



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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How Will the United Methodist Church Deal with Sexual orientation; with Homosexuality?

At Sunday's service I distributed a copy of the Council of Bishops' Plan to propose a "way forward" in working through issues dealing with sexual orientation and homosexuality. Following the service someone suggested to me that I, and the Bishops, had been talking around the issue and that there were probably many people in the congregation who did not understand what I was talking about. I realized that, during the service, I had spoken about the issue in terms of Human Sexuality and so did the Bishops. I believe that the criticism was fair and that I needed to rectify that situation because I believe that it is important for all United Methodists to understand the issues that are threatening to tear the denomination apart.

I was more direct in last week's article. Here is a quote from last week's newsletter:

Since 1972 the United Methodist Church has struggled with questions of human sexuality. We have seen these issues play out in many other traditions over the decades, even the Roman Catholic Church. The United Methodist Church has lived with decades in tension. On one hand the Discipline of the Church affirms the sacred worth of all persons and condemns discrimination against persons based upon sexual orientation. On the other hand, the Discipline declares homosexual practice to be incompatible with historic Christian teaching, refuses to ordain "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" and prohibits United Methodist pastors from performing same sex marriages.

The principal conflict in the United Methodist Church revolves around two issues.

1. Will the United Methodist Church Ordain clergy who are "practicing" homosexuals?
2. Will the church allow same sex couples to be married in the church by United Methodist Clergy?

I'll discuss each question separately.

Ordination of Practicing Homosexuals

In theory, if not in practice, the United Methodist Church would ordain a homosexual clergy person so long as they remained celibate. There is nothing 'sinful' in simply being homosexual. The proscriptions contained in scripture speak to engaging in sexual relations. Both homosexual and heterosexual persons are

expected to remain celibate if they are single, and neither are allowed to engage in homosexual relations. However, while it is possible for a celibate homosexual to be ordained, if they are honest about their sexual orientation it is unlikely that many Conferences, especially in the southeast, would ordain even a celibate homosexual. Some years ago there was a controversy in Virginia where a United Methodist pastor refused to allow a homosexual to simply join the church. The pastor's discretionary authority to refuse to accept a new member was affirmed by the United Methodist Judicial Council (the UM Supreme Court) despite the direct order of the pastor's Bishop to accept the member. Boards of Ordained Ministry have similar discretion to determine who will or will not be ordained.

That does not mean that the United Methodist Church has not ordained self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Some Conferences, principally in the Northeast and the Western states, have knowingly done so and virtually all Conferences have done so without knowing. At this last General Conference some 1100 clergy persons 'came-out' and acknowledged that they were practicing homosexuals. It is difficult to know how many of the general population classify themselves as either gay or lesbian but the figure is most often placed at just below 2% in the United States. It is certain that, in virtually all Churches, you have knowingly, or unknowingly, shared worship and ministry with homosexuals. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that some of your clergy have been homosexuals.

Same Sex Weddings

The other area of conflict revolves around same sex weddings. United Methodist pastors have, for many years, been prohibited from conducting or participating in ceremonies that "bless" same sex unions. Now that same sex marriage is recognized in this country, United Methodist Pastors are prohibited from officiating at same sex weddings and from allowing such services to be conducted in United Methodist Churches. To do so is a 'chargeable offense' for which the pastor may be punished by the Conference. The punishment can amount to a reprimand, a suspension or even revoking of the pastor's ordination.

Notwithstanding this prohibition, a number of United Methodist pastors have conducted such same sex services over the years. Sometimes this has been done primarily as a protest but on a number of occasions the pastors have been officiating at services for family members; sons, daughters, nieces, nephews and others. Several of these have ended with the clergy person's ordination being revoked. Over the last two years there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding a Bishop who has conducted two such services, one just prior to the start of this last general Conference.

Bisexuals and Transgender Persons

Someone engaging in homosexual practice, even though bi-sexual, would not be eligible for ordination. (Neither would a heterosexual who was engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage.) However, in recent years there has been growing awareness of persons whose gender is not, from a biophysical standpoint, clearly determined. Some persons born with male or female genitalia may, from a biochemical standpoint, be more closely associated with the opposite sex. Some persons are even "caught in the middle" with no discernable gender or are born with male and female sexual organs. This should not come as a surprise since it has been known for many years that sexual changes associated with puberty are driven by hormones and there have always been persons whose bodies did not conform to 'normal' development. But it creates a problem for the Church if it is trying to make distinctions based upon scriptures that were penned three thousand years ago.

At present that Discipline does not deal with persons who are transgender. Theoretically a transgender man (one born a woman but who underwent sexual reassignment surgery to become a man) could be ordained

and could even be married to a woman in the United Methodist Church by a United Methodist pastor. There are those in the Church who would oppose ordaining such persons.

The Effect on the Church

Beginning in the early 1990s the church began to divide itself into groups based largely on how they viewed the inclusion or exclusion of persons based upon sexual orientation (These groups also focus on other issues, such as abortion and biblical interpretation to name two, but the issues involving human sexuality seem to dominate). Two groups in particular have represented those opposed to inclusion of persons who are homosexual. One of these groups is the Confessing Movement and the other is the Good News movement. Information about both of these movements is available online.

The group principally representing the Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Queer movement is Reconciling Ministries. Some United Methodist churches have become Reconciling Congregations committed to radical hospitality for all persons, including members of the LBGQT community. (The term “queer” is used by members of the movement in different ways. I refer you to online resources for discussions of the scope of the term.)

There is a third block in the Church that has had an increasing effect on how the General Conference deals with these issues. The fastest growing segments of the church are found in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. In general, these countries are less hospitable to homosexuals and transsexuals. Homosexuality is punishable by death in some African countries. The number of delegates to General Conference from these areas has increased at every General Conference. The votes from these communities, coupled with those of like-minded movements in the United States, have blocked efforts over the last two decades to change the Church’s Discipline with regard to LGBTQ issues.

With that background I invite you to review again the statement of the Council of bishops.

AN OFFERING FOR A WAY FORWARD (A Statement from the United Methodist Council of Bishops)

Galatians 3:25-29 (NRSV)

²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 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. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring,^[a] heirs according to the promise.

Your bishops were honored to receive the request of General Conference to help lead our United Methodist Church forward during this time of both great crisis and great opportunity. As far as we can discover, this is the first time that a General Conference has ever made such a request of the Council of Bishops, and we accept this request with humility.

We share with you a deep commitment to the unity of the church in Christ our Lord. Yesterday, our president shared the deep pain we feel. We have all prayed for months and continue to do so. We seek, in this kairos moment, a way forward for profound unity on human sexuality and other matters. This deep unity allows for a variety of expressions to co-exist in one church. Within the Church, we are called to work and pray for

more Christ-like unity with each other rather than separation from one another. This is the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21-23.

UNITY We believe that our unity is found in Jesus Christ; it is not something we achieve but something we receive as a gift from God. We understand that part of our role as bishops is to lead the church toward new behaviors, a new way of being and new forms and structures which allow a unity of our mission of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” while allowing for differing expressions as a global church. Developing such new forms will require a concerted effort by all of us, and we your bishops commit ourselves to lead this effort. We ask you, as a General Conference, to affirm your own commitment to maintaining and strengthening the unity of the church. We will coordinate this work with the various efforts already underway to develop global structures and a new *General Book of Discipline* for our church. Strengthening the unity of the church is a responsibility for all of us.

PRAYER We accept our role as spiritual leaders to lead the UMC in a “pause for prayer” – to step back from attempts at legislative solutions and to intentionally seek God’s will for the future. As a Council of Bishops, we will lead the church in every part of the world in times of worship, study, discernment, confession and prayer for God’s guidance. We ask you, as a General Conference, to join us in this effort, beginning this week. We were moved by the sight of delegates praying around the table, and we hope these efforts will continue. As your bishops we are ready to join you and to lead you in these times of prayer.

PROCESSES We have discussed in depth the processes which might help our church heal and move forward – up to and including the possibility of a called General Conference in 2018 or 2019. We have not finalized our plans for such processes, but we will keep working on options we have heard from many of you, and we will keep reporting to this General Conference and to the whole church.

NEXT STEPS We recommend that the General Conference defer all votes on human sexuality and refer this entire subject to a special Commission, named by the Council of Bishops, to develop a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph in our *Book of Discipline* regarding human sexuality. We continue to hear from many people on the debate over sexuality that our current *Discipline* contains language which is contradictory, unnecessarily hurtful, and inadequate for the variety of local, regional and global *context*. The following summary outlines. We will name such a Commission to include persons from every region of our UMC, and will include representation from differing perspectives on the debate. We commit to maintain an on-going dialogue with this Commission as they do their work, including clear objectives and outcomes. Should they complete their work in time for a called General Conference, then we will call a two- to three-day gathering before the 2020 General Conference. (We will consult with GCFA regarding cost-effective ways to hold that gathering.)

CONTINUING DISCUSSIONS We will continue to explore options to help the church live in grace with one another – including ways to avoid further complaints, trials and harm while we uphold the *Discipline*. We will continue our conversation on this matter and report our progress to you and to the whole church.

General Conference 2016

The following Summary of the General Conference was written by Bishop William T. McAlilly, Bishop for the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences.

With Paul, I write, “*I give thanks for my every remembrance of you.*” These last 23 days in Portland have reminded me again of the joy of the work of ministry among the people of the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences. Already I am hearing wonderful reports of what God is doing on the Sunday after General Conference. Baptisms, professions of faith, celebrations of graduations, mission teams planning for ministry. Thank you for your faithfulness over the work to which God is calling us.

Many, many of you have followed General Conference day by day, vote by vote, via the internet. While the headlines captured much of the drama around the surface of the Conference, the real work occurred in legislative sessions led by lay and clergy men and women from across the world.

The faithfulness and tenacity of the delegates from the Nashville Area was inspiring to me. In addition to the delegates, there were those serving behind the scenes, doing whatever was needed to facilitate the work of General Conference. When the benediction was pronounced Friday, May 20, much had been accomplished. Below are some of the highlights.

For the sake of the Mission

To be clear, the General Conference chose to **stand united for the sake of staying in mission**. As a global church made up of people with differing viewpoints, we affirm a commitment to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church. We had serious discussions about the global growth of the church and the state of the church in the U.S. and passed a \$604 million dollar budget for 2017-2020 which includes \$5 million for theological education in the Central Conferences. This a slight increase over the \$603.1 million dollar budget approved at the 2012 General Conference. It is also an increase over the \$599 million budget proposed to the 2016 General Conference delegates, which would have been The United Methodist Church’s lowest in 16 years.

Offering a Way Forward:

We acknowledge that deep divisions exist in the church about human sexuality, but we believe there are options other than restructuring. We do not desire to split the church, and we seek unity for the sake of our mission and witness. **For the first time, a General Conference appealed to the Council of Bishops to lead legislatively as well as spiritually, a responsibility that has been reserved for the body.** Your bishops humbly accepted this challenge. The Council will lead a process to help the church move forward. This process has not yet been fully developed, but the Council will report to the church as we continue our conversations. If we discover it is necessary to have a special session of General Conference, the Council would be charged with the responsibility of making such a decision for the sake of the Church.

Because the General Conference requested leadership from the Council of Bishops to find a way forward, any changes in our positions on human sexuality were postponed. The Council will create a Commission to examine and possibly revise sections of church law regarding human sexuality. The Commission will include representation from every region of the UMC and from different perspectives. We will not be able to build trust unless these conversations are candid and do not carry incrimination. We are committed to a different kind of conversation that invites people to imagine where God wants the church to go.

No changes have been made to the Book of Discipline regarding our official positions on matters of human sexuality. The prohibitions outlined in church law still exist, but we have committed to explore options to help avoid further complaints, trials and harm while upholding the Discipline.

Additional conference highlights:

- A variety of worship experiences provided spiritual nourishment as well as an opportunity to unite with each other as a diverse, international body of Christ; while the Episcopal address, Laity address, and Young People's address provided inspiration.
- We felt the Holy Spirit among us as we engaged in conversation and our work.
- As we near the end of our Imagine No Malaria campaign, we celebrated our success in raising \$68.5 million in the fight against malaria, an effort that has served to help revitalize and engage churches in mission outreach.
- We continued in our Acts of Repentance with a presentation from the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes about the Methodist involvement in the 1864 Sand Creek massacre.
- We shared in the consecration of deaconesses and home missionaries and the commissioning of 29 missionaries.
- We acknowledged our heritage by observing a number of anniversaries: the 250th anniversary of John Street Church; the 200th anniversary of the death of Francis Asbury, the 150th anniversary of United Methodist Women, the 60th anniversary of the Methodist Church granting full clergy rights to women, the 40th anniversary of voting rights for the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, the 30th anniversary of DISCIPLE Bible Study, and the 25th anniversary of Africa University.
- The Council of Bishops welcomed a new leadership team, with Bishop Bruce Ough assuming the presidency of the Council. New members of the Judicial Council were elected and for the first time, a member from outside the U.S. was elected president. Gary Graves was elected secretary of the General Conference.
- We celebrated our ecumenical partnerships as we move in to full Communion with the Uniting Church in Sweden and toward full Communion with the Moravian church.

Legislation:

- Defeated a proposal to remove "*for the transformation of the world*" from our mission statement.
- Approved a resolution calling on United Methodist agencies to raise awareness about the harm caused by sports teams that use mascots or symbols that disrespect Native Americans.
- Voted to withdraw United Methodist membership from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
- Approved a new cloud-based hymnal.
- Approved a petition to create a new provisional conference in Southeast Asia and Mongolia.
- Created a new formula for the Central Conference theological education fund, allowing all Central Conference apportionment funding in excess of \$750,000 to go to the education fund.
- Favored a recommendation of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters to add five bishops after General Conference 2020.
- Allowed the General Conference to set provisions in regard to bishops' accountability and alter the complaint process against bishops.
- Created two new special Sundays: Women's Ministry Sunday and Volunteers in Mission Awareness Sunday. One Great Hour of Sharing will now be known as UMCOR Sunday.
- Defeated an effort to remove the constitutional ban to end guaranteed appointments.
- Passed a \$604 million budget.

On a Personal Note:

As many of you know, part of the task of presiding over the debate regarding the Bishops' Response: "A Way Forward" to lead the church through the institutional quagmire around human sexuality fell to me on Wednesday afternoon. Tensions were high and many things were articulated that were very disturbing. I was falsely accused by two delegates of manipulating the voting process. Whenever and wherever a bishop presides, it is done so with impartiality and without bias. I take that responsibility seriously as do my colleague bishops. By the grace of God and the prayers of many, many people, I was able to lead the conference through the remainder of that session. I am humbled by the love and grace extended to me by so many across the denomination.

In just a few weeks, the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences will gather to celebrate the mission and ministry across the Nashville Area. Our theme is: "*Offering Christ to A Hurting World One Neighborhood at a Time.*" It promises to be a time of renewal and celebration. I invite your prayers for all who will be leading.

Your Servant for Christ's Sake,

Bill McAlilly

A Theological Discussion Regarding the Terms "Traditionalists, Creedal, Orthodox, Confessing, and Bible Believing"

Professor Timothy Eberhart is Assistant Professor of Theology and Ecology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and Assistant Professor of Theology and Ecology at Methodist Theological School in Ohio. He is also a United Methodist Pastor. He and I and his wife were classmates at Vanderbilt Divinity School from 1997 until 2000. In the discussion below he challenges people who insist that his theological view that favors full acceptance of persons from the LGBTQ community is contrary to traditional, orthodox Christianity. He graciously consented to having his essay reprinted here.

Professor Eberhart refers to the label "progressive" often assigned to people who favor inclusion of persons regardless of sexual orientation. The implied meaning of the term is that the individual has adapted scripture to conform to culture. It is this proposition that Professor Eberhart is challenging.

There are self-identified traditionalists - creedal, orthodox, confessing, bible-believing Christians - in the United Methodist Church who describe those who advocate for the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the life of our denomination as progressives. Just to be clear, I do not arrive at my advocacy as a theological progressive.

I believe in God, the Creator of heaven and earth (Apostles Creed), who is revealed in the incarnation, life and ministry, death, resurrection, and future reign of Jesus Christ, truly God and truly human (Chalcedonian Creed), and who is present in the justice-working (Isaiah 61:1), life-giving (Nicene Creed), love-infusing (Augustine) powers of the Holy Spirit. With John Wesley, I affirm the *ordo salutis* [Latin meaning *Order of Salvation*] to be God's prevenient grace, which precedes all human action or decision, God's justifying grace, which forgives us our sin and accounts us as righteous, and God's sanctifying grace, which leads us as we respond in faith into ever greater holiness - i.e., love for God, others, and creation - in the whole of life.

I follow in the tradition of the early church by reading the whole of scripture and interpreting individual passages through this *regula fidei* [Latin for Rule of Faith] (Tertullian), which means that I do *not* accord each and every passage as equally authoritative in matters of faith and practice but rather interpret all passages in the central light - the canon within the canon - of who God is, of what God has done, is doing, and will accomplish, and of who God calls us to be as participants in the divine life and work. As Augustine wrote, for example: "Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up the twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought" (On Christian Doctrine). Or Wesley: "For instance: the asserters of this doctrine [of predestination] interpret that text of Scripture, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," as implying that God in a literal sense hated Esau and all the reprobated from eternity. Now what can possibly be a more flat contradiction than this, not only to the whole scope and tenor of Scripture, but also to those particular texts which expressly declare, "God is love"?" (Free Grace).

Those who read scripture as a collection of individual statements of fact, morality, or doctrinal belief to be confessed and applied regardless of context or of their relation to the whole scope and tenor of scriptural revelation are *not* traditionalists. In this matter, they are the actual progressives, those who have innovated beyond church tradition, beginning in the late 19th through early 20th centuries with the rise of *modern* fundamentalism's understandings of biblical inerrancy and biblical literalism.

Like theologians and teachers of the church in every age, I look to contemporary sources of knowledge, like science and human experience, in determining what is right and good, though I do so because of a prior belief that "truth belongs to God, wherever it is found" (Augustine). But my deeply held conviction that LGBTQ persons are decidedly *not* any more or less sinful than persons of other sexual orientations, all of which are distorted by sin and in need of God's saving grace, is rooted primarily not in science or experience but in the core affirmations of traditional Christian belief as expressed through the Wesleyan-Methodist branch of Christianity: that all persons, in their full personhood, are created in the image and likeness of God; that the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ extends to all without any partiality; and that the sanctifying energies of the Holy Spirit summon all to grow in loving holiness in all spheres of life.

I am convinced then, without reservation, that a baptized Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer person who responds to the Spirit's call to ordination in the United Methodist Church, who manifests the gifts and graces for ministry in the body of Christ for the sake of the world, and who meets all other qualifications for ordination, including a commitment to "celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage" (UMC Book of Discipline, para. 304) is *in no way* demonstrating incompatibility with Christian teaching - though those who do harm to their neighbors by denying the God-given worthiness of their full personhoods and who continue to refuse them full inclusion and participation in the life of Christ's holy church decidedly *are*.

I am wholly, even radically devoted to this, but not as a theological progressive.

New Disciple Bible Study

Disciple Bible Study is a powerful experience that can open the bible up for the participants. I would be willing to begin a new class this September if at least seven people desired to undertake the 34 week study. I could do this study on Monday or Tuesday nights between 7 and 9. If participants would prefer to meet on a week day that could also be arranged. In years past I have also taught Disciple Bible Study between 7 and 9 AM Sunday mornings. If you are interested please contact me at the Church. If you desire additional information for yourself or to give to a friend I have some explanatory booklets available.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

Our Thursday morning Bible Study meets between 10:00 and 11:30. Everyone is welcome to attend. It has been my practice to allow the group to decide what parts of the bible they wish to study. We have completed our study of the Gospels, including the Book of Acts and are beginning a study of Paul's Epistles. We have concluded our study of 1st Corinthians and have begun a study of Galatians.

Prayer Ministry

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

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

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

May 29th: A Different Gospel: From the beginning, people within the Church have proposed different Gospels, more comfortable Gospels. How can we identify those Gospels? My texts are Luke 7:1-10 and Galatians 1:1-12.

June 5th: Who Are You to Preach the Gospel? What are the minimum qualifications to preach the Gospel? That is a question Paul touches on in his letter to the Galatians. My texts are Psalm 146 and Galatians 1:11-24.

Worship Leader's Schedule

May 29

Julia Moore, **Liturgist**

Erin and Chuck McKibben, **Greeters**

Donnie and Renita Hartsock, **Ushers**

June 5

Hal Newman, **Liturgist**

Dorise and Bill LeCates, **Greeters**

Dawn and Richard Stevens, **Ushers**

Announcements

Parent's Night Out:

"The Parents Night Out team is looking for volunteers to help launch this family ministry! We need **6 volunteers for each of the following dates/times**. The launch party will be held [on Sunday July 10th from 12:30-3:30](#) after the service. The initial two PNO evenings will be [July 15th](#) and [July 29th from 5:30-9](#) and we need volunteers to serve from **5-9:30**. Volunteers will serve by staffing the various stations for the children attending and by serving a pizza dinner to the children. No experience necessary- just a heart to serve! All are welcome and we need many hands in order to ensure the success of this ministry. We are asking that volunteers complete a background check prior to [July 10th](#) and the PNO ministry will support with the cost and directions on how to do this. Once you sign up, a member of the PNO team will contact you with details. Please sign up to share your gifts!"

Volunteers are needed to help with this year's VBS. There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board by the side door. If you have questions, please contact Dawn Stevens at (615)-638-8827 or dawnstevens1961@gmail.com. A meeting will be scheduled soon to discuss the theme and all the activity details. VBS is an exciting, fun time for all, come join in!

The **Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School class** is both learning and enjoying a series of videos, narrated by Ray Vanderlann. The videos as well as the narration take place in ancient lands described in the Old Testament. We enjoy discussion about what we are learning and the application of the lessons to our lives.

We enjoy fellowship beginning at 9:45 with our study beginning at 10:00. All are welcome to join us as we pursue Biblical truths and the application for our lives.

Birthdays in May

Tommy Cotton, Sam Richardson, Jim Winton

Happy Birthday to each of you!