



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



For Immediate Release

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UMC Bishops to act on three major issues at the Chicago meeting

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Bishops of The United Methodist Church will meet in Chicago from April 29-May 4 to celebrate leadership through the passing of the gavel, certify constitutional amendments and finalize their recommendations to the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference.

The April/May meeting of the Council of Bishops will also hear leadership reports regarding immigration, ecumenical relations, racism, disaster relief and other mission and ministry work around the global denomination.

“As leaders of the church who are given the mandate to provide oversight to the global denomination, we take our responsibilities seriously and we are diligently working to provide leadership at this critical time in the life of The United Methodist Church,” outgoing COB President Bishop Bruce R. Ough said.

New COB officers

Bishop Ough of the Dakotas-Minnesota Area, who has led the Council of Bishops (COB) since the 2016 General Conference, will be handing over the gavel at the end of this meeting to Bishop Ken Carter of the Florida Area.

Bishop Carter, who has served as one of the moderators of the Commission on a Way Forward, was elected president at the November meeting of the bishops. Other new COB officers are Bishop Cynthia Harvey of Louisiana who will be the president-designate; Bishop Mande Muyombo of North Katanga who will be the secretary. These three bishops together with COB Executive Secretary Bishop Marcus Matthews, COB Ecumenical Officer Bishop Michael B. Watson and Bishop Ough, as the immediate past president, will be the executive officers for 2018-2020.

Constitutional Amendments

At the Chicago meeting, the bishops will also certify the votes of annual conferences on the five constitutional amendments approved by the 2016 General Conference. During the 2016 General Conference, delegates approved five proposed amendments to the Constitution of The United Methodist Church as contained in *The Book of Discipline (BOD)*. Any proposed constitutional amendments require ratification by annual conferences. The results are canvassed, certified and announced by the Council of Bishops.

The five proposed constitutional amendments are as follows:

- I. The first proposed amendment proposes a new paragraph between current ¶ 5 and ¶ 6. This new paragraph focuses on gender justice. If ratified, this would become the new ¶6, and the current ¶¶ 6-61 would be renumbered as ¶¶ 7-62.
- II. The second proposed constitutional amendment changes the wording in ¶ 4 in *The Book of Discipline*. This paragraph concerns itself with membership in our churches and protects different groups of people from exclusion. If ratified, the proposed amendment would add ‘gender’, ‘ability’, ‘age’ and ‘marital status’ to the protected membership groups.’
- III. The third proposed amendment deals with the election of delegates to the general conference as contained in ¶ 34. If ratified, the amendment would add this sentence: “Such elections shall include open nominations from the floor by the annual conference, and delegates shall be elected by a minimum of a simple majority of the ballots cast.”
- IV. The fourth proposed amendment clarifies the time of election of bishops in Central Conferences as contained in ¶ 46. If ratified, the amendment would add the following words to ¶ 46: “provided that episcopal elections in central conferences shall be held at a regular, not an extra, session of the central conference, except in the case where an unexpected vacancy must be filled.”
- V. The fifth proposed amendment adds language to ¶50 regarding how the Council of Bishops holds its individual members accountable for their work. This legislation follows the Judicial Council Decision 1275 requirement of a legislative resolution from General Conference so that the Council of Bishops may provide oversight of its members. If ratified, the amendment would add the following sentence to the end of ¶ 50: “These provisions shall not preclude that adoption by the General Conference of provisions for the Council of Bishops to hold its individual members accountable for their work, both as general superintendents and as presidents and residents in episcopal areas.”

If the bishops certify that the amendments have been ratified by the votes of the annual conferences, the amendments would become effective immediately.

Recommendations for the 2019 Special Session

The bishops are also working on making their final recommendations for the 2019 Special Session of General Conference which has been set for Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis, Missouri. During their meeting next week, the bishops will hear the final recommendations from the Commission on a Way Forward.

The Commission on a Way Forward held its penultimate meeting in Los Angeles last month to prepare the final report of recommendations to the bishops on proposed ways forward for the global denomination regarding the impasse over human sexuality.

At their meeting, members of the Commission expressed gratitude at the opportunity to be part of the Commission and they signaled hope for The United Methodist Church.

The 32-member Commission has been meeting since January 2017 in various places throughout the global denomination to assist the bishops in their charge from the 2016

General Conference to lead the church forward amid the present impasse related to LGBTQ inclusion and resulting questions about the unity of the church.

“The moderators have attempted to serve the Commission and the Council of Bishops in this collaborative work. We have listened to leaders from across our world who love this denomination and we have also felt their prayers and support. We continue to seek a way forward for our church, and we trust in the faithfulness of God as our foundation,” said Bishop Carter.

Contrary to some voices in the church that assume closure and that the work is already completed, the Commission indicated that there was still robust conversation taking place through the denomination. Members of the Commission noted that the UMC will continue to discuss the public and private mission of the church and the value of convicted humility.

The Council of Bishops plans to announce the summary of recommendations immediately after the COB meeting. Actual wording and full details of the recommendations will be released after the specific petitions have been drafted.

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