

Human Sexuality & the UMC

Historical Overview and Current Proposals

Rev. Tom Lank — April 15, 2021

Plan for the Evening

- Brief History of the Debate - 1968 to the Present
- Proposals for General Conference in 2022
- What Happens Next?
- Questions

1972

Atlanta

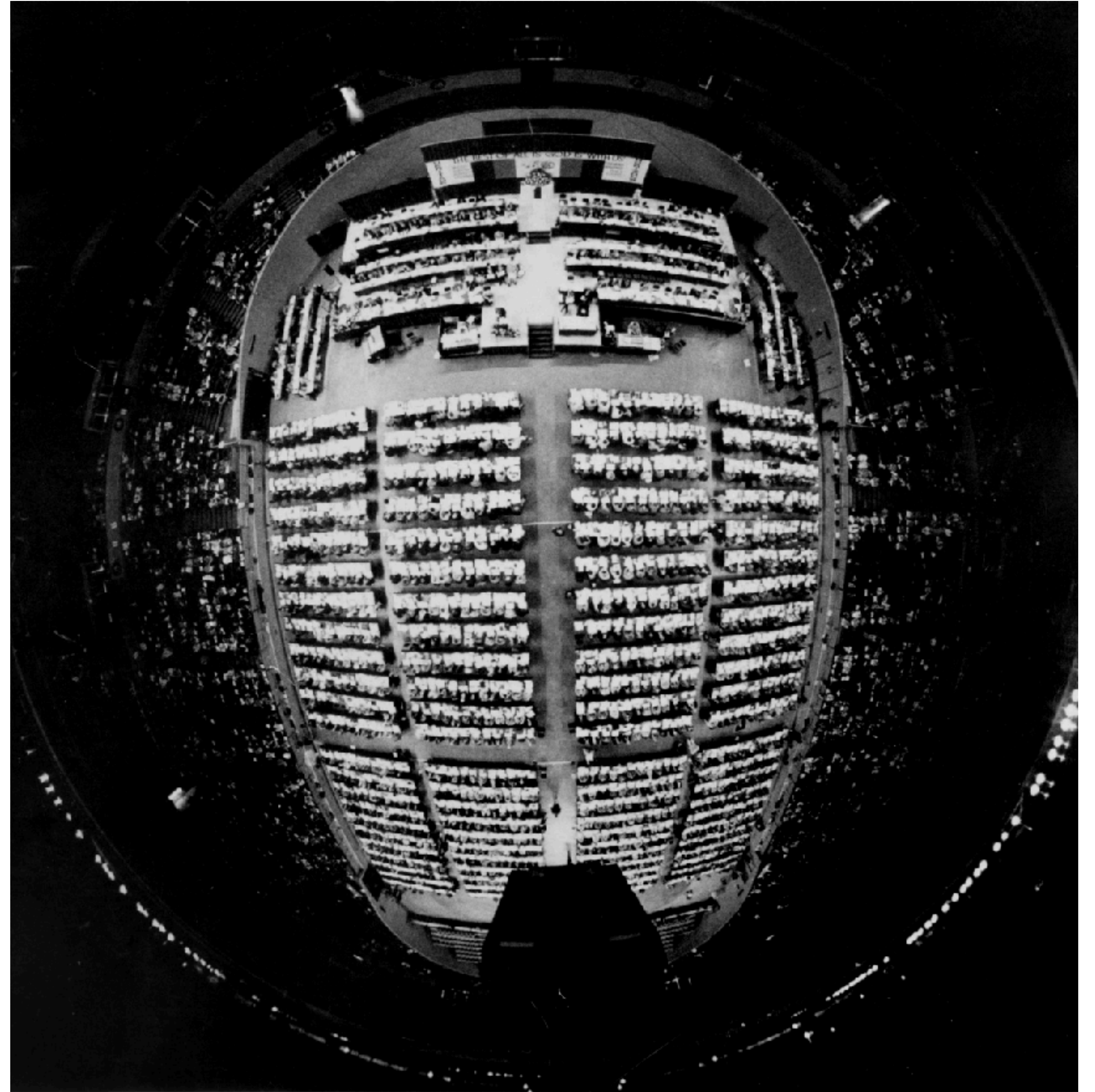
- Adoption of the Social Principles for the newly formed “United” Methodist Church - “persons of homosexual orientation are persons of sacred worth”
- Delegate proposes amendment from the floor adding “we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider it incompatible with Christian teaching.”
- “Do not recommend marriage between 2 persons of the same sex.”



1976

Portland, OR

- First openly gay man addresses General Conference
- Bans on use of church funds to promote homosexuality were added
- “We do not recognize a relationship between two persons of the same sex as constituting marriage.”



1980

Indianapolis

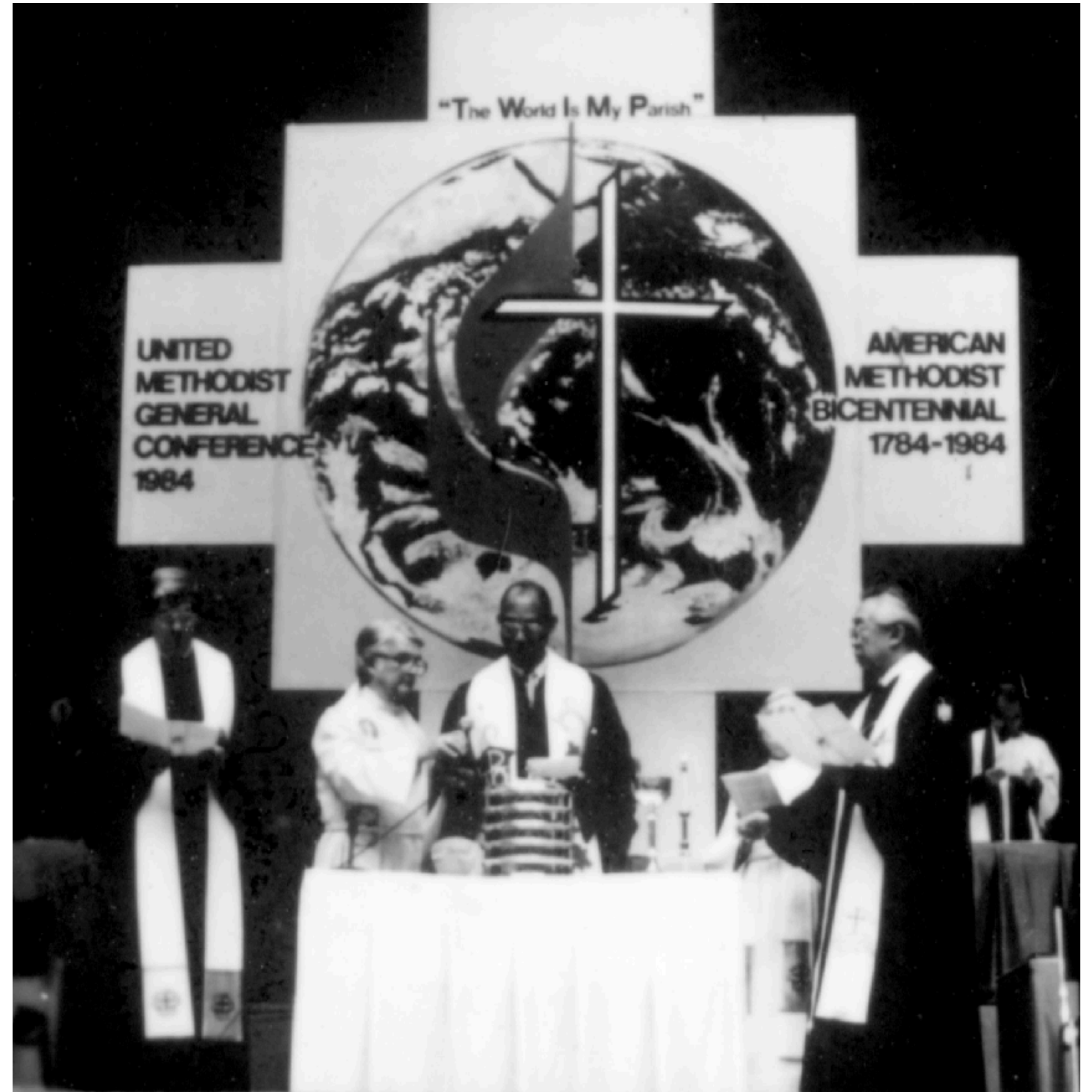
- Ban on ordaining “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” fails
- Language inserted defining marriage “between a man and a woman”



1984

Baltimore

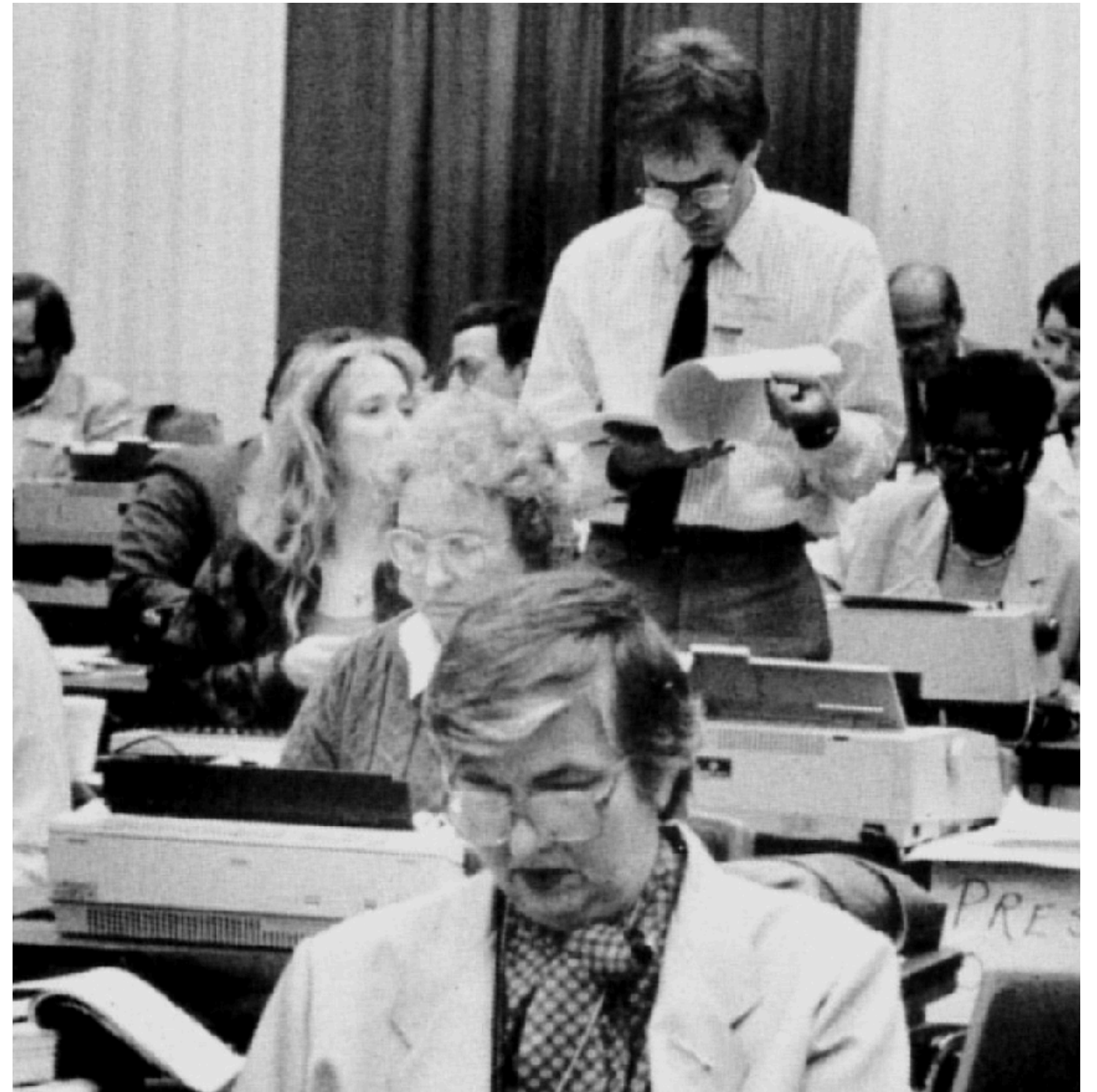
- Ordination ban passes - "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church."



1988

St. Louis

- “Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, we affirm that God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”
- First of several Study Commissions is established to report back to General Conference.



1992

Louisville

- No major changes to the Discipline
- Study Committee reports back on “Things the Church Can Responsibly Teach” and “Things the Church Cannot Responsibly Teach” on the subject of homosexuality.
- Later that year a case against a lesbian pastor, Jeanne Knepper, goes to the Judicial Council.



1996

Denver

- Definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” is added
- Churches are not allowed to host, nor are ministers allowed to officiate, same-sex wedding ceremonies.
- Statement that “we are unable to arrive at a common mind” fails 577-378
- Two years later, Rev. Jimmy Creech is brought up on charges and defrocked. This is the first of several high-profile church trials and acts of defiance.



2000

Cleveland

- “We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends.”
- Proposal that pastors sign a statement professing that “homosexuality is not God’s will” fails.
- “Soulforce” protests escalate - 191 arrests made on one day and 30 arrests made on the next.



2004

Pittsburgh

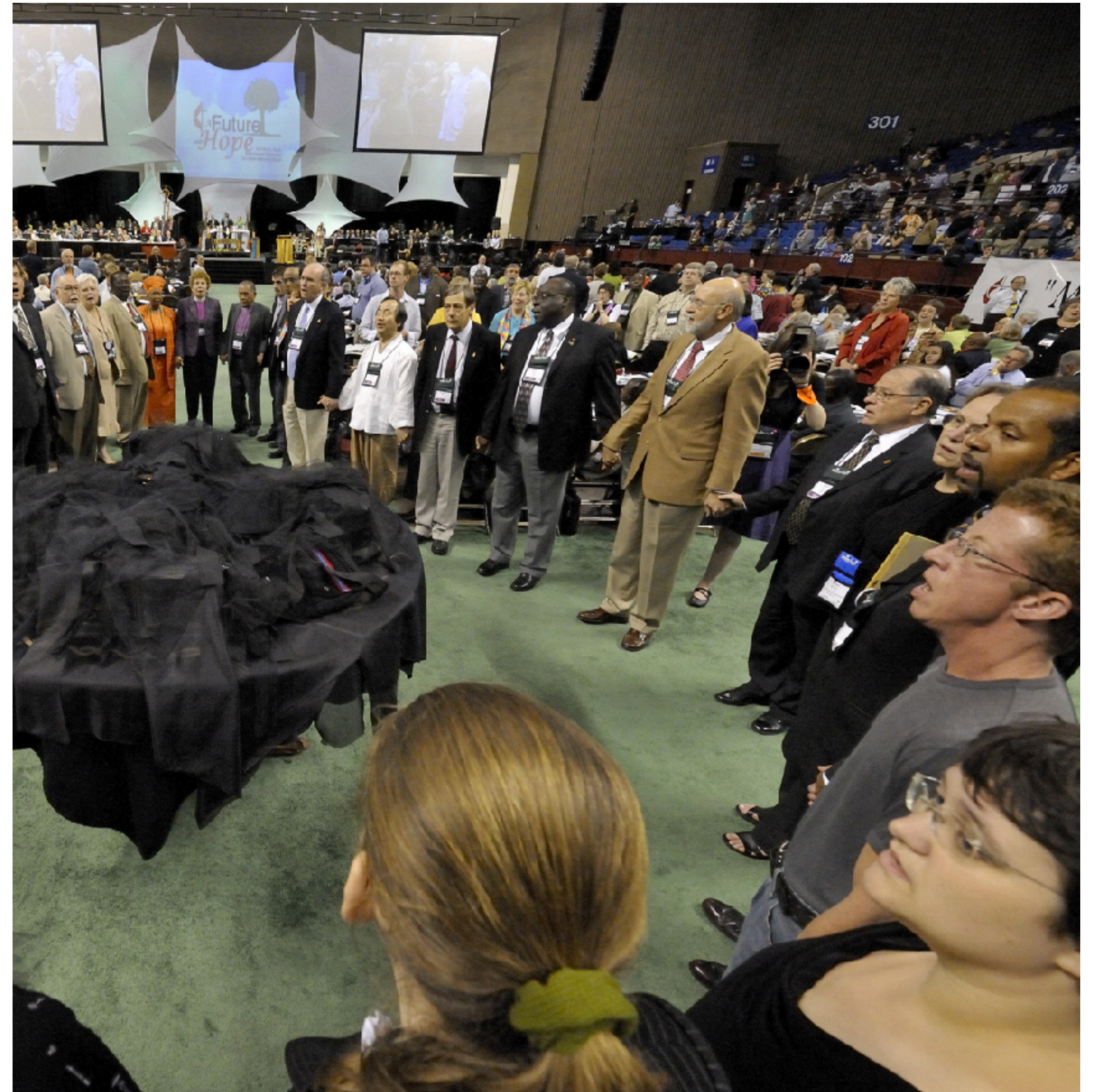
- Chargeable offenses for pastors now include “**being** a self-avowed practicing homosexual” or “conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions, or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.”



2008

Fort Worth

- Delegates reject another statement that “we are not of one mind”
- Add statements that the UMC opposes "all forms of violence or discrimination based on gender, gender identity, sexual practice or sexual orientation."



2012

Tampa

- Lots of proposed legislation, but no substantive changes pass.



2016

Portland, OR

- Question of splitting the denomination is raised
- Delegates ask the Bishops to lead us through the impasse
- "Commission on a Way Forward" is established



2016-2018

- Commission on a Way Forward meets and produces three proposals for General Conference to consider - The One Church Plan, The Connectional Conference Plan, and the Traditionalist Plan



February 2019

St. Louis

- Special Session of General Conference - can only consider the 3 plans offered by the Way Forward Commission.
- The Traditionalist Plan is adopted. It strengthens penalties against disobedient pastors and creates a process for churches to “disaffiliate” from the UMC more easily.



Terms of the Traditionalist Plan

- Expanded the definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual.
- District Committee on Ministry and Board of Ordained Ministry MUST ask about sexual orientation before approving candidates for candidacy, licensing, commissioning or ordination.

- Mandatory minimum sentencing for pastors who conduct same-sex weddings.
- Bishops may not consecrate, commission, or ordain LGBTQ persons.

Disaffiliation

NEW ¶ 2553 - Section VIII. Disaffiliation of Local Churches Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality

1. **Basis**—Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination **for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference**, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.
2. **Time Limits**—The choice by a local church to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church under this paragraph shall be made in sufficient time for the process for exiting the denomination to be complete prior to December 31, 2023. **The provisions of ¶ 2553 expire on December 31, 2023 and shall not be used after that date.**
3. **Decision Making Process**—The church conference shall be conducted in accordance with ¶ 248 and shall be held within one hundred twenty (120) days after the district superintendent calls for the church conference. In addition to the provisions of ¶ 246.8, special attention shall be made to give broad notice to the full professing membership of the local church regarding the time and place of a church conference called for this purpose and to use all means necessary, including electronic communication where possible, to communicate. The decision to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church must be approved by a **two-thirds (2/3) majority vote** of the professing members of the local church present at the church conference.
4. **Process Following Decision to Disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church —**

Disaffiliation (cont.)

NEW ¶ 1504.23

If a local church or charge in the United States changes its relationship to The United Methodist Church through closure, abandonment, or release from the trust clause pursuant to ¶ 2548, ¶ 2549, or otherwise, notwithstanding whether property with title held by the local church is subject to the trust (under the terms of ¶ 2501), **the local church shall contribute a withdrawal liability** in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall determine the aggregate funding obligations of the annual conference using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider, from which **the annual conference will determine the local church's share**. Nothing in the foregoing prevents an annual conference from collecting other obligations from a church or charge.

Proposals Submitted to the Next General Conference

Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation

a.k.a. “The Protocol”

- Leaders from various factions and regions of the church came together with a mediator and brokered a compromise.
- New denominations may be birthed from the UMC. [e.g. Global Methodist Church and Liberation Methodist Connexion]. Annual conferences may vote to join by 57% majority. Decisions trickle down to each congregation and pastor.
- Judicial processes and church closures held in abeyance during the window of opportunity.
- \$25 million to new traditionalist denomination; \$2 million for other new denominations; \$39 million to support ethnic ministries and Africa University.
- Pensions are not affected.
- Subject to review by the Judicial Council. Not severable.

The Christmas Covenant

From African and Asian delegates - Regionalization of the Church

- Only proposal that originated outside the U.S. It was crafted by delegates from Africa, Asia, and Europe.
- Creates a new U.S. Regional Conference on par with the Africa Central Conference and Philippines Central Conference, etc. Comprised of 5 current jurisdictional conferences.
- Regions all operate with the same Constitution, but can adapt the rest of the Book of Discipline to their particular contexts, just as Central Conferences can do now.
- Requires lots of Constitutional Amendments.
- Builds on a proposal coming from the UMC Connectional Table.

Indianapolis Plan

(From US conservatives - Plan developers now support the Protocol)

- Traditionalist - Centrist (UMC) - Progressive
- New denominations may be formed by 50+ local churches or an annual conference.
- Simple majority votes to affiliate
- Trust clause suspended
- Moratorium on LGBTQ restrictions and complaints
- Mandatory retirement of bishops and new elections of bishops postponed
- A la carte relationships with UMC agencies
- Does not require Constitutional Amendments

New Expressions Worldwide

From US progressives - Sponsored by UM Forward

- Dissolve the UMC into four new denominations - traditionalist, moderate, progressive, and liberationist.
- Conferences, clergy, and bishops decide which denomination they want to choose.
- Then local churches decide if they want to choose differently than their annual conference. If 2/3 majority, they can leave with property, assets, and liabilities.
- UMC assets divided equitably. Provisions made for investment in historically marginalized and vulnerable churches.
- General agencies become independent 501(c)3 organizations.
- Does not require Constitutional Amendments.

Next Generation UMC

(From US Centrists - Plan developers now support the Protocol)

- UMC remains intact. New denominations can form.
- Congregations, clergy and conferences determine affiliations.
- Local churches, by 2/3 majority may choose to separate from the UMC and retain property, assets, and liabilities.
- Removes LGBTQ prohibitions and Traditional Plan additions.
- Moratorium on complaints and trials.
- General Conference would set aside grants to fund new denominations that maintain a relationship with the UMC.
- Creates a U.S. Regional Conference and a U.S. Regional Committee of General Conference
- Constitutional Amendments or a new Constitution required.

What Happens Next?

- No new legislation can be considered unless offered as a substitute from the floor.
- Judicial Council Decisions on Protocol, etc.- ???
- Protocol Team is continuing to meet.
- Christmas Covenant may continue organizing.
- General Conference in Minneapolis August 29-September 6, 2022.
- Current disaffiliation terms expire December 31, 2023.

Questions?