

# BEFORE YOUR HOME MEETING

Before attending a home meeting, set aside some time to pray:

- Ask God for courage and clarity in what you say.
- Ask God for curious and careful listeners to hear you.
- Ask God for care and understanding in what you hear others saying.

Our Discernment Team also invites you to review this packet before you attend. A significant portion of your home meeting will be set aside *for you to ask questions* about the information presented here:

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# CURRENT TEACHING OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*This is the official moral teaching of the United Methodist Book of Discipline, located in Part V (Social Principles), ¶161 (The Nurturing Community), part F (Human Sexuality):*

*We affirm that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage...*

*We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.*

As a result of this moral teaching, the Book of Discipline also contains this statement:

*"Self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."*

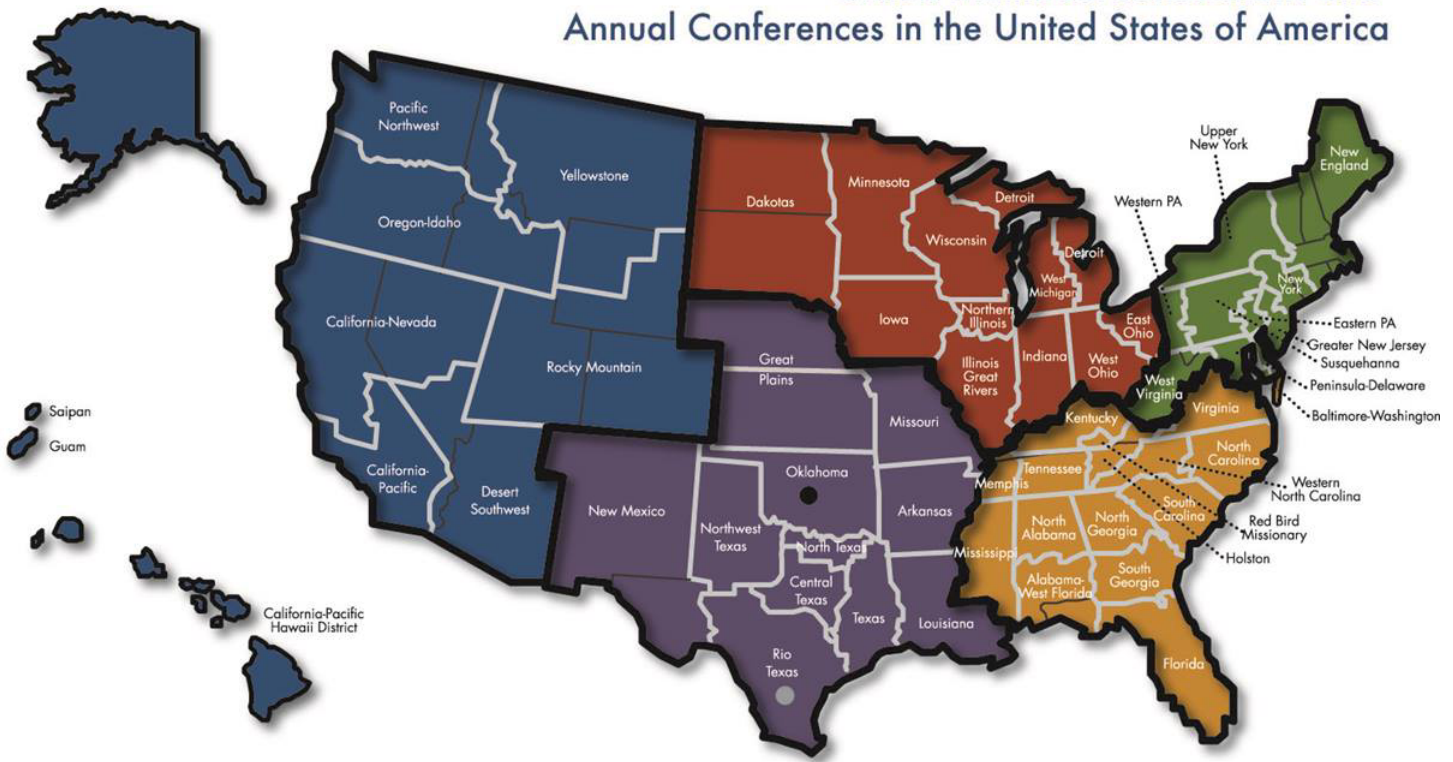
Further, there are 12 "chargeable offenses" for which United Methodist pastors may have their ordination revoked. The second of these chargeable offenses is:

*Practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.*

This is the official teaching for all United Methodists, around the world.

HOWEVER...

## United Methodist Jurisdictions and Annual Conferences in the United States of America



- Jurisdiction Boundaries
- Conference Boundaries
- State Boundaries
- North Central Jurisdiction
- Northeastern Jurisdiction
- South Central Jurisdiction
- Southeastern Jurisdiction
- Western Jurisdiction
- Some churches are outside the boundary of the Rio Texas Annual Conference.
- Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference is comprised of Native American congregations of Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas.

*\*Note – the map only depicts the 54 annual conferences in the US. There are another 75 annual conferences in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines*

### *The worldwide teaching of our discipline is applied regionally.*

We do not have a single, centralized head of the church, like a pope.

Our situation is as if the United States kept the Constitution, but with no president. The Constitution would be enforced by governors (aka, bishops), who would each interpret and apply the Constitution differently. Just as with governors, Methodist bishops are elected by and accountable to their region, rather than the worldwide church.

The official teaching of the UMC has not changed, but the bishops of two jurisdictions (the Western and Northeastern) have decided not to pursue church trials against gay and lesbian clergy, or against clergy who perform same-sex weddings. The Western Jurisdiction has also elected two bishops, one man and one woman, each of whom is in a legal same-sex marriage. Some churches and bishops in other regions have also expressed their desire to see the discipline change, but by an overwhelming majority, these regions have abided by that discipline.

# POSSIBLE FUTURES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

In May of 2024, United Methodists from around the world will gather in Charlotte, NC for a General Conference, which is (usually) held once every four years (the upcoming General Conference was postponed twice, due to COVID-related travel and visa issues).

The General Conference has a great deal of authority over the denomination's Social Principles and clergy standards, so it could make any number of decisions, but in general, one of these three scenarios is most likely.

## STATUS QUO

- There are no changes to official church teaching on sexuality and marriage.
- There are no changes to our regional governance.
- The United Methodist Church continues to be a denomination that teaches one thing, with some congregations and regions that practice another.

## REGIONAL OPTION

- The General Conference allows individual regions to adopt their own Social Principles regarding sexuality.
- Each congregation discerns for itself whether or not to bless same-sex marriages or receive gay or lesbian clergy. Each Annual Conference discerns for itself whether to ordain individuals who are in same-sex marriages.
- Under this regional governance, all United Methodist churches share the same confession of faith (Apostles' Creed, Articles of Religion, etc.) and support for missions, while having different teachings regarding marriage.

## STRONG GOVERNANCE OPTION

- There are no changes to official church teaching on sexuality.
- There are changes in our governance, requiring all regions to live by the current teaching.
- The United Methodist Church becomes a denomination with more centralized authority, in which every congregation and region must hold more closely to the church's social principles, or at least in the principles regarding marriage.

# DISAFFILIATION

In a special session of 2019, the General Conference passed several measures for our Book of Discipline, bringing the UMC closer to a “Strong Governance Option.”

At the same time, the General Conference passed a “limited right” for congregations to “disaffiliate” from the United Methodist Church if they were unwilling to live under a stronger form of governance regarding sexuality. This limited right expires at the end of 2023. That expiration date was originally set in the expectation that the General Conference would meet again in 2020. Because of the delay in General Conference, Dauphin Way’s bishop, Bishop David Graves, has asked the trustees and cabinet of Alabama-West Florida to offer an exit option through March 2025. The cabinet and trustees have announced their agreement with the bishop, and are creating a procedure to allow congregations an exit option in 2024 and 2025 that honors the current disaffiliation process (shown below):

## CHURCH COUNCIL

- No church is required to have a vote regarding disaffiliation; only the Church Council may call for such a vote.
- If the Church Council calls for such a vote, it must:
  - Submit a “statement of eligibility” to the Alabama-West Florida Trustees that includes *either* of two statements.
    - A statement that explains how the congregation disagrees with the denomination’s current teachings regarding homosexuality, OR
    - A statement that explains how those teachings have not been upheld within their annual conference (Alabama-West Florida)
  - Invite all professing members of the church to that vote and also invite the congregation to two townhalls to address any questions about the process and implications of that vote.
  - Invite the church into 40 days of prayer and fasting before the vote is held.

## CHURCHWIDE VOTE

If the congregation votes by a **2/3 majority** (of those who attend the vote) to disaffiliate, then the congregation must

- Pay an amount to cover two years of upcoming apportionments for the mission of the Alabama-West Florida Conference and the worldwide United Methodist Church.
- Pay a lump sum to cover its ongoing pension obligations to retired clergy (this is calculated every year).

If the vote fails to receive 2/3 majority support, the congregation may not reconsider the motion for at least 12 months.

## RATIFICATION

- The Trustees of the Annual Conference review the congregation’s Statement of Eligibility before the church’s vote.
- In 2023, disaffiliation must be ratified by a simple majority of the other churches in the Annual Conference – this is a requirement of the worldwide Book of Discipline.
- In 2024, this requirement could remain, or it may be removed in favor of a simple vote from the Bishop’s cabinet.

# DAUPHIN WAY'S TIMELINE

In August of 2022, our Church Council resolved not to make any binding decisions about our denominational future until after the 2024 General Conference.

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In October of 2023, our Discernment Team will draft a Statement of Principle\* to guide the Church Council's response to the General Conference.

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This Statement of Principle will be available to the entire congregation for prayer and comment for at least a full month before it is adopted.

*\*In March-April of 2023, Rev. Michael taught a five-week study, In Good Faith, on how faithful Christians came to disagree about our teachings about human sexuality. Following that study, in May of 2023, our Discernment Team invited everyone in the congregation to complete a qualitative survey. The results of that survey informed our agenda for our August and September home meetings.*

*Our home meetings will help the Discernment Team draft a statement that accurately reflects who Dauphin Way is and how God has called us, so that we may respond faithfully and quickly after the General Conference in 2024.*

# IN GOOD FAITH

HOW FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS CAME  
TO DISAGREE ABOUT SEXUALITY

A LENTEN COURSE LED BY  
REV. MICHAEL PRECHT



Each of these summaries comes from a different 90-minute class taught during Lent of 2023.

- If you would like to review the detailed class notes from each session, with footnotes and citations, please visit [dauphinwayumc.org/citations](https://dauphinwayumc.org/citations)
- There, can also find a lightly edited transcript of all five lectures, along with the companion sermons that were preached in worship at [dauphinwayumc.org/ingoodfaith](https://dauphinwayumc.org/ingoodfaith).
- If you would like to watch the video from these classes, you can [INSTRUCTIONS TO FOLLOW]
- If you would like to listen to the audio from these classes, please visit the Dauphin Way UMC podcast feed from August 10, 2023

# TERMS AND SOURCES

## A NOTE FROM REV. MICHAEL

I spent a great deal of time thinking about how to present this material in the fairest way possible, even down to the question of, “Who gets the last word?” If I present one case first, and I always follow up with the other one, it will seem as if the second case is refuting the first.

I finally decided to follow the ancient, Biblical practice of drawing lots. I said, “Hey, Siri, flip a coin,” and I used that to determine which got first place in my first session. And then I tried to switch it up, when applicable, for every session after that. I hope you will not read into this any intent other than to present what is on the minds of the folks who've been writing and thinking and praying and studying this issue for a really long time.

## KEY TERMS

### **Traditionalist**

Shorthand for “a person who holds that Christian marriage is defined by a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman.”

Many traditionalists on the question of marriage do not call themselves especially traditional in other aspects of their faith: worship style, church structure, etc.

### **Progressive**

Shorthand for “a person who holds that Christian marriage can be defined by a lifelong covenant between two people, regardless of their sex.”

Many progressives on the question of marriage do not consider themselves especially progressive in other aspects of their faith.

*Throughout this study, I've done my best to take language that is often politicized in America and use that language without any of those political connotations in mind. I hope we can keep that political baggage out.*

## FOUNDATIONAL SOURCES

### **Methodist Traditionalists**

*For The Body*, Tim Tennent

*The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Richard Hays

### **Methodist Progressives**

*Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships*, Karen Keen

*God and the Gay Christian*, Matthew Vines

### **Non-Methodist Sources**

*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, Robert Gagnon

“Same-Sex Marriage as an Ascetic Practice in the Light of Romans 1 and Ephesians 5,” Eugene Rogers



# SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURE

## CONSENSUS REGARDING SCRIPTURE

- The Bible rarely discusses homosexual behavior.
- When the Bible does mention homosexual behavior, it is always negatively.
- The Biblical authors were more concerned with behavior than motive or orientation.
- All but one (and maybe all) references to homosexual behavior in the Bible are focused on male-male encounters.
- The laws of Leviticus are not all binding under the new covenant in Christ, and the word *arsenokoites* (used in 1 Timothy 1 and 1 Corinthians 6) is difficult to translate, and so Romans 1:26-27 is the most important reference to homosexual practice for both traditionalists and progressives.
- Both affirming and traditionalist Biblical scholars agree that the biblical disagreements are not really about the five or six verses that directly mention homosexual behavior; instead, the disagreements are over which major themes in the Bible should be used to understand those few verses and define a Christian understanding of marriage. The understanding of marriage is *the* major point for scholars on both sides.

## MAJOR PROGRESSIVE THEMES:

1. God's intent at creation is evident in Gen. 2:8, "It is not good for man to be alone."
  - a. Intentional, lifelong singleness (celibacy) is a gift God gives to some, but does not impose on anyone: "If they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:9).
2. Marriage is a sign of the Kingdom of God because it shows us God's covenant faithfulness and self-sacrifice.
  - a. Same-sex couples are capable of lifelong faithfulness and self-sacrifice, and so can be "grafted in" to the covenant of marriage as Gentiles were grafted into the covenant with Israel. (Rom. 11:23-24)
3. The precedent for same-sex marriage comes from biblical *principles*. We should understand marriage in the same way that we understand sabbath-keeping and circumcision, both of which are practiced differently now than they were for the Israelites and first Christians.

## MAJOR TRADITIONALIST THEMES:

1. God's intent at creation is evident in Genesis 1:27, "in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
  - a. This is reasserted by Jesus: "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female'" (Mark 10:9), and also by Romans 1.
2. Marriage is a sign of the Kingdom not only because it shows us God's covenant faithfulness and self-sacrifice, *but also* because it carries the potential for new life, and unity across differences (i.e. the uniting of male and female as a mirror of marriage of heaven and earth).
  - a. Openness to children and sexual differentiation are part of God's design and serve to make the marriage covenant outward-focused (Revelation 21:1-2, 22:2).
3. Marriage should not understand marriage in the same way we understand sabbath-keeping and circumcision because — unlike sabbath-keeping and circumcision — there is no explicit *example* of same-sex marriage in the New Testament, and because Jesus tends to offer stricter, not looser, expectations for marriage and sexuality.

# SUMMARY OF REASON

## CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS AND BEHAVIOR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA (SUPPORTED BY BOTH TRADITIONALIST AND PROGRESSIVE SCHOLARS):

- Same-sex relationships between male peers were very rare, though not unknown. Nearly all same-sex relationships between men were exploitative and “pederastic” — involving an older, socially superior man with a younger, socially inferior (or enslaved) man.
- Same-sex relationships between females were even rarer but less likely to be exploitative.
- Same-sex desire was attributed to many origins
  - Ancient writers certainly knew of people who experienced exclusively homosexual desires, and innate homosexual desires.
  - It is not clear whether ancient sources believed that exclusive desires could be innate. It seems that most ancients believed that most “homosexuals” were born as “bisexuals” who became exclusively attracted to the same sex over time.

## MODERN SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS (SUPPORTED BY BOTH TRADITIONALIST AND PROGRESSIVE SCHOLARS)

- About 2-3% of the U.S. adult population reports a homosexual orientation.
- The origins of homosexual orientation are complicated and uncertain, but there is a consensus that “most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.”
- A person’s sexual orientation most often becomes evident around puberty.
- When Christians attempt to change their orientation, “most do not experience a change of orientation.”

## RECENT CHANGES IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF MARRIAGE

- The last 200 years have seen significant changes, even in traditional marriages.
  - Love is now expected to be a precursor to marriage, rather than arising after several years of marriage.
    - For example, consider the lyrics to “Do You Love Me?” from *Fiddler on the Roof*.
  - Lifelong singleness has greater economic and legal support (civil rights, employment rights, property rights, etc.) now than in previous eras.
  - Lifelong singleness has less social support; there are fewer monasteries, convents, intentional Christian communities, lifelong employers, or families living in multi-generational homes than in previous eras.
    - Increasingly, marriage is the only form of covenanted, lifelong relationship available to people.

# SUMMARY OF TRADITION

## BEFORE THE LAST FIFTY YEARS

- The “traditionalist” view has that name for a reason. The vast majority of church teaching, for the vast majority of Christian history, has held that sex is intended for marriage and that marriage is “a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman.”
  - Ancient, medieval, and pre-industrial churches did occasionally celebrate “brotherhood rites;” these never blessed same-sex sexual conduct, but they sometimes allowed the church to adopt a “don’t ask; don’t tell” in blessing the *friendship* of same-sex couples who lived together, owned property together, and were often buried together.
- Before 1970, the only real precedent for changing the definition of *marriage* in any way was focused on exceptions to the *lifelong covenant* part of the definition.
  - John Wesley considered re-marriage (except for widows and widowers) to be a form of polygamy (Mark 10:2-12) and not a true marriage, and this is still the position of some traditions. (e.g. Catholic, Orthodox, Church of Christ, and some branches of the Baptist tradition).
    - This was the position of the Methodist church until 1940, with an exception made for “the innocent party” if the other spouse could be proven to be unfaithful.

## IN THE LAST FIFTY YEARS

- A brief timeline of how traditional churches have ministered to and with gay and lesbian people.
  - Churches with an “oppositional” witness teach that homosexuality is an act of rebellion. These churches emphasize repentance from same-sex desire and behavior.
  - Churches with a “therapeutic” witness taught that homosexual desire is a wound to be cared for and healed. This gave rise to the now mostly abandoned practice of reparative therapy.
    - \*Note: Nearly all the major practitioners of “reparative therapy” have renounced it in the last 15 years. In addition, 30 years of research (including among strongly traditionalist organizations) have shown that reparative therapy greatly increases suicidal behavior and substance abuse.
  - Churches with a “sacrificial” witness teach that gay and lesbian Christians are called to a sacrifice of lifelong celibacy and the Church is called to a sacrifice of radical friendship and community to support its gay and lesbian members in their celibacy.
- A brief timeline of same-sex marriage affirmation:
  - The first public same-sex marriage ceremony in the U.S. was performed in 1969 by the founder of the Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination founded specifically to minister with gay and lesbian people.
  - Same-sex marriage remains the minority position. It has been officially affirmed *or* permitted-but-not-required) by several denominations and figures in Christian publishing and music: United Churches of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Presbyterian (USA), Episcopal Church, British Methodists, and The Church of England; Adam Hamilton, Tony Campolo, Amy Grant, Jen Hatmaker, and Eugene Peterson.

# SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE

## THE LIMITS OF STUDYING EXPERIENCE

- Ultimately, the question of experience is personal, as we ask God to show us how the Gospel bears fruit in the lives of gay and lesbian people whose lives we know best.
- Reading the testimonies of people we *don't* know will always cause us to privilege those who write and speak well, and perhaps overlook those individuals whose holiness is quieter.
- However, popular testimonies are helpful because these testimonies are available to all people, and do not depend on long, personal acquaintance.

## THE FOUR MOST PROMINENT FORMS OF PUBLIC TESTIMONY

- Gay-affirming Evangelicals (aka, Side A)
  - Testimony: “God has given me a new yoke” (Acts 15:10)
  - These are gay and lesbian Christians who believe that same-sex partnerships can be blessed by God, providing a sacrificial “yoke” that is easier to bear than lifelong singleness/celebrity.
  - The most prominent voices are from lifelong Christians who do not have a story of rejecting the Church or God, but who have struggled to reconcile their sexuality with their beliefs.
- Celibate, Gay Christians (aka, Side B)
  - Testimony: “God has given me a new calling” (Philippians 3:10-12)
  - These are gay and lesbian Christians who believe that same-sex orientation is a gift, enabling them to bear a unique counter-cultural witness, but they do not believe that same-sex sexual behavior can be blessed by God.
  - This group emphasizes strong friendships and community.
    - A minority of individuals have committed to a modern form of ancient and medieval “*brotherhood*” covenants, as mentioned in the Tradition session.
- Ex-gays (aka, Side X)
  - Testimony: “God has given me a new orientation” (Matthew 9:4-6)
  - Homosexual orientation itself must be repented of and “cured.”
  - Heterosexuality is seen as God’s best for all people. Therefore, Side X Christians usually promote “reparative” efforts to change a person’s sexual attraction.
    - \*Nearly all the major figures in this movement have renounced their testimony. In addition, 30 years of research (including among strongly traditionalist organizations) have shown that reparative therapy greatly increases suicidal behavior and substance abuse.
- Gospel Coalition Affiliated, Same-Sex-Attracted Evangelicals (aka, Side Y)
  - Testimony: “God has given me a new identity” (Romans 6:6-7)
  - “Side Y” are distinct from celibate gay Christians in their rejection of the term “gay” for self-reference, preferring “same-sex attracted.” Rather than seeing their orientation as a gift, they see it as a “thorn in the flesh,” after the example of the apostle Paul’s lifelong struggle.
  - They consider change in sexual orientation possible but do not believe change occurs for everyone or even most people.
    - They are more likely to esteem lifelong celibacy or mixed-orientation marriage.

# SUMMARY OF CHURCH

## UNITY AND HOLINESS

“The major emphases of [scripture regarding the Church] fall on unity and holiness. Both concepts are vital and non-negotiable. I've often remarked, having seen this in the churches I've led, that unity and holiness are not only difficult in themselves, but they are very difficult when put together.

Unity alone is comparatively easy. **If you don't care about holiness, you can all just get together and turn a blind eye to people's behaviour.** Likewise, holiness alone is comparatively easy. **If you don't care about unity, you just follow the rigorous standards you set for yourself and split off from anyone who disagrees.” [emphases added]**

- NT Wright “Church Unity Through Paul’s Eyes”

### CONVICTIONS ON MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY COME FROM OUR CONVICTIONS ABOUT BOTH HOLINESS AND UNITY:

<i>Holiness/ Unity</i>	Progressive/ Noncompatibilist	Progressive/ Compatibilist	Traditional/ Compatibilist	Traditional/ Noncompatibilist	<i>Holiness/ Unity</i>
	<p>People in this space have deep concerns for the call of Scripture for <b>holiness through justice</b> for all people and <b>Jesus’ care of the marginalized</b>. This is such a high value for them that they only want to be in a church that reflects this belief and <b>are willing to separate</b> from any church that does not.</p>	<p>People in this space would like to see the church bless same-sex marriage for committed Christian couples. <b>They respect the right</b> of their traditionalist friends and <b>do not want to force them</b> into situations that would violate their personal beliefs. They believe the <b>unity that Christ prayed for in the church can be upheld</b> despite this difference.</p>	<p>People in this space do not believe same-sex relationships fulfill God’s purpose for marriage and <b>do not want to be forced</b> into performing such marriages or receiving clergy in same-sex marriages; however, they <b>can live in a denomination where this occurs</b> (either in other regions <i>or</i> in other congregations). There are many issues beyond this where <b>they find unity in our connection</b>.</p>	<p>People in this space have deep concerns for the call of Scripture to <b>holiness through God’s design</b> and <b>not conforming to the world</b>. This is such a high value to them that they <b>are willing to separate</b> rather than feel their faith is compromised by diverse practices around same-sex marriage.</p>	
<i>Example:</i>		<i>Current UMC Practice</i>		<i>Current UMC Teaching</i>	:

# DAUPHIN WAY'S QUALITATIVE SURVEY

We received more than 240 responses to our qualitative survey, comprising more than 33,000 words. Our Discernment Team reviewed all of these responses, and (with the help of ChatGPT!), produced a summary of the major themes contained in those responses. All members of the Discernment Team agreed that this summary accurately reflects the most common themes in the survey. The Discernment Team also adds the following comment on the survey responses:

*The survey suggests that there is a very balanced distribution of spiritual convictions on homosexuality within Dauphin Way.*

For a more detailed summary, please refer to [dauphinwayumc.org/surveyresponses](http://dauphinwayumc.org/surveyresponses)

## QUESTION 1 - WHY IS DAUPHIN WAY YOUR CHURCH HOME?

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1. **Strong Community and Relationships:** The respondents mention the warm, welcoming, and caring nature of the church community. The people, pastors, and the community formed by the church seem to be a crucial factor for many. Many of the individuals view Dauphin Way as their spiritual home. Many individuals made Dauphin Way their home because of family ties, friends, or the relationships they've developed over time. This extends from marriages and baptisms to personal friendships and familial generations attending the church.
2. **Spiritual Growth:** Many members value the church for providing opportunities for spiritual growth, whether through sermons, Bible studies, or interactions with the pastoral staff. The variety of pathways for spiritual growth is especially important — including robust programs for children, youth, and service to the world.
3. **Faith Alignment and Beliefs:** Attendees align themselves with the teachings of the church, which they find supportive and non-judgmental. Some specifically enjoy the traditional beliefs and practices of the church. They appreciate the balance of tradition and adaptation in the church's teaching and practice.
4. **Location:** Some respondents mentioned the location of the church as a factor for them, particularly those who wanted a church in their local area.

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## QUESTION 2 – WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST ABOUT DAUPHIN WAY’S UNITED METHODIST CONNECTION?

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1. **Connection and Unity:** One of the major themes is the importance of being part of a larger community or network. This unity allows for sharing and connection on a level that goes beyond a single church or congregation. People express the importance of service and outreach both within their local community (e.g. Dumas Wesley, Mobile Inner City Mission, USA Wesley Foundation) and with Methodists worldwide. The denomination is described as a support system, assisting its members and the surrounding community, especially during times of disaster through the United Methodist Committee on Relief.
2. **Tradition and Historical Continuity:** The rich tradition and history of the Methodist church and its teachings are valued by the contributors. Also highlighted: the Methodist doctrines of grace and inclusiveness and the overall traditions of the United Methodist Church (UMC). Responses also note the use of the Wesleyan quadrilateral (Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience) in discernment and decision-making.
3. **Pastoral Leadership and Guidance:** There's a strong theme of appreciating the education, development, and recruitment of clergy. The value of having ministers and pastors who aren't directly beholden to the congregation is mentioned, as well as access to top-quality ministers.
4. **Governance and Structure:** The text mentions the value of the church's structure and governance, including the episcopal form of governance, the oversight and supervision of pastors, and adherence to the Book of Discipline. There's an appreciation for the steadiness of the Methodist church, its consistent service and values, and its adherence to established standards of behavior. The structure and stability provided by the church's leadership and denominational connections are appreciated. The church's decision-making processes are seen as trusted and beneficial.

## QUESTION 3 – HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE DISAGREEMENTS WITHIN THE UMC REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY?

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1. **Reconciliation of Personal Beliefs and Church Stance:** The survey shows that just as the larger denomination is wrestling with these questions, so are the members of the congregation. Many people express the difficulty of reconciling their personal experiences of gay or lesbian family members and friends with their personal beliefs. Others are struggling to reconcile their personal beliefs with the traditional teaching of the church. There is a deep and widely acknowledged desire, to demonstrate love and respect in considering different perspectives.
2. **Inclusion and Acceptance:** There is a clear theme of inclusivity and acceptance that runs through the statements. Many participants express a desire to welcome all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or identity. Some individuals feel that this inclusiveness should be expressed through the full inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals in various roles and reject anything less, considering it a form of discrimination. Others feel that it is possible

to demonstrate the Christian ideal of loving one another and welcoming everyone without changing established doctrines.

3. **Church Leadership and Governance:** There is a deep appreciation for how these disagreements are being addressed within the local church. There is a more neutral attitude taken toward the regional leadership in the Alabama-West Florida Conference. There is considerably more skepticism about how these disagreements are addressed on the level of the worldwide denomination. Concerns are raised about the potential for hypocrisy if the church has rules or policies that are not consistently followed.
4. **Societal Influence:** The influence of broader societal changes and attitudes towards homosexuality and gender identity is also a recurring theme. There is deep concern, regardless of whether the church's teaching changes or not, that teaching should be led by Scripture and divine guidance rather than societal norms. There are multiple perspectives on how the teachings and scriptures of the UMC should be interpreted and applied, particularly regarding issues of homosexuality and the roles of the clergy. There are also concerns about how the church equips children and adolescents to be set apart from changing values and secular moral principles.
5. **Sadness Over Division:** Many express sadness, disappointment, and concern about the division within the church over the issue of homosexuality. They acknowledge the presence of disagreements and the potential negative consequences of the disputes. Many express a desire for the denomination to find a resolution that respects differing opinions while maintaining a sense of togetherness.