

Resource for UM Churches during their discernment process

August 2023

In response to recent inquiries for help in leading conversations regarding disaffiliation from or staying with the United Methodist Church, your cabinet has responded with this condensed document.

First, some instructions:

1. Please follow the links provided in this document. The information they provide will help answer the questions your congregation may have concerning Scripture, The Book of Discipline, The strength of the UMC, and Misinformation.
2. If there is a subject you would like more information on, we urge you to visit the conference website which provides fact-checked information.
<https://www.ngumc.org/beumc> and
<https://www.ngumc.org/disaffiliation-process-and-information>
3. We encourage you to have conversations with these materials with individuals and in groups. If you choose to have conversations, please have at least 2 or 3 sessions.

Preview of enclosed materials:

Brief overview: This link provides an excellent overview of our current situation:

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/why-im-not-leaving-the-united-methodist-church#:~:text=I%20believe%20in%20the%20church,%E2%80%9Ceither%20for%E2%80%9D%20mentality>

Section I addresses and provides resources for our Scriptural focus. As Christians, scripture should inform and guide every discussion and action in our lives. We hope you will begin here.

The issue of same-sex engagement is mentioned 6 times in Scripture. These verses must be read in context and within the entire scope of Scripture which reveals a message of mercy over judgment, humility instead of arrogance, unity over division, and trust in God over self-reliance. In this section, many scripture passages are provided to move our conversations beyond those six verses that have become the sole focus of many. The grand scope of Scripture reminds us of God's message of love, salvation, and unity in human relationships.

Section II provides resources concerning our covenant (The Discipline) of The United Methodist Church and our leadership's submission to that covenant. We uphold the Discipline and do not take that responsibility lightly.

All ordained and licensed pastors in The United Methodist Church have been vetted by the Board of Ordained Ministry and the District Committee on Ordained Ministry, respectively. Each pastor makes a vow before God and the Annual Conference to live a life reflective of solid Christian character grounded in Wesleyan theology, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to uphold the Book of Discipline throughout their ministry.

John Wesley provided us with a framework for making faith decisions. Scripture is foundational to all of our faith decisions; however, Wesley taught us that we interpret Scripture in light of

Tradition, Reason and Experience. This framework guides us in the faith decisions we make throughout our lifetime as we encounter new issues that affect our lives.

As United Methodists, a critical part of our Book of Discipline is The Articles of Religion which reveal our Doctrinal Beliefs. These doctrinal beliefs have not and will not change. They are timeless, keeping us focused and true as we teach and live by these doctrines generation after generation This section provides a list of our Articles of Religion that have been the foundation of our faith since John Wesley.

Regarding the reading of Par 2553: At the General Conference of 2019, Paragraph 2553 was included in the Discipline as a way for those who cannot uphold the Discipline as it is concerning the language and issues related to homosexuality to withdraw from the UMC.

The resources below provide:

1. The wording of Paragraph 2553
2. The North Georgia Conference Trustees' pathway concerning the use of Par 2553 to withdraw from the UMC
3. A sample ballot.

It is important to note that Par 2553 was written by conservative delegates to General Conference so that those who disagree with our current Discipline may withdraw from the UMC. Many churches have used this paragraph as an opportunity to withdraw from the UMC for other reasons. The question each church and person must ask is: is this morally acceptable?

Section III highlights resources concerning the positive elements of being UMC such as: our theology is founded on grace instead of judgment, and we believe in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

- our theology affirms that all are welcome and recipients of God's grace.
- every church is provided a pastor who is vetted and educated.
- every member has voice and representation within our structure.
- our connection enables us to share resources to build and support schools and hospitals
- our connection enables us to respond to tragedies around the world with people and finances.
- and so much more.

Section IV provides links to clear up the misinformation that has been circulated. A question each must ask is, Am I seeking the truth or willing to believe the worst of what I hear?

Overview Article

Why I'm not leaving The United Methodist Church

By the Rev. Steve West

A few weeks ago, hundreds of North Alabama Methodists who consider themselves traditional, orthodox, and conservative met at Clearbranch UMC to talk about splitting from The United Methodist Church.

I have had good interactions with the pastors who organized the meeting. They are my colleagues. They are part of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, an organization of 1,500 churches nationwide and about 60 clergy here in North Alabama planning to launch a new denomination a few months from now, once the General Conference in May allows for their gracious exit.

I respect their convictions. But I won't be joining them. Here's why.

1. I made a promise.

My dad is a retired pastor, and he and I agree neither of us will leave The United Methodist Church (until recently, it was beyond my imagination that any of us would consider it). It would dishonor our family history, but there's something even more important at stake. I feel it would disregard the vows I made at ordination. I promised I would be faithful to The United Methodist Church and uphold its discipline. I have done so, even if others haven't, and I am only responsible for my own vows.

I follow the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church even when I get heat for it, gently insisting that all people may participate fully in the ministries, sacraments and programs of the church (yes, that's in there). I would not perform a same-sex marriage, but I'm passionate about inclusiveness in the church. For me, it's the way of Jesus, but it's also about the vows I took.

Speaking of vows, I feel leaving The United Methodist Church would be hypocritical when, for over 30 years, I have welcomed members into God's church by asking them to take a vow to be loyal to The United Methodist Church and support it.

2. This has evolved past social issues to schism.

I am a centrist and have varied opinions on issues. The United Methodist Church is not perfect, but diversity of thought is one reason I love it. John Wesley taught Christianity was essentially about love for God and neighbor, growing through the means of grace, and staying connected even when we "agree to disagree" (yes, he coined that phrase).

We have made it through divisive issues such as slavery, voting rights, temperance, civil rights and ordaining women. It is the most evenly widespread denomination in the United States, so there will always be cultural issues. But this is a moment where I must decide whether to stay at the table and work it out or not, and to me, that's the very definition of church.

There is no plan on the table that involves telling pastors they have to perform weddings they're not comfortable with, telling local churches they have to do something inappropriate for their context, or telling conferences that they can't set standards for ministry. I respect that others may leave The United Methodist Church because of their convictions, but I am staying precisely because of mine.

Wesley said that separating "from a body of living Christians with whom we were before united is a grievous breach of the law of love" and hence it "is only when our love grows cold that we can consider separation."

3. There is too much to be lost.

The United Methodist Church is not perfect, but it's my home.

In a romanticized view of starting a new Methodist denomination, one can forget there are so many positive things to be lost by leaving. Together we have created the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the Upper Room, the Walk to Emmaus, the Academy for Spiritual Formation, Africa University, and all sorts of regional treasures like Sumatanga and the Children's Home. In America, we have started more colleges and universities than any other faith group, and we charter more Scouts than any other denomination. No church is perfect, but there is much to be lost by leaving.

I respect those who can't live with differing practices across the country, but our DNA is connectional, not congregational. Small churches will be the biggest losers if they suddenly have responsibility to recruit their pastor (this is in the proposed Discipline of the new denomination). Promises are being made, of course, but I believe that the DNA of a new denomination that forms over cultural disagreements will end up splitting again over the next one.

I honor their decision, and perhaps we will all be able to move forward more freely with bringing people to Christ. But I can't be a part of leaving.

4. I believe in the authority of the Bible.

The debate is incorrectly framed as being about biblical authority, when it is really about culture wars. I hold the Bible in high authority under the lordship of Christ. It was inspired by the Holy Spirit, written by human hands and codified by holy councils. God was in all of it.

Wesley didn't teach fundamentalist ideas such as inerrancy and infallibility. Instead, he taught the importance of interpreting it faithfully through tradition, reason and experience. He said in our Articles of Religion that the Bible contains everything necessary for salvation, but he didn't say it spells out everything.

How do I interpret the Bible over complex issues like acceptance of LGBTQ Christians? The reason we call it the Word of God is because it reveals Christ, whom the Bible calls the Word. So I read the Bible through the lens of Christ, who fulfills the law and confounds the Pharisees.

I don't worship the Bible. I worship Jesus, so to make sense of the Bible, I read it through the person of Christ. He loved every broken person he encountered. The only people he criticized were the Pharisees who had lost sight of love because of religious rules based on their tight interpretation of Scripture. The Bible says God is love, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, so I believe it.

5. I am traditional and orthodox.

The schism is being planned over a set of social issues that are neither discussed in the Gospels nor addressed in the ancient creeds. So it is odd for people of only one viewpoint to exclusively claim the terms "traditional" and "orthodox."

There are indeed moral issues addressed in Scripture we must grapple with. But our Wesleyan tradition is, once again, to interpret Scripture through tradition, reason and experience. I believe in the virgin birth, the resurrection, the humanity and divinity of Christ, the Trinity and the things addressed in orthodoxy. I also follow the tradition of Wesley, who loved to use the saying, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

Jesus didn't even mention the issues that divide us, but there's something else that he most definitely did talk about: our unity, for that's what Jesus prayed for in John 17.

I have friends that say they are not leaving the church; the church has left them. I get that, but I honestly find it to be an echo of southern secessionism. The United Methodist Church agrees on what's essential, and I'm going to stay at the table and work out what's secondary.

6. I follow Jesus.

I keep coming back to the way Jesus treated the woman at the well. He offered her living water, then, after indicating he knew of her past, he took her seriously in discussing the religious issues on her mind.

I have noticed what he did NOT say. He gently pointed out that she was committing adultery (that one's in the Ten Commandments), but he didn't say, "Oh, now I take back what I said about living water." Christ's offer was still good, and then they had a fascinating discussion about faith. So I choose to accept people for who they are and invite them to God's table for relationship with Christ. God handles the rest.

7. I believe in grace.

Do our churches rebuke people who are divorced and remarried, not allowing them to serve in ministry? I'm not saying we should hold remarried people in judgment, not at all. I'm saying that if we offer grace in one situation addressed in Scripture and not in another, it's clearly not about biblical authority but about culture wars.

I can't be a part of a new movement that insists LGBTQ people can't be Christians. I know too many that are.

8. I believe in the church.

We are the body of Christ, and I don't have all answers about the future, but leaving the table is out of the question. Our divided culture needs a witness to love that transcends our differences, not giving in to the prevalent “us vs. them” and “either/or” mentality.

The biggest criticism Jesus got was that he “ate with sinners.” Who am I to decide that I can't be in communion with someone I don't agree with? The only people Jesus didn't tolerate were the religious elites who were intolerant. I'm not going to be one of them.

That's why I'll stay UMC. I agree with Pinson United Methodist Church Pastor Joe DeWitte who said, “The UMC continues to discover that our church is big enough (because our God is big enough) to include people who disagree on matters that are not creedal.”

Here I stand, I can do no other.

Section I

An exercise that illustrates well how Jesus regarded those with whom he disagreed requires that a person make a fist with one hand. This closed fist represents beliefs and values that a person holds tightly. This person's other hand is extended and shaking someone else's hand with whom they disagree on important matters. Jesus' theology, and I believe our own Methodist theology, is best represented by an unwillingness to let go of what is either in one hand (convictions) or in the other hand (relationship). This unwillingness to let go of what was in the left or the right hand enabled Jesus to be clear about who he was while being equally clear about the high value he placed on remaining "connected" to others. In fact, maintaining connection was a core value of his convictions. Herein lies the type of unity that underlies much of what we see when reading scripture.

To be clear, to use scripture as a means of justifying departing, separating, promoting schism, or disaffiliation, is to miss the powerful way in which Jesus was able to not only be in fellowship with those with whom he had fundamental disagreements, but to do it without sacrificing his core convictions. It is why he could eat with sinners, recruit a tax collector to be a disciple, and embrace a broad spectrum of people. As you read some of the following scriptures imagine how they illustrate maintaining conviction while remaining unwavering in one's commitment to connection:

Philippians 4:2: "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord."

Matthew 18:15-17: "If your brother/sister sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother/sister. But if he/she does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Matthew 5:25 – "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard and you be put in prison."

Luke 9:46-48 – "An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, 'Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.'"

Acts 15:36-40 – "After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are.' Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the world. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

2 Timothy 4:11 – “Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.”

I Corinthians 1:10 – “Now I exhort you, brothers/sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

2 Timothy 2:14 – “Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers.

1 Corinthians 6:1 – “Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?”

Romans 14:1 – “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.”

Proverbs 20:3 – “Keeping away from strife is an honor for man, but any fool will quarrel.”

I Corinthians 3:3-4 – “For you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men?”

Romans 14:19 – “For we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

Romans 16:17 – “Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.”

Romans 15:5 – “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus.”

2 Corinthians 12:20 – “For I am afraid that perhaps when I come, I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances. . .”

2 Timothy 2:23 – “But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.”

Acts 15:1-3 – “Some men came down from Judea and began teaching, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, it was determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

2 Corinthians 13:11 – “Finally, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Matthew 12:25 – “And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and any city or house divided against herself will not stand.”

Ephesians 4:1-3 – “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Mark 3:24-25 – “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.”

Galatians 2:11-14 – “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

Additional passages for reflection:

- **Colossians 3:13-15**
- **I Thessalonians 5:13**
- **2 Timothy 2:23-24**
- **Galatians 5:19-20**
- **1 Peter 3:8**
- **Proverbs 6:12-14**
- **Deuteronomy 1:12-13**
- **I Corinthians 6:5-6**
- **Titus 3:9-11**
- **I Timothy 1:3-4**
- **James 3:16**
- **Matthew 5:9**
- **James 3:18**
- **Genesis 26:19-22**
- **I Kings 3:16-27**
- **I Corinthians 6:1-7**
- **Philippians 2:14**

Section II

“To separate ourselves from a body of living Christians, with whom we were before united, is a grievous breach of the law of love. . . . It is only when our love grows cold, that we can think of separating from our brethren.” John Wesley

HOMOSEXUALITY: FULL BOOK OF DISCIPLINE STATEMENTS [2016]

¶ 4. Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church

The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, 4 or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its

worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. 5 In the United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition. 6

4. Amended 1992.

5. Amended 2000.

6. See Judicial Council Decisions 242, 246, 340, 351, 362, 377, 398, 594, 601, and Decisions 4 and 5, Interim Judicial Council.

¶ 161.G Human Sexuality

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 the reconciliation of 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 being in ministry with and for all persons. *

*See Judicial Council Decisions 702

¶ 214. Eligibility

The United Methodist Church is a part of the holy catholic (universal) church, as we confess in the Apostles Creed. In the church, Jesus Christ is proclaimed and professed as Lord and Savior. All people may attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments and become members in any local church in the connection (¶ 4). In the case of persons whose disabilities prevent them from reciting the vows, their legal guardian[s], themselves members in full covenant relationship with God and the Church, the community of faith, may recite the appropriate vows on their behalf.

¶ 304.3 Qualifications for Ordination

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals 1 are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. 2

1. Self-avowed practicing homosexual is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual. See Judicial Council Decisions 702, 708, 722, 725, 764, 844, 984, 1020

2. See Judicial Council Decisions 984, 985, 1027, 1028

¶ 341.6 Unauthorized Conduct

Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers

and shall not be conducted in our churches. 35

35. See Judicial Council Decision 1115

¶ 613 Responsibilities [of the conference council on finance]

The [conference council on finance and administration] shall have authority and responsibility to perform the following functions:

19. To ensure that no annual conference board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The UMC & not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends; (¶ 161F). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. This restriction shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic, nor shall it preclude funding for dialogs or educational events where the Church's official position is fairly and equally represented.

¶ 806.9 Fiscal Responsibilities [of the General Council on Finance and Administration]

[The General Council on Finance and Administration] shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The United Methodist Church & not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends; (¶ 161F). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. 18 It shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic.

18. See Judicial Council Decisions 491, 597.

Section III

Please watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxQF4E5F9Ro&t=3003s>

The presentation is from 16:57-46:55.

Please visit this links: <https://www.stayumc.com/articles>

Section IV

Bishop Dease and Cabinet Respond to Misinformation

The truth is: Not all are traditional

Not all churches that disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church in 2022 were theologically traditional congregations.

The truth is: Our bishops have guarded our United Methodist doctrine

Paragraph 401 of the *Book of Discipline*, which states that a Bishop is to guard the doctrine of the church and administer the *Book of Discipline*, has been cited in some documents by those pushing congregations to leave the UMC. Our Bishops have always guarded our doctrine. If anyone is stating that our Bishop or Conference Leadership does not believe in our doctrine or are changing it, they are offering incorrect information. The United Methodist Church is founded on a Wesleyan theology of grace which is anchored in Scripture, and professes faith in the teachings, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit.

The Articles of Religion, Confessions of Faith, The Standard Sermons of John Wesley, The Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, and The General Rules are our doctrinal standards as stated in our United Methodist *Book of Discipline*.

They are our theological foundation for faith and the ministry and mission of the church in the world. This is what we believe as United Methodists. Read these in the *Book of Discipline* or online at:

- [Articles of Religion](#)
- [Confessions of Faith](#)
- [The Standard Sermons of John Wesley](#)
- [The Explanatory Notes on the New Testament](#)
- [The General Rules: Do no harm, do good, and attend to the ordinances of God](#)

The truth is: No one is seeking to change our doctrine

All United Methodists have access to a free digital copy of the Book of Discipline (<https://www.cokesbury.com/book-of-discipline-book-of-resolutions-free-versions>) or can order a copy from Cokesbury.

Our Doctrinal Standards begin on page 47 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline*. No one is changing, asking to change, or opposing our Doctrinal Standards. The questions around human sexuality related to same-sex marriage and ordination are addressed in our church's policy section, which is a separate section of the *Book of Discipline*.

Church policies and procedures are regularly discussed, amended, and changed at General Conference every four years. Everyone from clergy, to laity, to bishops have different opinions and viewpoints on UMC policies. In the UMC it is okay for ordained clergy and bishops not to agree with everything in the *Book of Discipline's* policies. However, clergy and bishops do make a vow to uphold the *Book of Discipline*. If there is something in our *Book of Discipline's* policies that you do not agree with, then you, too, can write proposed legislation to amend, change, or remove policies from the *Book of Discipline* which may be considered at the General Conference. All legislation is reviewed, discussed, and decided on at General Conference, which is the only body that can officially speak or make decisions for the UMC.

We are not aware of any time that either Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson or Bishop Robin Dease have not guarded our doctrine or administered the *Book of Discipline*, even portions of the *Book of Discipline* with which they do not agree.

The truth is: Bishop Dease is and has been clear about her vow to uphold the Book of Discipline

A partial quote from Bishop Robin Dease in the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* has recently been shared in some of our churches, with the design of stoking fear that she will not uphold the *Book of Discipline*. Here is a full and true statement from Bishop Dease about her opinion, which includes her clear vow to uphold the *Book of Discipline*:

“Why I Am United Methodist?”

Who I am ... I am a United Methodist who believes in a theology of grace. Through God’s grace every person is welcome at the table and may be baptized into the family of Christ. This is why I believe same gender loving persons can fall in love and marry. I believe they can be called by God to serve God’s Church and be faithful to their call to transform lives for Christ’s kingdom.

Who I am not...is a person who will disobey The United Methodist Book of Discipline. I uphold and support our polity including our present stance concerning the practice of homosexuality. Yet, my hope remains constant; that the General Conference, our decision-making body, will change our polity to reflect a more inclusive Church that models the grace God gives to all humanity including LGBTQIA persons. Until then, as Bishop, I am committed to upholding the Book of Discipline while applying grace to individuals and local churches. —Bishop Robin Dease

The truth is: Our bishops have upheld the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality

Regarding the allegations that our Bishops have not “administrated” the *Book of Discipline* by enforcing the provisions regarding human sexuality, it is very important to note this is not the case in North Georgia:

1. Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson and the cabinet investigated any allegation regarding clergy performing same-sex weddings. And as of today, there has not been a clergyperson in our Conference that has performed a same-sex wedding.
2. The North Georgia Conference has continued to use the same policy around what is considered “officiating a wedding” since Bishop Lindsey Davis’s tenure. That policy states that administering the wedding vows, pronouncing the marriage, and signing the marriage license are what constitutes performing a wedding. Others (laity or clergy) may offer prayer or read scripture at a wedding. Those participants are not considered to be the “officiant” or to have “performed” the wedding.
3. Some have shared that there was an alleged violation of this policy at a wedding in 2021. This was investigated, and it was determined that the clergy accused of the violation did not perform the wedding.

4. Bishop Dease has instructed the cabinet to continue to ensure every clergy in North Georgia is upholding the *Book of Discipline* in all matters, including matters of human sexuality.
5. The cabinet has heard of an alleged violation of our policy at a wedding in 2022. We have not received any evidence of this situation. If this matter is brought to us, we will investigate.
6. No United Methodist church in North Georgia has hosted a same-sex wedding. If evidence of a violation is brought forward, it will be investigated. You can read St. Mark UMC's actual wedding policy and sample service from the UMC *Book of Worship* on their website <https://www.stmarkumc.org/weddings>.

Learn more about The United Methodist Church

We encourage you to not take information passed out to you by anyone as truth until you have verified it. We also encourage you to read more information about the UMC from our North Georgia Conference website at <https://www.ngumc.org/beumc>.

Finally, we encourage you to [contact your District Superintendent](#) with any questions. We are here to help you find truthful information and to help you make well-informed decisions.

—*Bishop Robin Dease and the Appointive Cabinet*