



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Life, Sex, Marriage, Divorce and Faith

*²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.
Genesis 2:24 NRSV*

²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26-28 NRSV

The Supreme Court's ruling on same sex marriage sent a shock wave through the nation last week. Whether you approve or disapprove of same sex marriage it is now the law of the land. It is therefore reasonable to ask how this ruling affects us as United Methodists and as Christians.

Please note that I am undertaking this discussion with some trepidation. It has been my experience that the topic of homosexuality is one of the most emotionally charged topics in the Church. However, I do believe that it is important that you understand what the Bible and the United Methodist Discipline says about this topic. I would be glad to discuss these issues in greater depth with any of you and, if enough people desire, to lead a class on the subject.

The United Methodist Church's Teachings on Homosexuality

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, speaking with regard to Human Sexuality, states in part:

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons. The United Methodist Discipline 2012, Paragraph 161.F

Please note the opening statement: “All persons are individuals of sacred worth.” The Discipline goes on to prohibit United Methodist Pastors from performing same sex marriages. Although a homosexual may be ordained, they are subject to charges and revocation of their credentials if they engage in sexual acts with someone of the same sex or with someone of the opposite sex outside of marriage. A heterosexual Pastor is also subject to charges for engaging in heterosexual acts outside of marriage.

The United Methodist church affirms the teaching of Paul that we all stand before Christ as one, neither male nor female. Early Christians were criticized for their acceptance of women as full members of the church on an equal footing with men. As I have explained in other articles and sermons, over time the Church drew back from recognition of women as full and equal members with men, much to the shame of the church. The United Methodist Church has chosen to follow the example of the earliest Christians in accepting leadership of both men and women in all aspects of the Church’s organization.

In summary, the United Methodist Church welcomes all persons regardless of sexual orientation. Pastors may not engage in homosexual acts and may not perform same sex marriages regardless of the legality of such marriages. United Methodist facilities, such as church buildings, may not be used as the venue of same sex marriages. We do not need a law to protect us from claims that we wrongfully refused to perform a same sex marriage. We are not a “bakery” engaged in interstate commerce. We are a religious institution and the First and Fourteenth Amendments provide all the legal protection we need. The current effort of the Tennessee Legislature to pass laws protecting Churches from demands to perform same sex weddings is, in my view, political window dressing and a form of fear mongering. I could wish that the State Legislators would be as concerned about providing healthcare to hundreds of thousands of Tennesseans.

Biblical Teachings Regarding Marriage and Homosexuality

To be clear, the Bible does not speak of homosexuality as that term is understood in our culture. It does speak, in fewer than ten passages, against sexual acts between persons of the same sex. That is not homosexuality any more than sexual acts between men and women is a description of heterosexuality.

Homosexuality and heterosexuality are more than sexual acts. These terms describe all aspects of our lives as sexual persons. We have barely begun to understand why some of us are more drawn to members of the same sex but there is no doubt that each of us are drawn to both sexes to a greater or lesser degree. Madison Avenue has known this for decades as it has drawn certain male and female prototypes designed to attract the attention of those of the same sex. The “Marlboro Man” is a classic example of a male image designed to be appealing to men; to attract men. It is not hard to find his descendants in the advertising of today. Such images have been constructed for women as well. The fact that you do not wish to engage in sexual relations with a person of the same sex does not negate the reality of attraction to those prototypes. For whatever reason, you are responding to the masculinity or femininity of the image.

As anyone who is married knows, marriage is much more than a commitment to engage in sexual acts. Heterosexual and homosexual relationships can involve deep commitments of mind and soul to one another, not simply commitment of the body. Indeed, such relationships have arisen and flourished when sexual relations were not physically possible. Our deepest relationships are commitments of who we are as people, what we value and what we view as essential to a fulfilled life. The best such relationships include a merging of the spiritual life of the partners, embracing what they believe about God and God’s purposes for their lives. These relationships extend to loving and raising children and working to ensure the future happiness of one another. To deny that such relationships can only exist between heterosexual couples is to deny the many examples of

such relationships all around us. Such partnerships are not prohibited by scripture nor even discussed by scripture. But they are, indeed, the very embodiment of the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 even though not described in that scripture as being between two persons of the same gender.

Likewise, the passage from Genesis notwithstanding, there is no ‘biblical definition of marriage’ as being between one man and one woman. As any student of the bible is aware, polygamous marriages were quite common at least up to the First Century. Additionally there were circumstances in Jewish law and tradition that demanded sexual relationships for procreation between a widow and one or more of her Brothers-In-Law. *De-facto* polygamous marriages also arose when married people took slaves or concubines as partners. Greek and Roman society in the First Century recognized only monogamous marriage between a man and woman and that is the marriage discussed in the New Testament. Christianity has spread to nations that practice polygamy and polyandry. In those places the church has continued to promote monogamy but it is doubtful that those teachings have fully been complied with any more than the thousands of biblical teachings about caring for the poor.

There are clear teachings against divorce in scripture, and some Christian traditions do not recognize divorce and remarriage. However the United Methodist Church, and many other Christian traditions, recognize that divorce happens when a relationship fails and there is nothing sinful *per se* about divorce. Moreover, there is nothing sinful if the divorced individuals are able to construct new loving relationships with other people. We grieve over the broken marriage and rejoice in the new beginning represented in the second marriage. We also recognize that some marriages are broken even though the spouses remained married. The church has caused great harm to millions of women over the centuries by demanding that they stay in relationships that are abusive and often mortally dangerous.

What Lies Ahead

At the very beginning of the United Methodist Discipline is a greeting from the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church. It states, in part:

*The Discipline as the instrument for setting forth the laws, plan, polity, and process by which United Methodists govern themselves remains constant. Each General Conference amends, perfects, clarifies, and adds its own contribution to the Discipline. We do not see the Discipline as sacrosanct or infallible, but we do consider it a document suitable to our heritage. **It is the most current statement of how United Methodists agree to live their lives together.** It reflects our understanding of the Church and articulates the mission of The United Methodist Church: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The Discipline defines what is expected of its laity and clergy as they seek to be effective witnesses in the world as a part of the whole body of Christ. **The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012 Episcopal Greeting***

The Discipline is the “most current” statement of how we agree to live our lives in covenant with God and one another. The General Conference of the United Methodist Church meets every four years and reviews the Discipline, making such changes as are agreed upon. The Next General Conference meets in the Spring of 2016.

At every General conference since 1972 the delegates to General Conference (made up of an equal number of laypersons and clergy from around the world) have discussed the church’s stance on homosexuality. Currently the church is roughly split down the middle on changing the Discipline to allow the recognition of same sex marriages and to allow the ordination of self-professed practicing homosexuals. Please be in prayer

for our General Conference as it struggles with this and the many other issues of being the Church, the Body of Christ, in the 21st Century.

A Letter from Bishop McAlilly Regarding the Supreme Court's Ruling on Same Gender Marriage.

(This is the letter read during the worship service on June 28th)

June 26, 2015

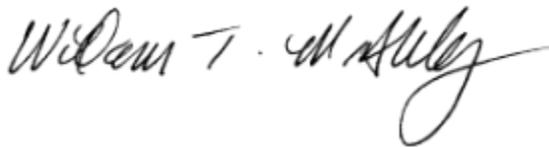
Dear Sisters and Brothers:

As you know, the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled in a 5-4 ruling that states cannot ban same gender marriage. Gay and lesbian couples across the country have a constitutional right to marry. This significant change in our civil law impacts each of us as we also live within the polity and discipline of the United Methodist Church.

As we seek to be in ministry with all persons, this law does not change what is and what is not allowed by United Methodist pastors and congregations. In a marriage ceremony of same gender persons, pastors may not lead the declaration of intent, lead the exchange of wedding vows and ring vows, or sign marriage certificates. Our church law does not prohibit offering a prayer or a homily in such a ceremony.

As your pastoral leader, I pray for the United Methodist Church in this season. I pray that we will lead with deep respect for each other. This is not a time to draw lines in the sand but rather a time to come together in prayer for one another and for all those with whom God calls us to be in ministry.

Serving Christ With You,



Bishop William T. McAlilly

The Poverty and Justice Bible

⁴⁸ *As surely as I am the living Lord God, the people of Sodom and its nearby villages were never as sinful as you. ⁴⁹ They were arrogant and spoiled; they had everything they needed and still refused to help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ They thought they were better than everyone else, and they did things I hate. And so I destroyed them.*

⁵¹ *You people of Jerusalem have sinned twice as much as the people of Samaria. In fact, your evil ways have made both Sodom and Samaria look innocent. ⁵² So their punishment will seem light compared to yours. You will be disgraced and put to shame because of your disgusting sins. Ezekiel 16:48-52 CEV*

The City of Sodom provided a label for a medieval writer to describe sexual acts between men. That label is still used today. But here the prophet Ezekiel emphasizes that the sins of Sodom went far beyond sexual sins. They were “*arrogant and spoiled; they had everything they needed and still refused to help the poor and needy.*” As we will see when we come to the Book of Amos, the principle sin of the land of Samara, also mentioned by Ezekiel in the passage above, was indifference to the suffering of the poor in the face of relative affluence. It might surprise some pastors and Christians to be reminded that God considers sinful what we do to harm one another, including refusing to help those in need. Callous indifference to the suffering of others is mentioned as sinful conduct in scripture a hundred times as much as using sexual acts to harm one another.

¹⁴ My friends, what good is it to say you have faith, when you don't do anything to show that you really do have faith? Can that kind of faith save you? ¹⁵ If you know someone who doesn't have any clothes or food, ¹⁶ you shouldn't just say, "I hope all goes well for you. I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat." What good is it to say this, unless you do something to help? ¹⁷ Faith that doesn't lead us to do good deeds is all alone and dead! James 2:14-17 CEV

I've used this quote before, but you must understand the New Testament is much shorter than the Old Testament. I can't pair every statement about our responsibility for others made in the Old Testament with a unique statement in the New. Still, the next time you hear a politician proclaim that there is no scriptural mandate for helping the poor, refer him or her to the Book of James or one of the many other New Testament passages that I've referenced over the last two years. The writer of James, like Ezekiel, considers ignoring the needs of the poor as ignoring our relationship with God.

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The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

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| Elva Beard | Mac McAfee | Kenneth Stevens | Judy Richardson |
| Larry Eastwood | Rachel Newman | Patricia Stevens | Charles Wilson |
| Leslie Eastwood | | Sam Richardson | |

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;

- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

July 5th: Lazy Farmers and Shade Weeds: When Jesus starts telling us what the Kingdom of God is like it can become pretty confusing. My texts are 2 Corinthians 5:6–10, 14–17 and Mark 4:26–34.

July 12th: Giving God Choices: The Bible was intended, in part, to make us laugh at ourselves. Often, it is only after we laugh at our presumption and foolish behavior that we can clearly see ourselves. The most extreme presumption, the height of our foolishness, is when we come to believe that we know what's best for God. My texts are: Psalms 24 and Acts 1:15-26

Worship Leader's Schedule

July 5

Jason Aldred, **Liturgist**

Pat Moran & Sam Richardson, **Greeters**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

July 12

Stacy Bell, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Mike & Renee Fetting, **Ushers**

Announcements

The "Companions in Christ" Sunday School class has begun a study, "Knowing God." We have extra books and extra chairs if you would care to join our class. All are welcome at 9:45 each Sunday Morning.

There will be a joint Administrative Council and program Council meeting on July 11th at 9:00 AM in the Fellowship Hall.

July Birthdays

Mac McAfee, Leslie Eastwood, Linda Robinson, Renita Hartsock

Happy Birthday to each of you!