

## Supporting Sources for Denomination Update: December 2022

Trinity on the Hill UMC - Augusta, GA

*The UMC has 5 Jurisdictional Conferences charged with the responsibility of electing new Bishops and appointing Bishops to Annual Conferences in the United States.*

*Our church, Trinity on the Hill, is in the North Georgia Conference, which is in the Southeastern Jurisdiction comprised of 9 states and 14 Annual Conferences.*

### **Point #1:**

The Southeastern Jurisdiction elected 3 new Bishops and all three are in favor of changing our Book of Discipline to redefine what is considered Christian Marriage between one man and one woman, and allowing LGBTQIA+ persons to be ordained.

(See Point #5)

<https://www.sejumc.org>

### **Point #2:**

Our current Bishop, Sue Hauptert-Johnson, was re-assigned to the Virginia Conference effective January 1, 2023. Bishop Robin Dease replaces Bishop Sue and will also begin her assignment to the North Georgia Conference on January 1, 2023.

The election of Rev. Robin Dease was a surprise, as she was a write-in nominee. Her name first appeared on the first ballot, after which she declined. In declining, she elaborated on some of her views, saying: (a video can be shown with her saying this)

“I want to be transparent: I do not believe homosexuality is a sin. I do believe that same-gender-loving persons can love and marry. I also believe they can be called by God, ordained, and serve our churches well. But you also need to know this is not the only issue we face as a church; I believe in building bridges, not tearing them down.” She cited other concerns that impact the church, including the Black church, others of color, the elderly and the young.

<https://advocatesc.org/articles/dease-elected-bishop>

When Bishop Dease’s name reappeared on the ballot as a write-in, it took four hours and the 25<sup>th</sup> ballot for her to reach the 60% threshold to be elected.

Bishop Dease, who has served as senior pastor of St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, since 2021, also paid tribute to her late parents and her brothers and sisters. “Most of my 13 siblings have joined the church triumphant, and those who are left physically cannot be here,” she told the delegates, “but you are my family.”

Bishop Dease was born in Brooklyn, New York. After moving to South Carolina, she graduated from Clavin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, in 1992. She earned a master of divinity degree and a doctor of ministry degree in stewardship from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. She joined the South Carolina Conference in 1992, became a full-time local pastor in 1998, and was ordained an elder in 2001. She has served as pastor of Wesley UMC in Johns Island (1998-2008), John Wesley UMC in Greenville (2008-2012), and St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC in Hilton Head (2021-present). She has served as superintendent of the Hartsville District (2013-2021) and in 2012 served as interim chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Clavin University in Orangeburg.

**Point #3:**

The Southeastern Jurisdiction passed 3 Non-Binding Resolutions

The first resolution was titled **Queer Delegates' Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC**

[Queer Delegates' Call To Center Justice And Empowerment For Lgbtqia+<sup>1</sup> People In The UMC](#)

Nine (9) gay and lesbian Southeastern Jurisdiction delegates submitted this resolution that urges the Southeastern Jurisdiction to support LGBTQIA+ people and affirm a moratorium on complaints against bishops because of their sexual orientation or their officiating at LGBTQIA+ weddings. The resolution also called for support in electing Bishops who uphold the same stance.

The resolution calls for the UMC to remove the Biblical standard from our Discipline to declare that homosexuality is not a sin. Once again, the new North Georgia Bishop also stated that she does not believe homosexuality is a sin.

The presiding Bishop ruled this resolution out of order because the language seemed to call for the SEJ to violate the Book of Discipline.

A peaceful protest began on the floor with submitters and supporters standing in solidarity in front of the dais where the Bishop sat. Some threw their credentials onstage and walked out of the auditorium. A delegate asked for a rule of law objecting to and appealing the Bishop's ruling.

The delegates were asked to vote in favor of the appeal and the resolution was finally approved with one amendment changing the word "commit" to "aspire" in an effort to make the resolution more of a desired action than mandatory.

The second resolution was in **Support of a United States Regional Conference Resolution in Support of a U.S. Regional Conference**

It urges the Southeastern Jurisdiction to support proposals and expedite processes to help create a USA regional conference of its own, and to support the Christmas Covenant, which basically proposes the same regionalization.

The effect of this resolution is to allow USA or “Western” beliefs to be honored even if the rest of the world believes something else and essentially separating global beliefs by geographical regions.

A presentation point explaining the Christmas Covenant will be posted on our church website in early 2023.

The third resolution was titled **Leading with Integrity**  
[Leading with Integrity](#)

It was submitted by a Tennessee Lay Delegate and our newly elected Bishop, Robin Dease. It was approved without amendment.

This resolution urges those who intend to disaffiliate from the UMC to move forward in fairness and lead with integrity by recusing themselves from leadership roles in the UMC. This is directed at all lay and clergy members in all areas of the UMC, including local church, districts, conferences, jurisdictional and general church level committees, boards, agencies, delegations and episcopal leaders.

It also encourages annual conference board of trustees to develop codes of conduct to manage conflicts of interest that may arise around discussions of disaffiliation agreements.

The resolution clearly states that the Southeast Jurisdiction Centrists and Progressives want traditionalists out even while they are still in the UMC.

**NOTE:** *All 5 Jurisdictional Conferences approved these resolutions with wording specific to their conferences. Those resolutions can be found on their jurisdictional websites.*

**Point #4:**

The Western Jurisdiction elected and consecrated Cedrick Bridgeforth, a self-avowed practicing homosexual who married his long-time partner on October 1, 2022 just prior to the jurisdictional conference meeting in November.

A complaint has been filed against the College of Bishops in the Western Jurisdiction and the Counsel of Bishops for this violation of the Book of Discipline.

In 2016, the Western Jurisdiction also elected and consecrated Karen Oliveto, a married, self-avowed practicing lesbian. The complaint filed against her election is still pending.

<https://westernjurisdictionumc.org/wj-2022-elects-cedrick-bridgeforth-as-bishop/>  
<https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/person-detail/2463386>

**Point #5:**

Southeastern Jurisdiction elected Tom Berlin who has been appointed to the Florida Conference. During a speech at the 2019 General Conference, he characterized the denomination's upholding of Traditional Christian values on marriage and sex as a sickening "virus" like Ebola.

In his Q&A for becoming a Bishop, Berlin stated "I affirm that the sexuality of gay and lesbian persons is an orientation that is an expression of the image of God in their lives. I have worked to change the Book of Discipline so that local churches and their pastors will be given the ability, but not the requirement, to offer Christian marriage to gay couples".

<https://www.sejc4i.org/episcopal-nominees-quotes>

Southeastern Jurisdiction – Episcopal Nominees Q&A

The new traditionalist denomination, once separate, would open the door for the existing United Methodist Church to repeal the church's ban on same-sex marriages and LGBTQ clergy.

"If this actually passes, it will be a great relief," says the Rev. Tom Berlin, a pastor at the Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Va., who signed the protocol and described himself as representing groups who hold a centrist view in the ideological conflict. What this proposal allows us to do is be a more inclusive United Methodist Church," Berlin says. "It also allows us to put a controversy to rest. The controversy itself has been a stumbling block toward our larger mission."

<https://www.npr.org/2020/01/04/793614135/united-methodist-church-announces-proposal-to-split-over-gay-marriage>

Newly elected Bishop, Rev. Connie Shelton, in her Q&A for becoming a Bishop stated, "With the removal of language in the Book of Discipline regarding homosexuality and same gender weddings and ordination, I believe we can live faithfully as clergy and laity allowing one another to live into our convictions without demonization or characterization."

<https://www.sejc4i.org/episcopal-nominees-quotes>

Southeastern Jurisdiction – Episcopal Nominees Q&A

**Point #6:**

Dottie Escobedo-Frank was elected by the Western Jurisdiction. One of her visions for the future of the UMC is to create streams of justice for persons who are LGBTQIA, BIPOC, and others who struggle. "Dottie believes we are living in a time of epochal

change, which requires the church find sacred ways to die in order to be reborn. She calls for heretics and edge-dwellers to lead the church forward. Now is the time, she says, to push these new leaders to the forefront of church restarts.”

<https://pvumc.org/people/dottie/>

<https://westernjurisdictionumc.org>

<https://www.dscumc.org>

**Point #7:**

The Northeast Jurisdiction refrained from electing a second planned Bishop when a female candidate who was willing to uphold the current Book of Discipline was gaining votes in a deadlock over a LGBTQ activist. The delegates amended the rules to hold off any more Bishops until 2024. A resolution entitled, “Queer Delegates’ Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for the LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC” passed with 75% support.

<https://susumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-NEJ-Summary.pdf>

<https://susumc.org> - Susquehanna Conference – 2022 NEJ Conference Summary

**Point #8:**

Kiri Anne Ryan Bereznai, a non-binary trans woman, made a speech at the North Central Jurisdictional Conference titled “Let’s Queer Up This Kingdom” that addressed the impact of transphobia in the church and not being fully accepted in the UMC.

*Let's Queer Up This Kingdom* – Kiri Bereznai

[https://youtu.be/LE\\_2i7VU37w](https://youtu.be/LE_2i7VU37w)

**Point #9:**

In a delegation interview, as a top Connectional Table staffer, newly elected Bishop Kennetha Bigham-Tsai in the North Central Jurisdiction recently declared that in the UMC, “It is not important that we agree on who Christ is”. She went on to raise questions of if she really believes in basic orthodox doctrine of the incarnation, of God becoming flesh in a particular human body in a particular time and particular place. In Bigham-Tsai’s words: “God became flesh, but not particular flesh. There’s no particularity around that. God became incarnate in a culture, but not one culture.”

<https://juicyecumenism.com/wp-content/uploads/Kennetha-Bigham-Tsaiinterview-clip-2022-10-24-15-33-50.mp4>

North Central Jurisdiction elected Rev. Dan Schwerin from the Wisconsin Conference. He stated in his biography, “I believe they were looking for a person who had a long-standing record of advocating for full LGBTQIA+ inclusion, someone who has an entrepreneurial spirit and experience leading systemic transformation.”

<https://www.ncjumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/D.-Schwerin-Print-Web-Nominee-Version.pdf>

Newly elected Bishop Lanette Plambeck stated, “I desire and will work to remove the restrictive language around human sexuality in the Book of Discipline.”

<https://www.minnesotaumc.org/newsdetail/10-things-to-help-you-get-to-know-bishop-lanette-plambeck-17117950>

North Central Delegates then passed the resolution “Queer Delegates’ Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in The UMC.”

[Queer Delegates’ Call To Center Justice And Empowerment For Lgbtqia+<sup>1</sup> People In The UMC](#)

**Point #10:**

No “traditional” Bishops were elected from any of the 5 UMC Jurisdictions.

These newly elected Bishops and current Bishops speak for and lead the entire United Methodist Denomination and are funded by the general church with a portion of local church apportionments.

The Council of Bishops (COB) of The United Methodist Church is welcoming thirteen (13) bishops who were elected during the November 2022 Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States.

Bishop Bickerton, President of the Council of Bishops, stated, “This is a historic class that adds needed diversity to the work of our council. They also represent some of the shifts needed in the denomination at this point in our life together. I truly look forward to the collaboration and mutual discernment that will unfold as we build trust and team work together.”

<https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/cob-welcomes-thirteen-newly-elected-bishops-17117960>

The new bishops in order of their election are:

1. Bishop Kennetha Bigham-Tsai – North Central
2. Bishop Thomas Martin Berlin - Southeastern
3. Bishop Delores J. Williamston – South Central
4. Bishop Laura Merrill – South Central
5. Bishop David Wilson – South Central
6. Bishop Héctor A. Burgos-Núñez - Northeastern
7. Bishop Lanette Plambeck – North Central
8. Bishop Connie Mitchell Shelton - Southeastern
9. Bishop Dan Schwerin – North Central
10. Bishop Robin Dease - Southeastern

11. Bishop Carlo A. Rapanut - Western
12. Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth - Western
13. Bishop Dottie Escobedo-Frank – Western

Biographies of all 13 are found on their 2022 Jurisdiction Conference Websites.

**Point #11:**

A UMC clergy participated in a same-sex marriage in Cobb County. The North Georgia Bishop investigated and ruled no charges were in order. UMC Clergy are free to participate in same-sex marriages by offering prayers, giving a homily or blessing. As long as the clergy does not administer the vows or sign the license, no violation has been committed.



**Point #12:**

In the North Georgia Conference, a non-binary trans woman announced during Neighborhood Church’s live-streamed sermon that the Book of Discipline is silent on transsexuals thereby providing the opportunity to take advantage of a “privilege loophole”. The pastor further claimed that the Bishop said, “Do you and do your thing.”

<https://youtu.be/QxF9sid6-L8>  
[Neighborhood Church – Atlanta, GA](#)

Allendale UMC – Florida - A Drag Queen, also known as Isaac Simmons, a gay candidate for ministry, was the guest “preacher” at a Florida church on National Holy Communion Day, October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Penny Cost also assisted in the Children’s Moment. During the sermon, Miss Penny Cost announced, “This hot mess express is going to be preaching regularly in a church one day. Yes, they are going to give me a church someday”.

The senior pastor responded to UM Clergy who expressed concern about his choice to invite Penny Cost. He invited her because “She is an incredible preacher in Wesleyan and liberation theology”. There are many trans members in his church and half of the

youth group is non-binary. He wanted all people to see people like themselves who are called by God to preach the Gospel.

Link to video – <https://vimeo.com/753557419>

Allendale UMC – St. Petersburg – Worship Live: October 2, 2022

**Point #13:**

At a 2022 Florida Annual Conference, the Board of Ordained Ministry put forth two homosexuals for ordination. The presiding Bishop introduced 16 candidates for a “block vote”. Many clergy delegates objected to this voting method because it forced them to violate their own clergy vows. A motion was made to vote on each candidate individually. This motion was not approved forcing all 16 candidates to be rejected. The 14 eligible candidates did not object.

<https://www.flumc.org>

<https://www.flumc.org/newsdetail/conference-offers-apology-and-support-for-rejected-ministry-candidates-16523436>

**Point #14:**

Claims by the UMC and other church leaders say that the Book of Discipline has not changed. That is true. The current Book of Discipline has been upheld by traditionalists since 1972 and was again upheld in 2019. The language is currently in line with traditional beliefs.

When many of our UMC Bishops and clergy have purposely violated the Discipline, whether the language changes or not, and when violators are not held accountable by Bishops, the Book of Discipline’s authority is diminished and treated as if it does not exist.

This isn’t a “not in my backyard” situation. Since the UMC is a “connectional” denomination, what one Bishop or clergy does in another conference reflects on all the other conferences, clergy, local churches, and the denomination as a whole.

Examples: Bishop Karen Oliveto and Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth are in same-sex marriages and were elected by their Jurisdictions. The Board of Ordained Ministry for Florida Conference elected LGBTQIA+ persons to be ordained as clergy.

Bishop Karen Oliveto: <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/person-detail/2463386>

Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/western-elects-cedrick-bridgeforth-as-bishop>

**Point #15:**

After the 2019 General Conference, the new North Georgia Bishop, Robin Dease, said this about attending the progressive group UMCNext: “I wanted to be part of a



movement that will develop strategies to change all the language and polity that prevents us from being a truly beloved community.” One of UMCNext’s goals is to reject “the traditional plan” (approved at the 2019 General Conference), and work to eliminate all discriminatory language/penalties in the Discipline regarding LGBTQIA+.

<https://advocatesc.org/articles/south-carolina-ums-among-600-attendees-at-umcnext>

**Point #16: OPINION**

With hundreds of UMC churches disaffiliating in 2022 and 2023, the odds are slim to none for having a future “traditional majority” in the Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conferences. Therefore, resolutions and amendments to the Book of Discipline will more than likely have no push back, especially once the Christmas Covenant is approved to eliminate 32% of the General Conference Traditional African delegates votes.

The “continuing” UMC’s top leaders are continuing to liberalize the UMC in what they believe, teach, advocate, and practice in the plans and visions they have for the future of our church. The actions of the November 2022 USA Jurisdiction Conferences revealed this clearly and boldly as actions speak louder than words.

As of early December 2022 - Total ratified disaffiliations - 1,314. It is predicted that by the end of December 2023, at least 3,000 and possibly 5,000 churches are expected to disaffiliate from the UMC. United Methodism has 30,000 U.S. churches. A loss of 2.3 million members from the nearly 6.3 million the denomination had in the United States in 2020 is predicted in anticipation of the liberalization on LGBTQ issues when the General Conference meets in 2024.