

Lesbian Pastor to Take Involuntary Leave

UMNS | A complaint against the Rev. Cynthia Meyer, a lesbian pastor in Kansas, has ended with her taking an involuntary leave of absence at least until the conclusion of the next General Conference.

[The resolution](#), announced Aug. 3, averts a church trial which was set to begin August 24 in Concordia, Kansas.

Under the agreement, Meyer will go on leave starting September 1 and no longer serve as pastor of Edgerton (Kansas) United Methodist Church. She cannot receive an appointment or perform the duties of a United Methodist elder, such as administering the sacraments. In short, she will be out of a job.

However, a church or other United Methodist entity can hire her for functions equivalent to that of a layperson. She also will receive \$37,000—about a year's pay in her current appointment.

She officially will retain her clergy credentials at least until 90 days following the next General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking assembly. Depending on what the legislative body does, she may:

- See her full elder status restored immediately and receive a new appointment
- Take advantage of another provision the body approves
- See the trial process begin again.

Meyer faced a charge that she is a “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy member, a violation of the *Book of Discipline*, the church's governing document.

The agreement came August 1 after more than 12 hours of closed-door discussions among Meyer, Great Plains Area Bishop Scott Jones, four counsels involved in the case, and two facilitators from the denomination's [JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation](#).

The resolution also comes as United Methodist bishops [are preparing to appoint a commission](#), charged with reviewing the denomination's policies

related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning individuals.

The bishops also are considering calling a special General Conference in 2018 to consider any of the commission's proposals. Meyer's leave will last at least through a special General Conference. Yet, if a special session is not called it will last until the next regularly scheduled General Conference in 2020.



Rev. Cynthia Meyer

Thoughts on resolution

Jones, whose current area encompasses the states of Kansas and Nebraska, is a member of the Council of Bishops executive committee that is planning the Commission on a Way Forward. He will become the bishop of the Houston Area, starting September 1.

“The agreement we reached upholds the *Book of Discipline* and yet recognizes that the larger denomination is in a time of discernment about a way forward,” Jones told United Methodist News Service. “So this agreement recognizes that accountability was necessary and yet holds open possibilities for whatever the general church is going to decide.”

Meyer said in a statement that she recognizes the agreement as a complaint resolution but not a just response. Nevertheless, she said she moves ahead in hope.

“I hope that The United Methodist Church, through a fully representative, inclusive commission, then a focused General Conference, will intentionally, prayerfully remove all discriminatory language and practice from its *Book of Discipline*,” Meyer said [in a statement](#).

Bishops Approve Plan for Sexuality Panel

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Plan for the commission

At its meeting, the bishops' executive committee set out [the mission, vision and scope](#) of the new commission.

The commission will have 20 to 25 members. The aim is to bring together people who are deeply committed to the future of The United Methodist Church with an openness to developing new relationships with each other.

The executive committee is asking all bishops to nominate up to five potential members. Individuals already suggested to Ough and retired Bishop Peter Weaver, the bishops' executive secretary, will be included in the pool of nominees.

The plan is for the commission's membership to be announced August 31 and for the group to hold its first meeting in October, if any needed visas can be obtained by then. The first Council of Bishops meeting with newly elected bishops is set to start October 30.

The executive committee named as commission moderators Florida Area Bishop

Ken Carter, West Virginia Area Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball and Central Congo Area Bishop David Yemba. Carter is set to succeed Ough in 2018 as Council of Bishops president.

“We wanted folks who we thought would reflect some of the values that we would like to see in all members of the commission,” Ough told UMNS. Specifically, he said, the committee sought people “who are able to listen well and respectfully and have a demonstrated ability of helping diverse groups come to common decisions.”

Ough said the executive committee also wanted to have a moderator from a central conference, church regions in Africa, Asia and Europe. Yemba, who has led the Council of Bishops work on faith and order, will soon be retiring.

The Council of Bishops also will be hiring a professional facilitator to work with the commission. The council is looking for someone with proven international and multicultural mediation skills. Whether the commission's meetings are open to the public will largely be up to the facilitator.

Scope of work

More than just discussions about human sexuality will be on the commission's agenda.

“The matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation that surfaces different ways of interpreting Scripture and theological tradition,” said Ough's statement.

The commission will examine new ways to be in relationship across cultures and church structures. The body also will look at ways to redefine what it means to be a connectional denomination.

“This unity will not be grounded in our conceptions of human sexuality, but in our affirmation of the Triune God who calls us to be a grace-filled and holy people in the Wesleyan tradition,” Ough's statement said.

Ultimately, any changes the commission recommends will need approval from General Conference.

The executive committee also began the process for calling a special session of General Conference. It will be up to the full Council of Bishops to call such a session.

Where's Right Home for Christian Unity Work?

BY REV. DR. JACOB DHARMARAJ
President, National Federation of
Asian American United Methodists

We, as a denomination, are traversing through the zone of all probability. Many of our constituents are not surprised when the improbable happens. The last two general conferences have put the denomination in a holding pattern with no uplift, no crash. We were simply circling above an airport going nowhere. At least, it is better than trying to land into a river because of a bird hit or booming into a marsh because of a deer crossing. The closest parallel to the indecision on some of the key issues during the 2016 General Conference is the movie, "All Is Lost," a survival drama with few spoken words starring Robert Redford as a man lost at sea.

While the plans to restructure the general boards and agencies were moved to the back burner, few paid attention to the decision of the Council of Bishops (COB) to overhaul the office that relates to ecumenism and interreligious affairs. Ever since the General Commission of Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns morphed into an office of the COB following GC-2012, it has failed to become a meaningful and relevant resource.

It is encouraging to know that the Council of Bishops is in the process of moving the Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships (OCUIR) to Washington, D.C., and hiring six new staff. COB's tacit acknowledgment that the old model was "Procrustean" and needed restructuring is indeed admirable. Unquestionably, our denomination needs clarity in our understanding of Christology, missiology, and ecclesiology in the context of interfaith or multi-faith relations, which the COB strives to address. Just like great apps such as "WhatsApp" or "Yelp" and others enhance our daily social interactions with our peers, a great missional and theological app can enhance, inspire, and illuminate our ministry of witness.

Since the emerging new world is remarkably similar to the Greco-Roman pluralistic domain, it offers new challenges every day in our struggle to witness our faith in Jesus Christ. With the questioning of traditional religions by modern scientific, philological, and archaeological discoveries, and by application of various theoretical apparatuses such as deconstructionism, phenomenism and etc., the foundational beliefs of Christianity have been challenged to the core. Christianity's relationship with people of other faiths and the Body of Christ has to be clearly defined in today's

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context. We sincerely hope the creation of this office will lead us to a higher level.

Nonetheless, I had a question while I was reading on-line the purpose of the office and the responsibilities of the staff. The program responsibility of this office in Washington, D.C., at least theoretically, comes close to the very purpose of the mission board. Let me clarify.

Anyone who is committed to Christian mission will undeniably agree that mission and evangelism are two sides of the same coin. Mission lays out the road map and evangelism connects all of us with the Author and Creator of all. I believe that the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) has the expertise, experience, and potential resources to work with ecumenical groups and interfaith communities.

By any definition of mission, the function, role, and responsibilities of the OCUIR come close to the mandate of Global Ministries. If we house the OCUIR under Global Ministries, our denomination will reduce the replication of missional tasks.

Let me submit one historic reference. The global ecumenical mission conference held in Jerusalem 1928 was dominated by debate between Hendrick Kraemer and William Hocking about ministry with people of other living faiths. This debate spilled over to the ecumenical conference held in Tambaram, India, in 1938 where Karl Barth, E. Stanley Jones, and others continued the conversation. These and all subsequent ecumenical mission conferences in the 20th century have discussed and deliberated the church's interaction with people of other faiths under the umbrella of mission and evangelism, but never as an isolated task. This office in Washington, D.C., can be justified to function apart from Global Ministries only, I submit, only if it were to be established to function as a "think tank."

As a think tank and under the governance of the bishops, this office would be able to produce quality resources that will equip our constituents to know what they believe and why they believe. It will help us overcome the sophomoric spasm of multiculturalism and ecumenism, and nurture an informed religious community that is equipped to rethink in knowledgeable ways. Most importantly, this office would help all of us focus on the challenges we face as a denomination rather than the progress we have made; it will take us from the present-day

corrosive culture of consultancy to the primary goal of finding answers. Lastly, it will be multi-disciplinary, and where appropriate, it will be multi-theological.

On the other hand, if it is to function as a program office, it will look for answers outside the problem and will continue to impose externally formulated ripostes. The think tank model will also help us come to grips with the problems we face, identify the questions and assumptions we have, and most importantly, enrich us to articulate theology from the core of our Christian convictions.

If we want people to join the United Methodist movement in the transformation of the world, we need to be intentional about developing intellectual leadership and put together a team that would better communicate what and who we are. It is not enough to minister with the poor and marginalized. We must develop and cultivate scholars and intellectuals who can minister to the movers and shakers of our society that include the intellectuals and affluent from all religious backgrounds.

As COB strives to re-ignite the engine of the denomination's mission with people of other living faiths and create a public theology, and as it is committed to move past education for maintenance to education for mission, we request the leadership not overlook the rich resources readily available within the diasporic community among us. They will be an asset and strength in our missional engagement, as they know many languages, several cultures, and various sacred scriptures of major world religions.

Our sacred history itself corroborates the necessity of engaging the diasporic faith community as our society becomes multi-contextual and pluralistic. For example, the Septuagint, commonly known as LXX or the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, was translated from Hebrew to Greek for the scattered Hellenistic Jews. They recruited and engaged 70 scholars from the diasporic community. Can our beloved United Methodist Church and COB have such a grand vision for our larger society and tap the rich resources that are readily available among us?

In the final analysis, the unanswered question is this: Is the Office of the Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships envisioned as a programmatic office or a research institute? The answer determines where it should be housed: with the GBGM or the COB.

OBITUARIES

Rev. Frederick M. Moore

The Reverend Frederick M. Moore, 84, a resident of Moriches, N.Y., died Aug. 3, 2016 at Peconic Bay Medical Center in Riverhead, N.Y.

Rev. Moore was born Nov. 22, 1931 in Port Jefferson, N.Y., to Karl F. and Mildred (McClure) Moore. He was an Army veteran and a former member of the Riverhead Fire Department, Washington Engine Company.

After serving in the former Peninsula Conference from 1963 to 1966, Moore became a member of the New York Conference. He served Lake Ronkonkoma UMC in Lake Grove, N.Y.; Riverhead UMC in Riverhead, N.Y., and Orient UMC in Orient, N.Y. He retired in 1997 and continued to serve at Orient UMC for the next 10 years.

Moore also served the New York Conference as executive director of the UM Retirement Community Development Corporation from 1979 to 1983, and as president of the Peconic UM Housing Development Fund from 1983 to 1990. He was the founder of John Wesley Village senior citizen community in Riverhead.

Predeceased by his first wife, Lois Jones Moore, in 2003, Moore is survived by his second wife, Sharon; sons, Thomas, William and James; sister, Mary Ellen DeBacco and eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

A service of remembrance was held August 12 at Tuthill-Mangano Funeral Home, Riverhead.

Memorial donations may be made to Peconic Bay Medical Center, 1300 Roanoke Avenue, Riverhead, N.Y. 11901, or North Fork UMC, P.O. Box 1286, Cutchogue, N.Y. 11935.

Sandra Piccirillo

Sandra Piccirillo died on July 31, 2016, at age 63. She was the wife of Rev. Joseph Piccirillo, who currently serves the Avon Memorial United Methodist Church in Connecticut. He previously served at Nichols United Methodist Church from 2002 to 2014.

Born January 3, 1953, in Bridgeport, she was the daughter of Sally and William Everett Sr. She earned a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's in art education at Southern Connecticut State University. Piccirillo taught art at Kolbe Cathedral High School, Bridgeport and The Lorraine D. FASTER School, Hamden.

In addition to art, she enjoyed dancing and was once a dance instructor at Arthur Murray's in the Fairfield and West Haven studios. She put her creative spirit to work in ministry as a member of the vocal and bell choirs, performing in church musicals, painting murals, and hosting dinner dances and bakery fundraisers.

In addition to her husband and her parents, she is survived by a brother William Everett Jr. of Milford; father and mother-in-law, Joseph and Phyllis Piccirillo of Trumbull; brother-in-law, David (Francesca Marini) Piccirillo of Trumbull; sister-in-law, Susan (Lina Mitchell) Rotunda of Milford, along with several nieces and nephews.

A funeral was held on August 6 at the Nichols UMC in Trumbull. Memorial donations may be made to the First UMC of Shelton, 188 Rocky Rest Road, Shelton, CT 06484; Nichols UMC, 35 Shelton Road, Trumbull, CT 06611; the Memorial UMC, 867 West Avon Road, Avon, CT 06001, or Masonicare Hospice, 111 Founders Plaza, East Hartford, CT 06108.

Notes and remembrances may be sent to Rev. Joseph Piccirillo at 867 West Avon Road, Avon, CT 06001.

Rev. Joseph N. Ary

Rev. Joseph N. Ary, 88, of Copake, N.Y., died at the Greer Nursing and Rehabilitation Residence in Canaan, Conn., on July 10, 2016.

Ary, who was born on the family farm in Greene County, Ohio, on May 19, 1928, attended a one-room schoolhouse through eighth grade. He grad-

uated from Xenia Central School in 1946. After graduation from Ohio State University in 1950, Ary taught vocational agriculture in Lost Creek, Ohio.

During the Korean War, Ary served with the United States Army as a corporal from 1952 to 1954. Upon his discharge, he entered Drew Theological School and graduated with a master of divinity degree in 1957.

His first appointment was to the Copake and Craryville United Methodist churches. Ary later served churches in Ossining, Red Hook, and Milan, N.Y. His last appointment was to First UMC in Walton, N.Y.

Following his retirement in 1990, Ary moved back to Copake, where he often helped his son doing carpentry work—just as he had helped his father when he was a boy. He also continued his ministry by assisting longtime friend, Rev. Gerry Pollock, in serving churches in Pawling and Poughquag, N.Y. Ary was also a member of the former Hillsdale Lodge #612 of Free and Accepted Masons.

Ary is survived by wife, Faye, whom he married in September 1952. In addition, he leaves a son, Joe (Dru) Ary of Hillsdale, N.Y.; two granddaughters, April Jo (Dave) Whalen Millerton, N.Y., and Hollie (Bryan VanTassel) Ary of Claverack, N.Y.; and two great-grandsons, Riley and Parker Whalen. He was pre-deceased by daughter, Lynn Rachel Ary and a sister, Marcella Shaw.

Funeral services were held on July 15 at the Copake UMC with Rev. David Rogers officiating. Interment was in the Copake Cemetery.

Memorials in Ary's name may be made to Copake and Craryville UMC churches, P.O. Box 127, Copake N.Y. 12516; The Roe Jan Food Pantry, P.O. Box 343, Hillsdale NY 12529; or the Double H Ranch, 97 Hidden Valley Rd, Lake Luzerne N.Y. 12846. Cards and notes may be sent to the family at 1635 County Route 7A, Copake, N.Y. 12516.

Church & Society Sets Priorities

The Conference Board of Church & Society (CBCS) held its annual planning meeting on July 9 to discuss the priorities for the coming year. Haunted by a week of shootings and national outcry, the assembled group felt that we needed to help our conference churches focus on human and civil rights in some way. We will be exploring education and action that will include, but not be limited to, Black Lives Matter issues, gun violence and racism. We hope to collaborate with various other conference agencies, like the Commission on Race and Religion and Black Methodists for Church Renewal, in order to engage our congregations effectively during the coming year.

CBCS will also continue to focus on mass incarceration. Our prison ministry symposium, "I Was in Prison and You..." on Saturday, October 1, will introduce myriad opportunities for both ministry and advocacy, which we will implement throughout 2017. [Registration](#) for this symposium is now open.

Another priority issue will be climate change and the environment. In the fall, we will follow up with our conference financial investors about commitments to divest from fossil fuel corporations. In the spring, we will introduce a Lenten study on climate change that will enable congregations to engage in thoughtful discussion, based on Christian principles, about the environment, our world and our place within it. This study will be prepared for Ash Wednesday 2017.

JOB OPENING: Social Justice Coordinator

The Conference Board of Church & Society is seeking an energetic and committed activist in the New York City metropolitan area who can assist local congregations throughout the conference in becoming involved with "Black Lives Matter" and other racial justice issues as well as initiatives to reduce gun violence. Please forward a resume and cover letter to Rev. Paul Fleck, CBCS Chair, at paul.fleck@nyac-umc.com.