

## **Additional References: Current UMC Beliefs & Practices**

As we studied and researched current issues in the United Methodist Church, we came across several articles that express a specific set of beliefs that fall under the centrist to progressive group which was identified at the beginning of the presentation – people that hold core beliefs as stated in the Apostles’ Creed, but do not agree with the current stance of the UMC Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality. They view themselves as traditional but affirming of LGBTQ+ lifestyles. At this point in time with regard to denominations, there is a choice of moving to a traditional denomination that follows the historical stance of the church regarding human sexuality or staying in the UMC. There is not a third option for “traditional with the exception of human sexuality.” The purpose of the presentation was to show the wide range of beliefs that are in the UMC today. If current members desire to belong to a denomination that affirms the LGBTQ+ lifestyle, the choice is to remain in the UMC. While the views listed are varying in degree, they are all evident in literature and practice. While a member may not hold to the beliefs listed other than support of the same sex marriage, it is important to know what his/her membership, tithes, and offerings support, either directly or indirectly. It is important to note theology may vary from church to church. There are some members that may be primarily concerned about their home church and not as concerned by the theology of other churches in the denomination. If so, the UMC is still a good fit for these members. If the theology espoused in other churches within the denomination is a concern, then, as noted in the presentation, these members need to consider which of the two options currently available best meets their personal needs for worship and service. There is no judgment regarding which path members choose to take, just the prayer that we can all continue to worship and serve our Lord as we feel led.

As we began our research and study of current beliefs and practices in the UMC, we knew that there was a great divide over issues related to human sexuality. We were shocked and greatly grieved to find theological beliefs and practices in the UMC that seem to refute the very basic tenets of Christianity. We had never heard Methodists express disbelief in the resurrection of Jesus or that there are other paths to salvation. With the examples right before us, it was hard to believe. Knowing this would also be the case with those hearing the information for the first time, we provided citations and references for every statement made in the presentation. The references listed in our handout represent a larger body of our documented research. The following quotes come from research and specifically address the virgin birth, atonement for sin, the bodily resurrection of Christ, interpretation of the Bible, and salvation:

### ***Roger Wolsey, ordained United Methodist pastor, director of the Wesley Foundation at UC Boulder***<sup>1</sup>

“Friends, Jesus isn’t God. Jesus didn’t die for our sins. Jesus wasn’t killed instead of us. God isn’t wrathful or vindictive. There isn’t a hell (other than ones that we create here on this earth). Going to heaven after we die isn’t what the faith or salvation is about. God didn’t write the Bible. There isn’t going to be a “rapture.” Jesus’ resurrection didn’t have to be understood as a physical one for it to be a real and meaningful one (Paul and many of the early disciples encountered a spiritually risen Christ).”

“I do believe that Jesus was divine (in the way that you and I are), and that he’s the 2nd person of the trinity. Christians rightfully honor and celebrate Jesus as a unique and fully incarnate manifestation of God. I don’t believe that he’s literally God (at least not what most people tend to mean by that word). We live and move and have our being in God, so did Jesus. The trinity is a beloved Christian poem of who God is to us. But poems don’t literally define things. Like all art, and theology, they point to what is beyond them”

“And Christianity isn’t the only way for humans to experience salvation.”

### ***Rev. Eric Folkerth, senior pastor of Northaven UMC, Dallas, TX***<sup>2</sup>

“God gave Jesus to **live** for our sins, not die for them.”

### ***Martin Thielen, retired UMC pastor***<sup>3</sup>

“The traditional theology of substitutionary atonement that “Jesus died for our sins” needs to be jettisoned in the modern era. While that metaphor made sense to an ancient world that practiced animal sacrifice, it’s theologically offensive to think God required a bloody sacrifice of his Son in order to forgive humanity. That’s divine child abuse, not divine justice or love. The belief that a loving God tortures people forever in unquenchable agonizing flames of hell is theological pornography. To claim that Christianity is the only way to God and that 70 percent of the world’s non-Christian population is “lost” without any hope in this life (or the next) is intolerable theological arrogance.”

**Rev. David M. Felten, Pastor, The Fountains UMC, Fountain Hills, AZ** <sup>4 5</sup>

“You may not believe it, but I have deep respect for the Bible. I’ve spent my entire adult life studying it. And I’m here to tell you (as evidently one of the “not chosen”) that it is indeed a storybook — but not “just” a storybook. It contains the stories of people who have spent *their* whole lives wrestling with and interpreting the meaning of life. It is not inerrant. It is not historical. Its books contain stories — stories with way more meaning than mere history. Our job is to interpret those stories for a new generation, not simply try to conform to old ways of thinking.”

“Over the centuries, Christianity has been warped into a myriad of harmful doctrines and expectations, according to The Fountains Pastor, Rev. David Felten. So, last year he addressed a number of Christianity’s most destructive ideas and why it’s critical for them to be defused, disavowed and abandoned. “These obsolete and toxic notions included Hell, Satan, Original Sin, Omnipotence, Biblical Inerrancy and the need to be Born Again,” Felten said.”

**Rev. Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan, President of Claremont School of Theology (UMC Seminary), UMC Elder, Rev. Emily Nelms Chastain, UMC Deacon, Erin Grasse, M.Div., Ceritified Candidate for Ministry Virginia Conference of the UMC** <sup>6</sup>

“Societies and communities have become increasingly religiously pluralistic. As Christians, we have to come to terms with the fact that we are not the sole possessors of religious truth and values.”

**Bishop Joseph Sprague, North Central Jurisdiction (Statements from a 2002 speech, cleared of violating church doctrine by a panel of 4 UMC Bishops), Sprague retired in 2004** <sup>7</sup>

“The myth of the virgin birth was not intended as historical fact but was employed by Matthew and Luke in different ways to appoint poetically the truth about Jesus as experienced in the emerging church.”

“I believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but I cannot believe that his resurrection involved the resuscitation of his physical body.”

“I affirm resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus. God’s essence cannot be killed, buried, or kept from being alive in creation or history. God is from everlasting to everlasting. But, resurrection, including that of Jesus, does not include bodily resuscitation. God does not work this way.”

“Having so affirmed Jesus as God’s unique and normative revelation, I must dissent from Christocentric exclusives which hold that Jesus is the only way to God’s gift of salvation.”

“The concept of blood sacrifice is superstition at best and an idolatrous allegiance to a non-Jesus methodology of God–human relationship at worst. Historically and presently the church has other models of atonement theory to offer a hurting world. The time has come for progressives, courageously to advance other theories for consideration and to claim one as our own confession of the meaning of the cross.”

<sup>1</sup> Wolsey, Roger. “It’s time For Progressive Christianity.” *The Holy Kiss*, Patheos.com, May 24, 2018, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogerwolsey/2018/05/its-time-for-progressive-christianity/>, Accessed September 23, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Folkerth, Eric. “Confronting Atonement Theology.” Um-insight.net, March 25, 2013, <https://um-insight.net/perspectives/confronting-atonement/>, Accessed March 30, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Theilen, Martin. “God is No Longer a Working Number.” Um-insight.net, October 7, 2021, <https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/practicing-faith/god-is-no-longer-a-working-number/>, Accessed March 30, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Felten, David. “Bible: Word of God or Just a Storybook?” Um-insight.net, March 7, 2018, <https://um-insight.net/perspectives/bible-word-of-god-or-just-a-storybook/>, Accessed March 30, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> “Fountains Announces New Sermon Series.” *Fountain Hills Times*, October 20, 2021, [https://www.fhtimes.com/news/religion\\_news/fountains-announces-new-sermon-series/article\\_bb605b8e-3108-11ec-8b65-0708a8ba231c.html](https://www.fhtimes.com/news/religion_news/fountains-announces-new-sermon-series/article_bb605b8e-3108-11ec-8b65-0708a8ba231c.html), Press Release.

<sup>6</sup> Kuan, Kah-lin Jeffrey, Chastain, Emily Nelms, and Grasse, Erin. “The Multifaceted Nature of Progressive Theology.” The Connectional Table, UMC, March 11, 2019. (Article originally published July 30, 2019) <https://www.emergingmethodism.com/new-article/the-multifaceted-nature-of-progressive-theology>

<sup>7</sup> Sprague, Joseph. “Affirmations of a Dissenter.” January 28, 2002, FLUMC, [http://www.flumc.com/bishop\\_whitaker/sprague.htm](http://www.flumc.com/bishop_whitaker/sprague.htm), Transcript.