

MISSION

The Commission will bring together persons deeply committed to the future(s) of The United Methodist Church, with **an openness to developing new relationships** with each other and **exploring the potential future(s) of our denomination** in light of General Conference and subsequent annual, jurisdictional and central conference actions. We have **a profound hope and confidence in the Triune God**, and yet we acknowledge that we do this work in a climate of skepticism and distrust, from a human point of view. We are a connection, and we admit that our communion is strained; yet much **transformative mission across our world is the fruit of our collaboration**. The matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation that surfaces different ways of interpreting Scripture and theological tradition. The work is meant to **inform deliberation across the whole church and to help the Council of Bishops in their service** to the next General Conference in finding a way forward.

VISION

The Commission will **design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness** in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for **as much contextual differentiation as possible**, and that **balances an approach to different theological understandings** of human sexuality with a desire for **as much unity as possible**. This unity will not be grounded in our conceptions of human sexuality, but in **our affirmation of the Triune God who calls us to be a grace-filled and holy people in the Wesleyan tradition**.

SCOPE

We should be **open to new ways of embodying unity** that move us beyond where we are in the present impasse and cycle of action and reaction around ministry and human sexuality. Therefore, we should consider **new ways of being in relationship** across cultures and jurisdictions, in understandings of episcopacy, in contextual definitions of autonomy for annual conferences, and in the design and purpose of the apportionment. In reflection on the two matters of unity and human sexuality, we will fulfill our directive by **considering “new forms and structures” of relationship** and through the “complete examination and possible revision” of relevant paragraphs in the Book of Discipline. We will give **consideration to greater freedom and flexibility to a future United Methodist Church that will redefine our present connectionality**, which is showing signs of brokenness. If we ignore this work, fracturing will occur in more haphazard and even self-interested ways across the church. If we do this work only to address our preferences and self-interest, we will fail to **place our complete trust in God’s steadfast love and faithfulness**. If we do this work with complete surrender to God’s unlimited imagination and kingdom purposes, we will be blessed beyond our limited human imagination. **God remains God; God is with us; God will never let us go. To God be the glory!**

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK of the Commission on a Way Forward

AN ECUMENICAL CHURCH

[[Acts 2](#); [John 3](#); [Genesis 1, 3](#)]

United Methodists are part of the great ecumenical consensus expressed in the historic creeds of the Christian faith: affirmations about the triune God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit, and inclusive of the marks of the church that remain before us as gift and task—one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The church is the community of people transformed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ so that personal and communal life manifests holiness by demonstrating love for God and their fellow human beings. We share with Christians across many communions, Eastern and Western, Protestant and Catholic, a commitment to the central role of scripture in forming and sustaining the church in doctrine and practice. We affirm the gracious work of God in creation, and the reality of the image of God in every human being, obscured by sin and alienation from God, but never utterly effaced.

GRACE AND HOLINESS

[[Romans 5](#), [Mark 12](#)]

As Wesleyans we are heirs of a distinctive account of grace, which is God's pardon and God's empowerment in the whole journey of salvation. We believe in the universality of the call to repentance and return to God who is our life, and the universal reach of God's Spirit which grants freedom and power to respond to that call. We affirm the free offer of unconditional pardoning love, along with the divine determination to transform and reclaim as God's own individuals, along with the communities and institutions they inhabit. We understand the goal of salvation to be holiness, understood fundamentally as perfection in love toward God and neighbor, to be pursued in this life as well as consummated in the life to come.

We remain persuaded that the fruitfulness of the church and its witness to a fractured world are enhanced by our willingness to remain in relationship with those who share our fundamental commitments to scripture and our doctrinal standards, and yet whose views of faithfulness in this regard differ from our own.¹

CONNECTION AND MISSION

[[Philippians 2](#), [Matthew 28](#)]

As the fruit of our history as a movement we affirm the communal and connected form of the church's life, and bear witness to the social and relational character of growth in holiness through mutual support and mutual oversight. We lift up the centrality of practicing the means of grace as the essential nature of discipleship, that calls us to work out salvation trusting ever in the activity and power of the Holy Spirit. And finally, we understand the church is called into being for the sake of the world, to spread the good news of God's mercy in Jesus Christ and to be a sign of God's intention for peace, justice and flourishing for the whole creation. The church embodies God's mission for the world through making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, and is called into being for the sake of the world.

A CONVICTED HUMILITY [[1 Corinthians 12-14](#)]

We begin from the recognition that our members hold a wide range of positions regarding same sex relations and operate out of sincerely held beliefs. They are convinced of the moral views they espouse, and seek to be faithful to what they see as the truth God calls the church to uphold. It remains the case that their views on this matter are distinctly different, and in some cases cannot be reconciled. We pray the exaggeration of our differences will not divide us. We also recognize and affirm that as United Methodists we hold in common many more fundamental theological commitments, commitments which bind us together despite our real differences. These also have implications for how we understand and express our disagreements, and for what we do about them. Therefore, we seek to advocate a stance we have called convicted humility. This is an attitude which combines honesty about the differing convictions which divide us with humility about the way in which each of our views may stand in need of corrections. It also involves humble repentance for all the ways in which we have spoken and acted as those seeking to win a fight rather than those called to discern the shape of faithfulness together. In that spirit, we wish to lift up the shared core commitments which define the Wesleyan movement, and ground our search for wisdom and holiness.

¹ The Theological Framework was developed by a team that included members of the Commission and the Committee on Faith and Order. It was affirmed by the Commission on a Way Forward at their January, 2018 meeting, and edited after the Council of Bishops meeting.

MISSIONAL FRAMEWORK of the Commission on a Way Forward

UNITY IN MISSION

AS THE CHURCH SEEKS A WAY FORWARD, WE BELIEVE OUR MISSION UNIFIES US BOTH AS A MOVEMENT AND A CHURCH:

- ▶ The mission of the United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This mission begins with and belongs to God. The church and humans do not own or control mission. God's mission reconciles individuals to God and each other through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, heals the brokenness of individuals and the world, and restores individuals and the world to God's intended fullness for creation.
- ▶ The church exists to bring people to a saving knowledge of God through Christ, make and develop Christian disciples, worship the Triune God, and partner in God's mission in the world. The church must be in mission to be fully the church. Mission is a shared responsibility of laity and clergy.
- ▶ Mission is incarnational. God's mission always happens in specific times and places. Thus, it looks different in different contexts. It works through individuals' and groups' cultures, social systems, and senses of identity, even when it seeks to reconcile, heal, and restore them.
- ▶ Mission goes beyond the activity of any one group of Christians. All Christians everywhere are participants in God's mission. All people everywhere, including all Christians, need God's mission of reconciliation, healing, and restoration.
- ▶ While all United Methodists participate in the church's mission, not all participate in the same way. The Holy Spirit gives distinctive gifts and passions for mission. United Methodists as a tradition have distinctive gifts and passions while our sub-groups and members also have their own distinctive gifts and passions. We have historically been organized to support mission in all places and contexts.

TO BE UNIFIED IN MISSION REQUIRES:

- ▶ **FAITHFULNESS.** We will continue to practice shared ministry, conferencing, itinerant ministry, and general superintendency, not for their own sake but to be faithful to God's mission.
- ▶ **HUMILITY.** We will practice our faithfulness with humility, knowing that our understanding of God's mission is always partial.
- ▶ **CONTEXTUALITY.** We will practice our distinctive United Methodist ways of being church differently in different contexts, even as we seek agreement on their meaning.
- ▶ **CREATIVITY.** We will experiment with new forms of mission and polity to support missional engagement with ever-changing contexts.
- ▶ **FLEXIBILITY.** We will be flexible in how we understand and practice being church to support creative experiments in United Methodism.
- ▶ **MUTUALITY.** We will recognize all contextual adaptations and creative expressions as valid expressions of United Methodism. No one expression is normative for all others.
- ▶ **GENEROSITY.** We will encourage each other in the generous use of our distinctive gifts and passions for the sake of God's mission.

We pray that these principles may guide us in a way forward that leads to deeper discipleship of Jesus Christ, more faithful service in the transformation of the world, and a more unified practice of being the church of Jesus Christ, sent by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit in mission for all the world. Amen.¹

¹ The Missional Framework was drafted by members of the Commission in consultation with a Wesleyan missiologist. It was affirmed by the Commission on a Way Forward at their January, 2018 meeting and edited after the Council of Bishops meeting.