

Labyrinthing Together – Study Guide

These videos were created by the Dumbarton Denominational Task Force (DDTF), Dumbarton United Methodist Church's committee tasked with working out our congregation's relationship with the United Methodist Church (UMC) in light of General Conference 2019's discriminatory actions against LGBTQIA+ United Methodists and clergy who officiate legal, same-gender weddings.

As part of our exploration of the challenges and options facing our denomination, DDTF took advantage of our newfound familiarity with Zoom to create a speaker series and invite leaders representing a variety of organizations and interests within the UMC to share their perspectives with us. We also tapped some resources within our own congregation.

DDTF then took excerpts from the various presentations and created several videos with the hope that members of Dumbarton and others could use them to better inform themselves about the challenges facing the UMC. We have posted a long version of the video that can be viewed in its entirety, and several shorter segments which might better lend themselves to a study or discussion group format.

These suggested study questions are keyed to the shorter segments. But they are equally relevant for the longer version, as the content of the two formats is almost identical.

We hope that United Methodists seeking to learn more about the future of the Church will find these resources helpful as they discern faithful responses to the challenges we face.

Introduction:

What have you heard that you resonated with? What surprised you? What interests you? What are you curious about?

What does hearing multiple voices on this topic offer to you as an individual? As a congregation?

As you consider the questions for the church to decide in the wake of General Conference 2019, which voices and which constituents are important to hear from? Whose perspectives would you seek to hear more from? What is the reasoning behind your choice?

We asked our forum guests to give their perspectives on the future of the church and what was important to them. What would you ask invitees if you held your own forum? What is important for you as an individual to know to decide your own way forward? What about as a congregation?

UMC Structures:

The UMC is a very complex organization. Is our current structure the best way for us to continue to organize the Church? What do we gain and what do we lose because of our organizational complexity? Would it be acceptable to simplify our organization if it meant disadvantaging other United Methodists?

What might we guess from these structures about the priorities of the UMC?

The existence of various caucus groups may point to a need to create one's own space, where one's own voice can be heard. What does it say to its global membership that these are the caucus groups that exist within the UMC?

Many Possible Paths After General Conference 2019:

What would you guess were the underlying values of the groups that each participant represented? What did each participant consider important? What are your values? What do you consider important?

How should your congregation decide whether and where you fit in the UMC? How should you personally decide whether and how you fit into the UMC?

Is your congregation engaged in the grassroots work of deciding what you stand for as a Christian community? How would you do that?

Different Views of the UMC's Future:

A number of options for reorganizing the UMC have been proposed, including some that would split the church into two or more parts. The Protocol and the Christmas Covenant are two proposals that our speakers discuss. Dumbarton UMC has not taken a position endorsing any of these plans.

How important is it for you to be part of a global church? Would we as a church lose something if we were not connected to fellow Christians in the Global South?

How much influence should United Methodists in Africa and the Philippines have on the UMC in the United States? How much influence should American United Methodists have on the United Methodist Church in those places? How much influence should United Methodists in other parts in the U.S. have on your congregation and within the U.S.?

Justice for Whom?

Implicit in many of these interviews are ideas about the role of the United Methodist Church in the world. What are the ideas about that role that are suggested here? What do you think is the role of the church in the world?

After hearing these comments, the idea of “justice for all” may not seem so simple. What do you use to guide you when seeking justice? How is the church called upon to practice justice? What are some of the obstacles it may face? How does God help us or nudge us as we consider these questions?

What would you lose if the UMC divided? If the UMC splintered into multiple churches, what kind of church would you want to belong to? Do we already have a divided UMC, just under one organizational umbrella?

Can you be part of a church that deliberately excludes certain types of people? Where a related church nearby excludes certain types of people? Where whole divisions of the church exclude certain types of people? Are we already living and acting like such a church?

We heard the Rev. Lloyd Nyarota say that Bishops in Africa can criticize corruption and human rights violations because they have the backing of the global UMC. We also know that United Methodists in multiple countries, including Russia, would face legal sanction if they had to support gay marriage and gay rights. How do we reconcile our desire for inclusion with our desire to support vulnerable United Methodists in other countries? Would reorganization along the lines he proposes (the Christmas Covenant) be helpful or harmful or both?

For the first time, the Protocol offers significant funding to Black Methodists. Does hearing Tony Love and Deborah Bass of Black Methodists for Church Renewal change your calculus about the Protocol?

No next steps are without some harm to someone. Are we faced with the question of what harm we are willing to tolerate and to whom? In the face of this question, what is God calling us to do?

Widening the Options:

Can you think of specific actions of the Church that would make you want to leave it? If your congregation leaves the UMC, the most likely denominations to affiliate with are whiter, wealthier, and less global than the UMC. Is that a problem for you? What do you believe is God's plan for you, your congregation and the UMC?

Presenters in this section talk about other options for congregations that are independent of General Conference. What are some other outside-the-box options that local congregations might

think about?

What did these presenters think was important that led them to offer these options? What is important to you? What is important to your congregation? Are there questions you may not have asked yet that may be worth considering?

Resources:

Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation:

<https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/legislation>

Christmas Covenant – Our Gift of Hope: <https://www.christmascovenant.com>

United Methodist Church General Commission on Religion and Race: <https://www.gcorr.org/>

Baltimore-Washington Area Reconciling United Methodists (B-WARM):

<http://www.bwarm.org/index.htm>

Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN): <https://rmnetwork.org>

Black Methodists for Church Renewal: <https://bmcrumc.org/>

Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit: <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/trainings/bic/>

Liberation Methodist Connexion: <https://www.thelmx.org>

The Liberation Project: <https://www.theliberationists.com>

BWC Disaffiliation Process as of AC2021: <https://www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/book-of-discipline-paragraph-2553-provides-information-on-disaffiliation/>