

**IN RE: PETITION FOR DECLARATORY DECISION FROM THE SOUTH CENTRAL JURISDICTIONAL CONFERENCE CONCERNING THE APPLICATION, MEANING, AND EFFECT OF ¶¶ 304.3, 310.2D, 341.6, 2702.1A), B), AND D) OF THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE 2012 IN REGARD TO THE NOMINATION, ELECTION, CONSECRATION, AND/OR ASSIGNMENT AS BISHOP OF A PERSON WHO CLAIMS TO BE A “SELF-AVOWED PRACTICING HOMOSEXUAL.**

**BRIEF OF DIXIE BREWSTER, SUBMITTED BY REV. KEITH D. BOYETTE**

This brief is filed on behalf of Dixie Brewster, a lay person from the Great Plains Annual Conference who was a delegate to the 2016 General Conference and the 2016 South Central Jurisdictional Conference. Ms. Brewster was the maker of the motion before the 2016 South Central Jurisdictional Conference requesting the declaratory decision which has given rise to this matter. The Reverend Keith D. Boyette, an elder in the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church and an attorney licensed to practice law in the Commonwealths of Virginia and Kentucky, files this brief on Ms. Brewster’s behalf and at her request.

**STATEMENT OF FACTS**

On July 15, 2016, during the session of the South Central Jurisdictional Conference, Dixie Brewster, a lay member of the Conference, from the Great Plains Annual Conference made the following motion:

Bishop, I move that the South Central Jurisdictional Conference request a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council on the following matter:

Is the nomination, election, consecration, and/or assignment as a bishop of The United Methodist Church of a person who claims to be a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” or is a spouse in a same-sex marriage lawful under The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church.

Specifically,

What is the application, meaning and effect of ¶304.3, ¶310.2d, ¶341.6, and ¶2702.1 (a), (b), and (d) in regard to the nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as bishop of a person who claims to be a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” or is a spouse in a same-sex marriage or civil union? Further –

- Does a public record that a nominee for the episcopacy is a spouse in a same-sex marriage disqualify that person from nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as a bishop in The United Methodist Church?
- If a jurisdictional conference nominates, elects, consecrates, and /or assigns a person who, by virtue of being legally married or in a civil union under civil law to a same-sex partner, would be subject to a chargeable offense, is the action of the jurisdictional conference null and void?
- Is it lawful for one or more of the bishops of a jurisdiction to consecrate a person as bishop when the bishop-elect is known by public record to be a spouse in a same-sex marriage or civil union?
- When a bishop, district superintendent, district committee on ordained ministry, Board of Ordained Ministry, or clergy session becomes aware of or is made aware that a clergy person is a spouse in a same sex marriage or civil union of public record, does such information in effect and in fact amount to a self-avowal of the practice of homosexuality as set forth in ¶304.3, related footnotes and related Judicial council Decisions?

The motion made by Ms. Brewster was seconded and then adopted by the South Central Jurisdictional Conference by a vote of 109 for the motion to 84 against the motion, a 56.48% majority. A video of the making of the motion at the South Central Jurisdictional Conference, the ensuing floor debate and the taking of the actual vote may be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/176664651> (accessed on February 9, 2017, posted by the Great Plains Annual

Conference of The United Methodist Church).<sup>1</sup>

## JURISDICTION

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction over this matter under ¶ 2610 of the *2012 Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church. Paragraph 2610 provides, in relevant part:

*Declaratory Decisions* – 1. The Judicial Council, on petition as hereinafter provided, shall have jurisdiction to make a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision as to the constitutionality, meaning, application, or effect of the *Discipline* or any portion thereof or of an act or legislation of a General Conference . . . .

2. The following bodies in The United Methodist Church are hereby authorized to make such petitions to the Judicial Council for declaratory decisions: . . . (f) any jurisdictional conference on matters relating to or affecting jurisdictions or jurisdictional conferences or the work therein . . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Contemporaneous with the adoption of the motion requesting a declaratory decision by the South Central Jurisdictional Conference, the Western Jurisdictional Conference elected the Rev. Dr. Karen Oliveto as a bishop of The United Methodist Church. Bishop Oliveto, since October 1, 2014, has been and continues to be a spouse in a same-sex marriage according to a public record obtained from the Clerk's Office in the County and City of San Francisco, California. See Exhibit 1. Bishop Oliveto on numerous occasions and most recently during the 2016 Western Jurisdictional Conference has affirmed that she is a self-avowed practicing homosexual. The 2016 Western Jurisdictional Conference was well aware of this reality as they took time during the Conference for conversation about the impact of electing an openly homosexual person who was in a same-sex marriage to the episcopal office. See Exhibit 2 which can also be accessed at <https://westernjurisdiction.com/first-elected-delegates-call-for-closed-combined-delegation-meeting-14-july-2016>. Both the maker of the motion and one of the persons who argued in favor of the adoption of the motion noted the imminent election of Oliveto to the episcopacy in the Western Jurisdiction as part of the rationale for adopting the motion. In announcing the vote, the presiding bishop then announced that Oliveto had just been elected to the episcopacy by the Western Jurisdiction. See the video at <https://vimeo.com/176664651>. The relief requested in this brief would result in the election of Oliveto being declared null, void and no effect.

The matters addressed by the petition for declaratory decision of the South Central Jurisdictional Conference deal with the nomination, election, consecration and assignment of persons as bishops of The United Methodist Church. The nomination, election, consecration and assignment of persons as bishops of The United Methodist Church is the primary and exclusive work of the jurisdictional conference in the United States and the central conferences outside the United States. *Discipline*, ¶¶ 46, 405. Additionally, once a person is elected and consecrated as a bishop, that person is a bishop of the entire church and potentially eligible to serve within the confines of any jurisdictional or central conference. *Discipline*, ¶¶ 49, 422.1. Thus the petition deals with matters relating to or affecting jurisdictions or jurisdictional conferences or the work therein.<sup>2</sup>

## ARGUMENT & ANALYSIS

### I. JURISDICTIONAL CONFERENCES MAY NOT LEGALLY NEGATE, IGNORE, OR VIOLATE PROVISIONS OF THE *DISCIPLINE*.

In Decision 886, the Judicial Council held:

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<sup>2</sup> An argument may be advanced that the Judicial Council does not have jurisdiction because the matter addressed in the motion for declaratory decision was not germane to the regular business, consideration or discussion of the conference and did not have a direct or tangible effect on the work of the conference session. Such an argument is specious. The first reference to such language with respect to a request for declaratory decision is found in Memorandum 1277 where it is clearly dictum since the matter raised had already been addressed by a General Conference Committee and the case was dismissed on the grounds that the issue raised was then moot. As Ruben Reyes, a member of the Judicial Council, observes in his dissenting and concurring opinion in Memorandum 1200, “in order for an annual conference [here jurisdictional conference] to gain access to the Judicial Council via petition for declaratory decision under ¶ 2610, it is sufficient for jurisdictional purpose that the subject matter relates to annual conferences [here jurisdictional conferences] or their work, not *necessarily limited to the petitioning conference*.” (emphasis added).” Decision 301 is entirely consistent with Mr. Reyes’ analysis in his dissenting and concurring opinion in Memorandum 1277. As noted in the text, nothing is more related or germane to the work of jurisdictional conferences than the nomination, election, consecration and appointment of bishops since that is the primary work of the jurisdictional conferences. Any jurisdictional conference is empowered to request a declaratory decision on any aspect of that work and the Judicial Council has jurisdiction to rule on such a request.

The *Discipline* is the law of the Church which regulates every phase of the life and work of the Church. As such, annual conferences may not legally, negate, ignore or violate provisions of the *Discipline* with which they disagree, even when the disagreements are based upon conscientious objections to those provisions.

The Judicial Council has declared that the holding of Decision 886 is applicable to the jurisdictional conferences in The United Methodist Church. In Decision 1250, the Judicial Council reviewed a resolution adopted by the Western Jurisdictional Conference titled “Sense of the Western Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church” and which sought to establish by legislative action of the jurisdictional conference the penalty if a bishop was convicted of violating a provision of the *Discipline*. The resolution provided that in such a case the appropriate penalty would be a suspension of the bishop “from the exercise of the episcopal office for a period of 24 consecutive hours.” See Decision 1237. The Judicial Council stated “a conference – jurisdictional, central, or annual – . . . may not legally negate, ignore or violate provisions of the *Discipline* . . .” Decision 1250 (citing Decision 886).

In Decision 886, the Judicial Council observed that such acts negating, ignoring or violating the provisions of the *Discipline* “would leave the Church, without any enforceable law, which would lead to chaos in the Church.” The principle set forth in Decision 886 has been applied in numerous cases to invalidate actions of annual and jurisdictional conferences. See, e.g., Decisions 911, 1111, 1115, 1120, 1185, and 1250. In each instance, those actions have involved resolutions directing individuals or entities to take actions which would negate, ignore or violate the *Discipline*. However, the action addressed here is even more pernicious because a jurisdictional conference, if it were permitted to proceed to nominate, elect, consecrate and/or assign a person such as described in the declaratory decision request, would immediately be in

violation of the *Discipline*. In such an event, the Judicial Council is the only body within the polity of The United Methodist Church which would have the ability to rule such an action by a jurisdictional conference to be unlawful, null and void.

The words of the Judicial Council in Decision 886 have proven to be prophetic in The United Methodist Church, where the actions of various jurisdictional and annual conferences negating, ignoring and violating the provisions of the *Discipline* leave the Church without any enforceable law and where the Church is in chaos with its very unity threatened. The only remedy left for those who would uphold the *Discipline* in the face of such willful disobedience is to seek redress from the Judicial Council.

The circumstance on which a declaratory decision is requested by the petition has in fact now occurred through the actions of the Western Jurisdictional Conference. Representatives of the Western Jurisdictional Conference have been identified as interested parties, including Bishop Oliveto who has been nominated, elected, consecrated and assigned in violation of provisions of the *Discipline*. Therefore, if the Judicial Council holds as requested below, the action of the Western Jurisdictional Conference in nominating, electing, consecrating and assigning Bishop Oliveto would be an action which would negate, ignore and violate the provisions of the *Discipline*, and would therefore be null, void, and of no effect, resulting in the invalidation of Bishop Oliveto's election.

**II. THE NOMINATION, ELECTION, CONSECRATION AND/OR ASSIGNMENT AS A BISHOP OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF A PERSON WHO IS A SPOUSE IN A SAME-SEX MARRIAGE NEGATES, IGNORES AND VIOLATES THE PROVISIONS OF THE *DISCIPLINE* AND IS NULL, VOID, AND OF NO EFFECT.**

The *Discipline* declares that in The United Methodist Church the only marriage recognized is between one man and one woman. For example, ¶ 161B of the *Discipline* states:

*Marriage* – We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. . . . We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

In Decision 1185, the Judicial Council held that in adopting ¶ 161B, the General Conference was acting within its legislative authority. Specifically, the Judicial Council stated, “This definition is within the power and authority of the General Conference to define ‘marriage’ for the entire Church.” The Judicial Council also noted that the “Church’s definition of marriage as contained in the *Discipline* is clear and unequivocal and is limited to the union of one man and one woman.”

Our *Book of Worship*, in its provision of marriage ceremonies, affirms that marriage is the union of one man and one woman. See *The United Methodist Book of Worship* at 116-133. Paragraph 16.6 of the *Discipline* states that as part of the full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional, the General Conference has the authority to “provide and revise the hymnal and ritual of the Church and to regulate all matters relating to the form and mode or worship . . . .” and they have done so through the adoption of the Book of Worship.

The *Discipline* further declares that an act of immorality by a person who is a bishop or clergy member of an annual conference includes but is not limited to “not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in *heterosexual* marriage . . . .” ¶ 2702.1a of the *Discipline* (emphasis added). Paragraph 341.6 of the *Discipline* further makes clear the understanding of The United Methodist Church that the General Conference has declared marriage to be a covenant between a man and a woman: “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”

The nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as a bishop of The United

Methodist Church of a person who is a spouse in a same-sex marriage would be an act which would legally negate, ignore and violate these provisions of the *Discipline* and as such would be null, void and of no effect. The *Discipline* repeatedly makes clear that an ordained person, and thus a bishop, must be celibate in singleness and faithful in marriage (see ¶¶ 304.2, 310.2d, and 2702.1a), and expressly defines marriage as heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman.

**III. THE NOMINATION, ELECTION, CONSECRATION AND/OR ASSIGNMENT AS A BISHOP OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF A PERSON WHO CLAIMS TO BE A SELF-AVOWED PRACTICING HOMOSEXUAL NEGATES, IGNORES AND VIOLATES THE PROVISIONS OF THE *DISCIPLINE* AND IS NULL, VOID, AND OF NO EFFECT.**

Paragraph 304.3 of the *Discipline* provides that “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.” Footnote 1 to ¶ 304.3 states that a “‘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.”

Furthermore, ¶ 2702.1b provides that it is a chargeable offense for a person to be a self-avowed practicing homosexual.

The nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as a bishop of The United Methodist Church of a person who claims to be a self-avowed practicing homosexual would manifestly negate, ignore and violate ¶ 304.3 of the *Discipline* and would as such be null, void and of no effect.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the focus of the Judicial Council in this proceeding is on the ability of a jurisdictional conference to elect a person as a bishop and not on the standing of the person under consideration in his or her ministerial office. The *Discipline* does not guarantee any ordained

**IV. A PUBLIC RECORD THAT A NOMINEE FOR THE EPISCOPACY IS A SPOUSE IN A SAME-SEX MARRIAGE DISQUALIFIES THAT PERSON FROM NOMINATION, ELECTION, CONSECRATION AND/OR ASSIGNMENT AS A BISHOP IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH.**

A public record that one person is married to another person conclusively establishes the existence of the marriage addressed therein unless a court order of divorce is produced. Where the public record establishes that the two individuals whose marriage is stated on the record are of the same sex or gender, then neither of those persons could be nominated, elected, consecrated or assigned as a bishop in The United Methodist Church for the reasons set forth in part II of this

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person the right to be elected to the episcopacy. However, the *Discipline* does guarantee ministers in good standing an appointment. Therefore, in Decision 920, the Judicial Council held that a statement made by a clergy woman that she is “living in a partnered, covenanted homosexual relationship with another woman” is a sufficient declaration to subject such person’s membership in her ministerial office to review under ¶ 359.1” [now ¶ 363.1]. While the review occurred, the person remained a minister in good standing and was guaranteed an appointment under ¶ 334.1. If the Judicial Council determines as contended here that a jurisdictional conference is prohibited from electing to the office of bishop an individual the election of whom would negate, ignore or violate the *Discipline* and that such an election would be null, void and no effect, such a person would continue to be a member of the order of elders, would continue under appointment as an elder and that person’s membership in his or her ministerial office would be subject to review under the terms of Decision 920. Thus, if as requested, the election of Bishop Oliveto is declared null, void and of no effect, Karen Oliveto would still remain an elder of The United Methodist Church and be guaranteed an appointment, but the Western Jurisdictional Conference would have been prevented from taking an action which negates, ignores and/or violates the *Discipline*. Complaints are pending against Karen Oliveto placing her membership in her ministerial office as an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church under review. The last statement issued with respect to those complaints has been that they are in supervisory process. See Heather Hahn, “Bishops Respond To Gay Colleague,” UMNS, August 23, 2016, at <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/bishops-respond-to-gay-colleague> (accessed on February 9, 2017). The initial 120 day period for the supervisory process has expired with no notification of an extension of the supervisory process or what the disposition of the complaints has been. Oliveto’s right to trial guaranteed by ¶¶ 20 and 58 and fair process protections are ensured as part of the judicial process resulting from the complaints filed against her.

argument and analysis because to do so would result in the provisions of the *Discipline* being negated, ignored and/or violated.<sup>4</sup>

**V. WHERE A PERSON IS KNOWN BY PUBLIC RECORD TO BE A SPOUSE IN A SAME-SEX MARRIAGE OR CIVIL UNION, THE BISHOPS OF A JURISDICTION CANNOT LAWFULLY CONSECRATE THAT PERSON AS A BISHOP AND THEIR ACTION WOULD BE NULL, VOID AND OF NO EFFECT.**

Paragraph 403.1(f) of the *Discipline* declares:

1. Bishops are elected from the elders and set apart for a ministry of servant leadership, general oversight and supervision . . . . The bishop leads therefore through the following disciplines:

...

f) The ministry of administration. The role of the bishop is to uphold the discipline and order of the Church by consecrating . . . persons in ministry of the Church and the world . . . .

Charged with upholding the discipline and order of the Church, the lawful actions of the bishops are defined by the Constitution and *Discipline*. Just as conferences (jurisdictional, central or annual) cannot negate, ignore and/or violate the *Discipline*, neither can bishops in the performance of their responsibilities. The General Conference as provided in ¶ 16 of the Constitution is invested with full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional.

As discussed above, the General Conference has preemptively declared that the only marriage acknowledged and permissible in The United Methodist Church is a marriage between one man and one woman, and that our clergy, and therefore our bishops, are called to celibacy in singleness and fidelity in heterosexual marriage (*see* ¶ 2702.1a of the *Discipline*).

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<sup>4</sup> As Exhibit 1 to this brief evidences, Bishop Oliveto is married Robin Ridenour in a homosexual union. Thus, a ruling by the Judicial Council that the nomination, election, consecration and assignment of such an individual who is a party to a same-sex union negates, ignores and/or violates the *Discipline* and is null, void and of no effect would mean that the election, consecration and assignment of Bishop Oliveto is null, void and of no effect.

Therefore in their role as bishops charged with the ministry of administration, the upholding of the discipline and order of the Church, it would be unlawful for a bishop or a group of bishops to consecrate a person who is known by public record to be a spouse in a same-sex marriage or union. If a bishop or groups of bishops did consecrate such a person, their actions would be null, void, and of no effect.

**VI. A PUBLIC RECORD OF A SAME SEX MARRIAGE OR CIVIL UNION OF A CLERGY PERSON IS A SELF-AVOWAL OF THE PRACTICE OF HOMOSEXUALITY WHEN BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE BISHOP, DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT, DISTRICT COMMITTEE ON ORDAINED MINISTRY, BOARD OF ORDAINED MINISTRY, OR CLERGY SESSION.**

There are many ways that information can be conveyed to another. Certainly a direct statement, either oral or written, is one way. When such a statement is made in a governmental record signed by a clergy person and made public as an official record, it is sufficient to declare that which is contained in the public record to anyone to whose attention the record is made known. Therefore, if a bishop, district superintendent, district committee on ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry or clergy session becomes aware or is made aware of a public record of a same sex marriage or civil union of a clergy person, the public record is an act of self-avowal of the practice of homosexuality.

**CONCLUSION & RELIEF REQUESTED**

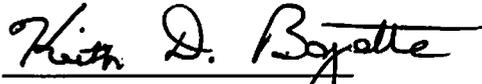
Dixie Brewster, through her advocate the Rev. Keith D. Boyette, respectfully requests that the Judicial Council issues its declaratory decision on the matters raised in the petition of the South Central Jurisdictional Conference as follows:

- The nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as a bishop of The United Methodist Church of a person who is a spouse in same-sex marriage negates, ignores and violates the provisions of the *Discipline* and is therefore null, void, and of no effect.
- The nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as a bishop of The United Methodist Church of a person who claims to be a self-avowed practicing homosexual negates, ignores and violates the provisions of the *Discipline* and is null, void, and of no effect.
- A public record that a nominee for the episcopacy is a spouse in a same-sex marriage disqualifies that person from nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as a Bishop in The United Methodist Church.
- Where a person is known by public record to be a spouse in a same-sex marriage or civil union, the bishops of a jurisdiction cannot lawfully consecrate that person as a bishop and their action would be null, void and of no effect.
- A public record of a same sex marriage or civil union of a clergy person is a self-avowal of the practice of homosexuality when brought to the attention of the bishop, district superintendent, district committee on ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session.
- The election of a person to the office of bishop where such election is null, void and of no effect results in no change in such person's membership in their ministerial office, but subjects such person's membership in their ministerial office to review as required by Decision 920.
- For all of the foregoing reasons, the nomination, election, consecration and assignment of Karen Oliveto as a bishop of The United Methodist Church is an action which negates,

ignore, and/or violates the *Discipline* and her nomination, election, consecration and assignment is null, void and of no effect.

**Dixie Brewster, through her advocate, Rev. Keith D. Boyette, requests that the Judicial Council conduct an oral hearing in this matter on the petition of the South Central Jurisdictional Conference for a declaratory decision.**

Respectfully Submitted,



Rev. Keith D. Boyette on behalf of Dixie Brewster

### **CERTIFICATION**

I certify that a copy of this brief has been forwarded by email on February 13, 2017 to each of the persons identified as interested parties and/or amici curiae in this matter listed below:

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STATE OF CALIFORNIA

CERTIFICATION OF VITAL RECORD

CITY and COUNTY of SAN FRANCISCO

Brewster Brief Exhibit 1

4 2 0 1 4 3 8 008559

LICENSE AND CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE

MUST BE LEGIBLE - MAKE NO ERASURES, WHITEOUTS, OR OTHER ALTERATIONS USE DARK INK ONLY

LOCAL REGISTRATION NUMBER

Form with fields for 1A-1B (First Name, Middle, Current Last, Last Name at Birth), 2-12 (Date of Birth, State/Country, Marriages, Address, City, State/Country, Zip Code), 10A-11A (Parents' Names and Birth States), 12A-12C (Second Person's Name and Birth State), 13-20 (Second Person's Birth Info), 21-22 (Second Person's Parents), 23-24 (Signatures), 25-26 (License Date and Number), 27-28 (Witnesses), 29-31 (Solemnizing Marriage), 32 (Registrar Name and Signature).

INFORMATIONAL NOT A VALID DOCUMENT TO ESTABLISH IDENTITY

CERTIFIED COPY OF VITAL RECORDS

STATE OF CALIFORNIA } SS COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

This is a true and exact reproduction of the document officially registered and placed on file in the office of the SAN FRANCISCO ASSESSOR-RECORDER.

ATTEST: [Signature] Bonita Huang DATE ISSUED: JUL 27 2016



Carmen Chu, San Francisco Assessor - Recorder

This copy not valid unless prepared on engraved border displaying date, seal and signature of Deputy Assessor-Recorder.



ANY ALTERATION OR ERASURE VOIDS THIS CERTIFICATE

## Brewster Brief Exhibit 2

### 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]*