

# Recommendation on the Proposed Constitutional Amendments *The Renewal and Reform Coalition*

March 15, 2017

In anticipation of the upcoming votes by all the annual conferences on whether or not to ratify the five proposed constitutional amendments for our church, the Renewal and Reform Coalition offers its perspective for your consideration. On two of the proposed amendments, there are both positive and negative features that could lead to different conclusions. Their meaning and implications are sufficiently unclear that the Coalition is not taking a collective position.

## I. Amendment 1 – Add a new paragraph on Gender Justice

The Coalition takes **no position** on this amendment

### Positives

- Strong statement in favor of the equal value of women and men in God’s eyes, which we support
- Strong commitment on behalf of the church to seek to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, which we support

### Negatives

- This statement reads more like a Social Principle than a paragraph in the Constitution, particularly with its emphasis on theology. We question whether it belongs in the Constitution.
- The second sentence raises theological concerns when it says, “it is contrary to Scripture and to logic to say that God is male or female ... maleness and femaleness are ... not characteristics of the divine.” Does this mean Jesus is not male? Or does it mean that Jesus, who is obviously male, is not divine? Either position is contrary to our doctrinal standards.
- This language could potentially be used to discourage use of references to God as Father (e.g., hymns, prayers, creeds)

Summary – While this statement is well-intentioned, and we support its strong emphasis on the equality of women, we are concerned with its theological fuzziness being written into our Constitution. The church’s advocacy for women’s equality is well-stated elsewhere in the *Book of Discipline*.

## II. Amendment 2 – Add to ¶14 on Inclusiveness “ability, gender, age, marital status”

The Coalition takes **no position** on this amendment

### Positives

- We support the idea that persons of any ability should be welcome in our churches and included in the church’s life, worship, and governance.
- We support the idea that both men and women equally should be welcome in our ministries and included equally in the church’s life, worship, and governance.
- We support the idea that persons of every age should be welcome in our churches and included in age-appropriate ways in the church’s life, worship, and governance.
- We support the idea that single, married, widowed, and divorced persons should be welcome in our churches and included in the church’s life, worship, and governance.

## Negatives

- The word “gender” is no longer understood to be merely a binary (male/female) term. It has recently become a loaded word in Western culture and carries within it connotations of transgender, gender queer, and other perceptions of gender that we do not believe should be granted blanket and unconditional inclusion in the Constitution.
- We are concerned that adding “marital status” without defining the term could be interpreted to give a mandate in our constitution to recognize same-sex marriage or polygamy in those countries that allow such. The current definition of marriage in the Social Principles could be nullified by this Constitutional language.
- The inclusion of “age” could result in the elimination of mandatory retirement for bishops and clergy. There was no discussion of this possibility at General Conference, and we are concerned that this could be an unintended consequence of adopting this amendment. If we are to eliminate mandatory retirement, it should at least be discussed and considered by the General Conference delegates before being approved.

Summary – While in sympathy with the intentions of the proposed additions, we are concerned about potential unintended consequences of adopting this amendment as presently worded. We encourage careful consideration of the issues involved before adopting this amendment. We would hope to support better wording in the future that could accomplish the purposes in a clearer and less controversial way.

### **III. Amendment #3 – Election of Delegates by Majority, Requiring Floor Nominations**

The Coalition **supports** this amendment.

This amendment would standardize the process for election of delegates across annual conferences and would foster a more open and transparent democratic process in places where that is not a tradition. The requirement for a majority could cause voters to coalesce more quickly around the top candidates. The requirement for floor nominations enables maximum openness and access of all qualified persons to the process of running for delegate. It addresses problems that have been experienced in some annual conferences.

### **IV. Amendment #4 – Requires Central Conferences to Elect Bishops at a Regularly Scheduled Conference**

The Coalition **supports** this amendment.

This amendment would ensure that the dates of central conference meetings are not manipulated to allow irregular processes for electing bishops. It addresses problems that have been experienced in some central conferences.

### **V. Amendment #5 – Allows the Council of Bishops to Hold Bishops Accountable**

The Coalition **supports** this amendment.

This amendment is a key part of enhancing the global accountability of bishops. It gives the Council of Bishops the option to supervise complaints against bishops when the jurisdictional or central conference complaint process does not work appropriately. It addresses problems that have been experienced in several regions of the global church.