

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE 5

FAITH AND ORDER

Renewal and Reform Coalition (RRC)
Priority petitions in bold italics

HOMOSEXUALITY

The church’s balanced, compassionate, and biblically faithful position on the practice of homosexuality has been reaffirmed by ten General Conferences over 40 years. Despite vociferous disagreement by some parts of the church, it still represents the majority opinion of the grass roots church membership worldwide. Changing the church’s position to allow same-sex weddings and/or the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals would separate our church from 2,000 years of the church’s consensus teaching and from 95 percent of world Christians today. It would also provoke separation of The United Methodist Church, forcing those who could not in good conscience live with the progressive position to leave the church. It is important to maintain clear lines of accountability to what our church has taught for 44 years and continues to require today. We oppose any efforts to remove or weaken our church’s standards. Instead, we support efforts to strengthen accountability to our church’s standards.

Pet 61039 ***Page 768*** ***Amend Footnote*** ***Support***

This petition is necessary because of confusion over what constitutes a “self-avowed practicing homosexual.” The General Conference is the only body that can define the term. Currently, persons who are living openly in partnerships or marriages with same-sex spouses are being ordained and appointed as clergy in the UM Church, despite what our *Discipline* says. This is because they refuse to “self-avow” by acknowledging that they are in a sexual relationship with a same-gender partner (the current definition). Broadening the definition to include those who are married to a person of the same sex or gender, as well as those who communicate in a public setting that they are a practicing homosexual, removes ambiguity. It preserves the “public” nature of self-avowal by stipulating that being married or in a domestic partnership (a public act) or making a public statement constitutes “self-avowal.” It also would eliminate the need to probe into intimate details of a couple’s relationship.

Pet 60779 ***Page 769*** ***Deletion*** ***Oppose***
Pet 60780 ***Page 769*** ***Qualifications for Ordination*** ***Oppose***
Pet 60781 ***Page 769*** ***A Third Way – Qualifications for Ordination*** ***Oppose***
Pet 60907 ***Page 770*** ***Qualifications for Ordination*** ***Oppose***

These petitions all remove the qualification that self-avowed practicing homosexuals shall not be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve. Petition 60781 allows annual conferences to decide to ordain and appoint practicing homosexuals, while Petition 60907 gives that power to jurisdictions or central conferences. All four would allow practicing homosexuals to serve as ordained clergy in at least some parts of The United Methodist Church.

Pet 60799 ***Page 769*** ***Qualifications for Ordination*** ***Support***

This petition would make clear the current understanding that those engaging in any kind of sexual relationship outside of heterosexual marriage are disqualified from serving as clergy in the UM Church. It puts other forms of sexual immorality on an equal basis with homosexual behavior.

Pet 61036	Page 770	Qualifications for Ordination	Oppose
While well-intended, this petition is confusing in the language of the footnote, and the definitions given include extraneous material and also do not include non-marital sexual relationships (fornication).			
Pet 61042	Page 770	Qualifications for Ordination	Support
This petition specifically names the practice of homosexuality as a sin.			

MISSION STATEMENT

<i>Pet 60544</i>	<i>Page 762</i>	<i>Mission Statement</i>	<i>Support</i>
This petition adds to our mission statement the words “for the eternal salvation of persons.” It would help us remember the spiritual dimension of discipleship and the necessity for evangelism. It is needed to balance the emphasis on world transformation, which too often becomes the goal, rather than the result, of disciple-making, glossing over the need to “offer them Christ” (Wesley’s primary instruction to early American Methodists).			

TWO JURISDICTIONS

This petition is part of a comprehensive plan to dissolve the current five jurisdictions and create two (or three) new jurisdictions covering the entire U.S.—a “progressive” jurisdiction, a “traditionalist” jurisdiction, and possibly a “moderate” jurisdiction. The plan would allow each jurisdiction to set its own standards for ministry, which would allow some jurisdictions to permit same-sex weddings and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. This plan would also require annual conferences and local churches to choose which jurisdiction to affiliate with, based on their agreement with that jurisdiction’s stance on same-sex marriage and the ordination of practicing homosexuals. Some traditionalists could accept this solution as a compromise, while others could not, but so far there has been no support from the progressive leadership for this approach. This petition must be acted upon along with the rest of the plan. To enact this petition alone would give every jurisdiction the power to adapt the *Discipline* similar to the central conferences and would be a recipe for chaos. At least one, and perhaps three, of the current jurisdictions would allow same-sex marriage and the ordination of practicing homosexuals. It would be well to refer this petition to Committee 3, Conferences, which is dealing with the bulk of the petitions related to this plan.

<i>Pet 61018</i>	<i>Page 759</i>	<i>Two-Jurisdiction Solution – Power to Adapt the Discipline</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
-------------------------	------------------------	---	----------------------

ARTICLE XXIII

Pet 60864	Page 759	Deletion	Oppose
This petition deletes Article XXIII from our <i>Articles of Religion</i> . While on its face this article is irrelevant for the global United Methodist Church, the interpretive paragraph on page 70 of the <i>Discipline</i> applies the principles of Article XXIII for countries other than the U.S. It would be better to have replaced Article XXIII with a suitably globally framed paragraph, rather than pursue the blunt instrument of deleting it. There are also questions of procedure, since the <i>Articles of Religion</i> are protected by the first restrictive rule (§ 17).			

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

Pet 60676	Page 760	Revision of Our Theological Task	Support
This petition brings much-needed revision to our theological statement, emphasizing the primary authority of Scripture and clarifying how that works out in our theological method. In a time when experience is becoming more important to some in doing theology, it is essential to reinforce the primary authority of Scripture for our life and faith (see <i>Articles of Religion</i> , Article V, and <i>Confession of Faith</i> , Article IV).			

BIBLICAL LANGUAGE

Pet 60260 Page 778 Readopt Resolution Oppose

This resolution discourages the use of masculine terms for God. While acknowledging that the Bible uses a variety of metaphors and descriptions for God, nowhere does the Bible use feminine or neuter terms in addressing God. This resolution goes too far when it discourages the use of biblical language in addressing or describing God.

GLOBAL DISCIPLINE

Pet 60276 Page 758 General Book of Discipline No Position

This petition accompanies Petition 60277 in Committee 3, Conferences, which authorizes a churchwide feedback process to help shape a proposed *General Book of Discipline* that would apply equally to all annual conferences and not be subject to adaptation by the central conferences. The final draft of the *General Discipline* would then be proposed and voted on (with whatever amendments) at the 2020 General Conference. This petition codifies that process in ¶ 101 of the *Discipline*. We suggest that Part V Social Principles Preface and Preamble be restored (not deleted) as part of the *Discipline* that is not adaptable. These sections contain important theological foundation of the Social Principles. It might be helpful for Petition 60277 to be brought to this committee, so that all petitions on the Global Discipline could be acted on together.

Pet 60352 Page 758 General Book of Discipline Process Oppose

This petition attempts to modify the feedback process being used to shape the Global Discipline, per Petition 60277 in Committee 3, Conferences. Such modifications of the process need to be incorporated into 60277 so that there are not contradictory provisions. The process should not be included in the *Discipline* itself (as this Petition 60352 does), but made part of the non-Disciplinary action of the General Conference, in line with 60277. We further oppose weighting the process unfairly with institutional bodies that would tend to have more influence than the voice of the grassroots of the church. These bodies can certainly be included in the feedback process by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, but should not have official standing, as this petition suggests. Deletion of the first sentence of ¶ 101 loses the description of our Wesleyan way of serving Christ “through doctrine and disciplined Christian life.”

NICENE CREED

Pet 60980 Page 759 Add Nicene Creed to Doctrinal Standards Support

This petition implements the Constitutional amendments in Petitions 60978 and 60979, which are currently assigned to Committee 7, General Administration. These petitions would add the Nicene Creed to the *Articles of Religion* and *Confession of Faith* as part of our doctrinal standards. This would more deeply root our standards in the ancient faith of the church, as articulated by the most widely accepted ecumenical councils. The elements of the Nicene Creed further define our faith congruently with the *Articles* and *Confession*, but go beyond them in some areas of specificity. The Nicene Creed focuses on the most bedrock articles of Christian faith. Having it as one of our doctrinal standards would reinforce our connection with historic and contemporary world Christianity. It would be helpful if all three petitions could be acted upon by this legislative committee, as requested by the submitters.