

First Elected Delegates Call for Closed Combined Delegation Meeting 14 July 2016

After hearing several sideline conversations about the possibility of electing an openly gay or lesbian clergyperson to the episcopacy, the first elected delegates gathered together and decided it would be best for the Western Jurisdiction if we were able to have that conversation together. Some of the concerns with calling for a closed session involved:

- creating safe space for all voices to be heard; and
- allowing opportunities for varying opinions and questions to be addressed; and
- demonstrating a healthy way to “talk” with each other; and
- sharing information, per United Methodist polity as it is and as it shall be with a new and pending disciplinary language.

The first elected delegates were careful to identify two skilled facilitators who would be sensitive to the overall nature of such a conversation. The caution was that we did not want to present the conversation in a way that would skew votes, advocate for candidates, or reform opinions. The ultimate goal was to have an open conversation and allow questions and even more dialogue to follow. We believed that whether we do or do not elect an openly gay or lesbian clergyperson this time, the desire to do so would not go unnoticed nor would that desire dissipate. We believed having the conversation, as a body, establishes a good foundation for future dialogue and establishes a model future delegations may employ. The decision to close the session was about limiting outside influence or distraction. We are aware there are many allies of varying opinions who are present at Jurisdictional Conference and conversations by such factions may not always help us in the ways that benefit us most.

The conversation during the closed delegation meeting began with opening statements about confidentiality – asking attendees to refrain from recording or posting information from the session. The questions addressed at tables in small groups were:

- What does it mean to consider persons of all sexual orientations to be qualified to be bishop?
- What would it mean for your local church if your bishop was not straight?
- What would it mean for your Annual Conference if your bishop was not straight?

After several minutes of responding to those questions, each group sent forth a person to summarize the table’s responses to the third question. Answers ranged from “Some would leave if we were to elect a gay bishop” to “Some would leave if we do not elect a gay bishop.” Other responses also included: questions that pushed back on the body to consider what it means to live as beloved community and many other sentiments that let us know we have much work to do and more relationship-building must take place in our local churches and Annual Conferences. The overall sentiment was that we really want the best candidate for this time. We followed the question and reflection time with a brief discussion around “legal” implications of electing an openly gay or lesbian person to serve. The relevant legislation was posted online so delegates could see the information and know how complaints against bishops could be handled in the future, if 2/3 of annual conferences approve the constitutional change needed to enact the new legislation [reference: Petition 60912 approved at 2016 General Conference].

We are grateful for the care and compassion of the Western Jurisdiction delegates and for the grace-filled conversations that continue.

*First Elected Delegates [**Yellowstone:** Tyler Amundson and Don McCammon; **Alaska:** Jo Anne Hayden and Carlo Rapanut; **Pacific Northwest:** Marie Kuch-Stanovsky and Mary Huycke; **Rocky Mountain:** Douglas Palmer and Kent Ingram; **California-Nevada:** Emily Allen and Jeffrey Kuan; **Desert Southwest:** Jim Nibbelink and Dan Hurlbert; **Oregon-Idaho:** Jan Nelson and Donna Pritchard; **California-Pacific:** Rosa Rios and Cedrick Bridgeforth]*