

## UNITY TASK FORCE

### *Proposing a Way to Move Forward*

The Unity Task Force of West Ohio is a body of lay and clergy members of the conference, currently numbering 16, representing a variety of theological viewpoints. The Task Force was created in 2005 to “*cultivate a life in common as we live out our faith and covenant in the West Ohio Conference.*” Since that time we have assisted the Annual Conference in adopting a style of Holy Conferencing based upon the concepts of “*Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love.*” We have recommended procedures for dealing with controversial issues, and we have proposed a process to guide the election of our delegates to Jurisdictional and General Conference.

This year Bishop Ough has invited us to again propose a fair process to guide the annual conference in considering a matter of importance to all, in the spirit of Christian Conferencing.

That matter is the nomination and election of a Chief Financial Officer (Conference Treasurer). The Council on Finance and Administration is charged by The Discipline, with the responsibility of nominating a person to fill that role. You may have heard that the nominee is Bill Brownson, a gay United Methodist layperson living in a committed relationship for the last twenty years.

We on the Unity Task Force acknowledge that, like the whole church, we are not of one mind on this subject. There are those who strongly believe that Mr. Brownson's sexual orientation is not relevant to this decision and discussion. Others strongly believe that Mr. Brownson's election is not consistent with the Disciplinary statement that “the United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider it incompatible with Christian teaching.” ¶161(F) of The Social Principles. There are also those within the task force who are conflicted about their beliefs and are struggling in their own minds and spirits to discern how they will vote.

But, in spite of our differences on this subject, we witness to you that there are points on which we do agree. We offer them to you with the invitation to join us in allowing these shared beliefs to guide the discussion at Annual Conference surrounding the nomination and election of the Chief Financial Officer.

- a. The discourse that surrounds this issue should be conducted with civility and an attitude of holy conferencing. (Guidelines for civility are attached at the end of this document.)
- b. We all desire to conduct this debate doing the least amount of harm to the persons involved, the church and our mission to make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.

- c. We will honor the different voices that will speak and the vote that will be taken.
- d. While we were not a part of the selection process, we affirm that the responsibility to make the nomination lies with the Council on Finance and Administration, and while we acknowledge that no process is perfect, we will concentrate our debate and conversation on the real issue as we perceive it – that being the sexual orientation/practice of the nominee.
- e. We acknowledge that Mr. Brownson possesses the professional qualifications to perform the duties of this position.
- f. We believe that we need to deal with this matter in an expeditious manner so we can move on to the other important work of this annual conference.
- g. We will commit to pray for all involved and for our conference throughout this discernment process.

In light of this witness to our areas of agreement, we have proposed to the Bishop and the Conference Design Team, that we amend our rules to deal with this matter in ways consistent with the statements above. The Annual Conference will have an opportunity to do this during the Rules committee Report.

In addition

- 1. You will receive information answering anticipated questions.
- 2. You will receive a written explanation of the selection process and the work of CFA.
- 3. You will hear the nomination from CFA.
- 4. There will be a period of discussion and debate to help provide clarity about the different perspectives in this matter. This discussion period will be somewhat different than you have experienced in the past. Each of the two opposing perspectives (those in favor of Mr. Brownson's election and those opposed) will be given a maximum of fifteen minutes to explain and debate the nomination. The Unity Task Force has asked two persons [one who is in support of the nomination and one who is opposed] to direct the time allotted to each point of view. Individual speakers will alternate from one perspective and then the other. After each perspective has exhausted their respective fifteen minute periods, there will be an opportunity for a three minute summary by each.
- 5. After the summary periods are completed, Bishop Ough will lead the Conference in prayer and we will move immediately to a written secret ballot.

It is our hope that God's Holy Spirit will be at work among us so that we can deal with this issue while maintaining the *"unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."*

### **Guidelines for Holy Conferencing**

*(These guidelines are the ones used at General Conference in 2008)*

- Every person is a child of God. Always speak respectfully. One can disagree without being disagreeable.
- As you patiently listen and observe the behavior of others, be open to the possibility that God can change the views of any or all parties in the discussion.
- Listen patiently before formulating responses.
- Strive to understand the experience out of which others have arrived at their views.
- Be careful in how you express personal offense at differing opinions. Otherwise dialogue may be inhibited.
- Accurately reflect the views of others when speaking. This is especially important when you disagree with that position.
- Avoid using inflammatory words, derogatory names or an excited and angry voice.
- Avoid making generalizations about individuals and groups. Make your point with specific evidence and examples.
- Make use of facilitators and mediators.
- Remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God - not by the flaws we discover, or think we discover, in their views and actions.