it made in the spirit of the United Methodist Church? How do you think the global church would react to this?

The UMC of Africa has recently stated that they will not split from the church, nor will they accept changes to the Discipline about homosexuality.

- Does this statement reflect the comment above of Rev. Davis? How do these two thoughts work together, work apart?

Biblical Connection

Christians have been disagreeing for centuries – here is the account of a disagreement between friends and fellow missionaries, Paul and Barnabas:

Acts 14:36-41

After a few days of this, Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back and visit all our friends in each of the towns where we preached the Word of God. Let’s see how they’re doing.” Barnabas wanted to take John along, the John nicknamed Mark. But Paul wouldn’t have him; he wasn’t about to take along a quitter who, as soon as the going got tough, had jumped ship on them in Pamphylia. Tempers flared, and they ended up going their separate ways: Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus; Paul chose Silas and, offered up by their friends to the grace of the Master, went to Syria and Cilicia to build up muscle and sinew in those congregations.

Romans 14:1

Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don’t see things the way you do. And don’t jump all over them every time they do or say something you don’t agree

with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

Both scripture selections are from *The Message*, translated by Eugene Peterson.
Holy Conversation (!)

- Have you had a disagreement with someone that you could not resolve?
- How do we resolve these kind of disagreements? What does it take from each of the parties?
- How could we “treat gently” those with whom we disagree about in welcoming the LGBTQA+ community to church through ordination and marriage?
- What do you think Jesus would say about this United Methodist disagreement?

Keep this prayer in mind:

Holy and Sustaining God,
Give me a heart of mercy and love, so I can
-stay positive amid negativity
-listen to criticism without taking it personally
-hope for this person’s renewal
-can regard the log in my own eye before my neighbor’s
-embody Your love to all your children.
Amen.

Prayer time

Ask for joys and concerns – end the group time with a prayer. Use your own or this:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you.
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon, and give you peace.