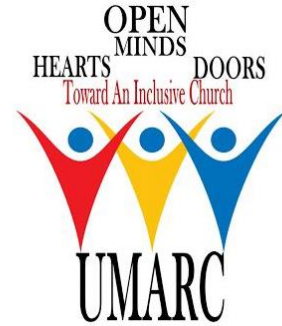


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Upcoming Conference Explores Impact of Schism on Mission and Ministry

By Donald E. Messer
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A church united in mission and ministry raised over \$70 million toward eliminating malaria in the world. What happens, however, to the church's outreach, if in a few months United Methodism splinters and endless legal battles possibly absorb the faith community's attention and resources?

Questions like this will permeate the day-long second annual "Toward An Inclusive Church II" Conference on Friday, November 16 at St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Highlands Ranch, Colorado. Sponsored for laity and clergy by the United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy (UMARC) and the Mountain Sky Conference, three United Methodist Bishops and other church leaders will provide perspectives on how the church might move forward towards inclusiveness and diversity without becoming divided and schismatic.

Keynoting the event will be Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton of New York, who successfully led the highly successful "Imagine No Malaria" campaign that raised over 70 million dollars. Bishop Karen P. Oliveto of Colorado will challenge the church to overcome its tendency to exclusiveness and stigmatizing the LGBTQ community. By video Bishop Julius Trimble of Indiana will emphasize the church's calling to find a way forward that will enhance the church's mission and ministry.

The event is scheduled on the eve of an unprecedented special General Conference to be held in St. Louis, Missouri, February 23-26, 2019, when 864 delegates from around the world will come together to debate whether The United Methodist Church should tighten its restrictions or remove its prohibitions against ordaining gay & lesbian persons and performing marriages for same-sex loving couples. Currently the church seeks to enforce policies based on the premise that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

Some 58% of the delegates are from the United States and 30% from Africa, with the remaining from the Philippines and Europe.

“Focused Conversations” will be held during the November 16 conference, so laity and clergy can converse with their elected delegates and review the legislative options coming before the special General Conference. Other workshops will hear persons related to the LGBTQ community tell their stories, explore issues related to racism and sexism, and probe how people in the church can promote civility despite polarized perspectives.

Conference co-chairs, Rev. Dr. Donald E. Messer, Centennial, CO, and Rev. Dr. Harvey C. Martz, indicated this year’s conference is intended to prepare persons to understand how “the denomination is at a dangerous crossroads in mission and ministry.” They note, “however, it also could be a ‘kairos’ moment, when the Holy Spirit breaks through, affirming a way forward that looks more like the inclusive Kingdom of God and beloved community Christians proclaim.”

Register at <https://rmcumc-reg.brapp.com/TowardsanInclusiveChurchConference71>
Cost, including lunch, is \$25. Persons need to select workshops in advance to ensure appropriate size meeting rooms. The event is from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.

Live streaming will be available of the plenary sessions and two worships. Details can be found on the website of the United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy:

www.umarc.org

