

WHO ARE WE & THE UMC

Official United Methodist Positions on Marriage and Homosexuality

"We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman"

Paragraph 161.C

"While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of other human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church."

Paragraph 304.3

"Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches"

Paragraph 341.6

"To ensure that no annual conference board agency, committee, commission or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of the UMC 'not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends' - paragraph 161G" The Council (on Finance and Administration) shall have the right to stop such expenditures."

Paragraph 613.19

"A bishop, clergy member or an annual conference, local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative leave or diaconal minister may be tried when charged with one or more of the following offenses: 1) immorality, including but not limited to not being celibate in singles in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage; 2) practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including, but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions or performing same sex wedding ceremonies..."

Paragraph 2702.1

These are the set positions of the United Methodist Church until
at least 2024.

Disaffiliation is a new, first-ever option for churches added at the 2019 Special Called Session of General Conference. It was introduced by supporters of the Traditional Plan that the General Conference passed and is explicitly for churches who "for reasons of conscience disagree with the provisions passed at General Conference or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.

Many churches do not disagree with the Traditional Plan. They are seeking disaffiliation because of changes they fear will take place in the future. Those fears of the not-yet (and maybe not ever) future have circulated in churches as if they were true and present realities.

The disaffiliation process is meant to be like other United Methodist processes: **open, fair, transparent, and based on accurate information**. Because of the misinformation that has been spread in conversations, meetings, and in writing, in order to qualify for a Church Conference vote on disaffiliation, the District Superintendent required the Administrative Council to write the congregation an acknowledgement of misinformation, an identification of the false or misleading statements and corrections to those statements.

Here is the letter and the list of statements:

Dear Members of Triplet,

Based on input from the congregation, we, the Administrative Council, voted for Triplet to enter the discernment process for disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church. That decision will be made at a Church Conference which is currently penciled in for Sunday, February 26th, 2023. All members of the church will have a vote and all voters must be present to vote; there will be no absentee voting.

Because a number of false statements have been made in meetings, in personal conversations and in writing in the past few months, before the Church Conference can be set, we are offering this letter and a series of information meetings to qualify Triplet for a Church Conference Vote and help Triplet members make their best decision possible.

This letter is our good faith response to making corrections. It shows to everyone the statements that have been made that are not true and their corrections (these are listed at the bottom of this communication). We hope you will read it closely.

In addition, we hope you will join us for the after-church information sessions beginning this coming Sunday, January 29, through February 19. They will include a light lunch in the CLC immediately after worship. Because they are focused on specific topics, we expect these information times to last no longer than 45 minutes. The sessions relate directly to the areas where people have had confusion or misinformation.

- Sunday, February 12: United Methodist Beliefs & Doctrine, How are ministers held accountable to our doctrine? Where/how would we get our ministers if we disaffiliate?
- Sunday, February 19: Property and money. What is the Trust Clause and how does it serve the church? What will it cost to disaffiliate and how would Triplet pay for it?

Each of these topics will be beneficial to your prayerful decision-making. We hope you will join us.

Sincerely,

The Triplet UMC Administrative Council

Following are the false statements made at Triplett and the accurate information:

What is the current position on same-sex marriage?

FALSE STATEMENT: The United Methodist Church has changed its position on marriage.

WHAT IS TRUE: The United Methodist Church has not changed its position on marriage. United Methodist Church stance on marriage: "We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union". We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

FALSE STATEMENT: There are no guarantees the church would not have same sex weddings or a gay pastor in the UMC.

WHAT IS TRUE: IF there are changes to the Discipline that would allow same sex weddings or gay pastors (which there is not at this time), there are already guarantees a church would not be appointed a gay pastor in the UMC. Churches can fill out an "extended profile" for future pastors to ensure churches which the cabinet would abide by. The Trustees of any local church determine the wedding policy of the church. They would decide about same sex weddings.

What is the current position on the ordination of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals?

FALSE STATEMENT: The General Conference approves of gay bishops and the WNC has approved gay pastors and deacons.

WHAT IS TRUE: The General Conference has not approved of gay bishops.

The WNC has not approved gay pastors and deacons.

FALSE STATEMENT: The UMC has a gay married bishop and "nothing was done about it".

WHAT IS TRUE: Charges were filed against the gay married bishop and the Judicial Council was asked for a ruling. Her status was referred back to the Western Jurisdiction. The election, consecration, assignment and supervision of bishops is - per the current Discipline - exclusively in the hands of the jurisdiction, and no other group. (Added to the Discipline in 1939)

FALSE STATEMENT: The UMC does not hold people accountable.

WHAT IS TRUE: The UMC does hold people accountable. Accountability in the UMC is not done publicly for the good of all concerned. As with the court system, in an orderly process - which often takes a long time. It can be frustratingly slow. Accountability is built into every level of United Methodist life.

What did our Superintendent say about same-sex marriage and gay/lesbian ordination?

FALSE STATEMENT: The DS was asked about the position of the UMC on same-sex marriage and gay pastors and had "nothing to say".

WHAT IS TRUE: Rev. Dan Pezet and the Discipline say No. Clarification: The Discipline does not allow for self-avowed, practicing homosexuals to serve as clergy.

FALSE STATEMENT: The DS had "no answer" to the question of what the UMC believes about gay marriage.

WHAT IS TRUE: Rev. Dan Pezet and the Discipline say No. Clarification: The Discipline does not allow for self-avowed, practicing homosexuals to serve as clergy.

FALSE STATEMENT: The DS said marriage has changed in the UMC from "a man and a woman" to "two people".

WHAT IS TRUE: United Methodist Church stance on Marriage has not changed: "We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union...we support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman."

What is the current position on doctrine?

FALSE STATEMENT: Ministers in the UMC do not have to believe UMC doctrine to be ordained.

WHAT IS TRUE: Ministers in the UMC must believe UMC doctrine to be ordained.

Did the Conference have plans to close Triplett?

FALSE STATEMENT: We need to own our own property or the conference can come shut us down. The conference already tried to close Triplett recently.

WHAT IS TRUE: The Conference has never tried to close Triplett.

How would Triplett find ministers if it chooses to disaffiliate?

FALSE STATEMENT: In answer to the question "Who will vet ministers if we disaffiliate?" answer was given that Staff Parish already vets ministers.

WHAT IS TRUE: Currently, Staff Parish does not have any role in credentialing ministers. Ministers are credentialed only by the Boards of Ordained Ministry (District and Conference) in a long testing process.

The positions on human sexuality are fixed until 2024.

No changes HAVE been made to these stated positions.

No changes CAN be made until the 2024 General Conference meets.

Only the General Conference speaks for the United Methodist Church.

The General Conference is a world-wide gathering with representatives from 54 US conferences and 80 conferences outside of the US. Getting agreement from this wide body takes place slowly, if at all.

IF changes take place at FUTURE General Conferences:

In the Western North Carolina Conference:

Determination of whether or not a gay pastor could be appointed:

In the hands of the local church SPRRC and Admin Council through the expanded profile.

Whether or not same sex weddings could be held in the church:

Determined by local church trustees.

Whether or not gay people would work with children and youth:

Determined solely by local church nominations and committees who are already solely responsible for the recruiting and screening of those who lead and work with children and youth.

Whether or not a minister would have to perform any wedding:

Would be at the sole discretion of the pastor.

HOT SPOTS OF OUTRAGE

There are four frequently highlighted situations that are sources of outrage in the current discussion of the United Methodist Church. Groups critical of the UMC and trying to recruit UMC congregations repeat these four situations over and over as evidence of their allegation of how out of control the UMC has become. Each of these are unique situations. But with sufficient repetition, people have come to feel they are the norm.

1

Ms. Penny Cost is a 23 year old young man who feels a calling to let gay young people know God does not hate them. His form of outreach/evangelism is to dress up in drag. His name is Issac Simmons. He is a first year seminary student at Boston School of Theology. He is not a minister. He is a certified candidate with a District Committee on Ministry in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference—which means he is exploring a call to ministry.

What's true: The United Methodist Church has over 38,000 ordained ministers. None of our ordained ministers are drag queens. Issac Simmons is under accountability to the District Committee on Ministry of his conference and his District Superintendent. They will determine if/when he is ordained.

2

Worship Service at Duke Divinity School Chapel to “a queer God.” In March, couple of dozen students attended a student-led service that was held in the chapel of Duke Divinity School. Only one United Methodist student was present at the event. It was not led by any Duke faculty or staff. Video from the service has circulated repeatedly through the IRD and WCA publicity forums in a way that sensationalized the service, vilified the persons who participated and cast doubts about the orthodox theological training at Duke Divinity School.

What's true: Duke Divinity School has had hundreds of traditional, orthodox, Christian centered worship experiences in Goodson Chapel. Duke Divinity School is a seminary of the United Methodist Church with a long history of being very traditional, conservative and orthodox. It is under the supervision of the UM University Senate which regularly and thoroughly reviews its academic and theological offerings and practices.

3

Illiff Seminary has “embraced paganism”. This sensational accusation came from an “expose” from a lay person in the Institute of Religion and Democracy publication: “United Methodism’s Illiff Seminary Embraces Paganism” February 14, 2022.

What’s true: Illiff Seminary has a large population of students preparing for military chaplaincy – a ministry field where more and more people do not affiliate with any religion at all. The Illiff courses prepare them for Christian ministry with people who are other than Christian faiths and increasingly of no professed faith at all.

4

Bishop Karen Oliveto, a married lesbian, who is serving as a United Methodist Bishop in the Western Jurisdiction. (And, just since January Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth, a gay married also began serving as a Bishop)

Since 2016, Bishop Karen Oliveto, a married lesbian has served as a Bishop in the Western Jurisdiction. And, beginning in January of 2023, Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth a gay married man, is serving as bishop in the Greater Northwest Episcopal Area. Bishop Oliveto’s consecration was appealed to the Judicial Council (the Supreme Court of the UMC) and they ruled there was no explicit conflict in the current Discipline to invalidate her serving. The sole responsibility for the election, consecration and placement and supervision of bishops lies fully and exclusively in the hands of the jurisdiction (which was written into the 1939 Discipline as a compromise to the ME Church South. At that time, it was a guarantee to them that they would not have a black bishop.) That provision of exclusive jurisdiction authority is still in place. Bishop Oliveto, like every bishop, is accountable to her Annual Conference’s Committee on Episcopacy. It is often said that she was elected and “nothing happened”. Although she was not removed her name has become a household name for criticism and denunciation.

These four examples show how fear and apprehension have been fueled by high-profile publicity based on one-off, uncharacteristic and unusual situations.

- There are over 38,000 ordained United Methodist pastors in the US. Although there is one 23 year old in the initial steps of candidate to be a minister, there are no ordained UM ministers who are drag queens.
- Duke Divinity School has had hundreds of traditional, orthodox, Christian centered worship experiences in Goodson Chapel. Not one of the services they led has been to “A Queer God”.
- Illiff Seminary has a long and rich history of preparing ministry students for military chaplaincy. The addition of courses in “paganism” and other religions was to equip chaplains to deal with the increasing number of military people who are of no faith or other-than-Christian faiths.
- Bishop Oliveto – and now Bishop Bridgeforth-- serve under supervision of their Jurisdiction....which has the sole authority over bishops in that Jurisdiction. That is the law of the church and cannot be changed except by the General Conference.

The publicity for these four high profile “hot spots” has been initiated by “exposes” from groups that are openly recruiting United Methodists for the new denomination that they are starting.

This is what it is like in real life: If you were kind and even-keeled for 300 days. Then one day (maybe for good reason), you were short-tempered with your wife. After that, you went back to being your congenial self. Then you found out that your wife made a video of what you said that one day you were out of sorts. And she posted it on Facebook and she sent it to the local newspaper. And she showed it to your Sunday School Class to prove that you were ill tempered.

How would you feel? An isolated circumstance is not a norm or a reliable indicator of reality.



HISTORY



The Methodist Church in America began in 1784 at the Christmas Conference. Except for the Civil War and now the COVID Pandemic, the General Conference has met every four years. For 188 of Methodism's 239 years, there was no mention of homosexuality in the Discipline.

- **1972** - The Good News caucus initiated the first legislation: "We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider it incompatible of Christian teaching" and "We do not recommend marriage between two persons of the same sex".
- **1976** - The same group added 3 statements banning the use of church funds to promote homosexuality.
- **1980** - the 1972 & 1978 provisions were left intact.
- **1984** - The General Conference adopted as the standard for ordained clergy a commitment to "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" and "self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church".
- **1988** - The General Conference added: "we affirm God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons".
- **1992** - The General Conference voted to retain its current positions.
- **1996** - The General Conference added a definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual" and a declaration that "ceremonies to celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by United Methodist clergy or in United Methodist churches".
- **2000** - The General Conference added "We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and family".
- **2004** - Delegates agreed to a statement of unity: "As United Methodists, we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement and affirm our commitment to work together for the common mission of making disciples throughout the world".
- **2008** - Delegates approved a new resolution to oppose homophobia and heterosexism.
- **2012** - Two items stating Christians have different opinions about homosexuality were not approved, leaving the current language intact.
- **2016** - The General Conference voted to have a special called session of General Conference in 2019 to address solely and specifically the church's stand on human sexuality. The Council on Bishops was tasked with leading an effort to develop a plan for consideration by the 2019 General Conference.
- **2019** - A plan called "The Way Forward" (largely favored by the Bishops who had led its development) was put to the 2019 General Conference. Two other plans were also presented. The plan was passed (53% - 48%) was the Traditional Plan. This plan furthered restrictions to homosexual persons and added new and severe penalties to anyone who violated the Disciplinary provisions on homosexual unions or practices. For example, the church has a process to bring complaints against clergy for violations of the Discipline. If a just resolution cannot be agreed upon, the matter used to go to the Conference Chancellor - a third party mediator. In the Traditional Plan, the 3rd party settlement has been changed to require the signature of all the complainants. Until 2019, when a matter when to a clergy trial, the trial court got to assign penalties. In the Traditional Plan, the penalty for conviction of conducting a same sex marriage was no longer set by the trial court - but a mandatory sentence of one year loss of livelihood without pay. Penalty for conducting a second same sex wedding is pre-set at loss of ministerial credentials.

The vast majority of Disciplinary provisions that have passed were initiated by conservative groups beginning in 1972 and added to in 1976, 1984, 1996. The years there were no changes 1980, 1992 reaffirmed the restrictions in place. In 2019, the Traditional Plan enacted a new level of restrictions on gay church members, pastors, and bishops and unprecedented severe penalties to anyone who disobeyed their restrictions.

BACKLASH TO THE TRADITIONAL PLAN

The new 2019 restrictions on gay/lesbian people and the range of severe penalties (unprecedented in the history of the church) provoked backlash which was expressed at Annual Conferences in June 2019. Here are two examples of the deeply felt resistance to the newly adopted Traditional Plan. They are petitions passed by the Western North Carolina Conference:

Petition 21: Removing Incompatible Language

WHEREAS, ¶161G of the United Methodist Book of Discipline (2016) which states that the practice of homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching” never refers to any specific Christian teaching that concludes such incompatibility; and,

WHEREAS, there is Christian teaching that concludes that the practice of homosexuality is not incompatible; and,

WHEREAS, since its adoption, the incompatibility statement found in ¶161G of the United Methodist Book of Discipline has been argued by biblical scholars and theologians as inaccurate and in conflict with what many Christian educators teach; and,

WHEREAS, the wording in ¶161G of the United Methodist Book of Discipline directly contradicts ¶162 of The Book of Discipline which states: “We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened.” and,

WHEREAS, the incompatibility statement found in ¶161G of the United Methodist Book of Discipline has never fully represented all United Methodists and has been rejected by a growing number of United Methodists every year since its adoption; and,

WHEREAS, the incompatibility statement found in ¶161G of the United Methodist Book of Discipline has been the source of tremendous harm to countless people within The United Methodist Church and beyond; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Western North Carolina Annual Conference petition the 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church to remove the sentence found in ¶161G of The 2016 Book of Discipline that states: “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”

AN OPPOSITION TO THE TRADITIONAL PLAN (PETITION 22) WAS PRESENTED AND NOT PASSED. RATHER A SUBSTITUTE PETITION WAS PRESENTED AND THAT PETITION PASSED.

Petition 22 Substitution: Endorsing the Commitments of UMC Next and Support Full Inclusion of All People.

WHEREAS, more than 600 laity and clergy leaders from every Annual Conference in the United States met May 20-22, 2019 at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas for an event entitled UMC Next. The event's purpose was to explore faithful responses to the Traditional Plan that was adopted by the 2019 special session of General Conference.

WHEREAS, John Wesley's first rule for every Methodist was to do no harm and the enactment of the Traditional Plan continues and amplifies harm already done by the church to LGBTQIA+ United Methodists and their families, and

WHEREAS, in our baptismal vows we promise to "resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves."

WHEREAS, there was a clear consensus from those in attendance at the UMC Next event about the four commitments essential to the future of the United Methodist Church,

NOW, THEREOFRE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Western North Carolina Conference (WNCC) formally aspires to the statement and four commitments of UMC Next: "We believe these commitments are essential to a hope-filled future for the global Methodist movement as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world:"

1. We long to be passionate followers of Jesus Christ, committed to a Wesleyan vision of Christianity, anchored in scripture and informed by tradition, experience and reason as we live a life of personal piety and social holiness.
2. We commit to resist evil, injustice and oppression in all forms and toward all people and build a church which affirms the full participations of all ages, nations, races, classes, cultures, gender identities, sexual orientations, and abilities.
3. We reject the Traditional Plan approved at General Conference 2019 as inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ and will resist its implementation.
4. We will work to eliminate discriminatory language and the restriction and penalties in the Book of Discipline regarding LGBTQ+ persons. We affirm the sacred worth of LGBTQ persons, celebrate their gifts, and commit to being in ministry together.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge local United Methodist congregations of the Western North Carolina Conference to ensure that LGBTQIA+ persons are welcomed and included in the membership and leadership of the local churches, to encourage members of the local congregations to be inclusive of all people and to have an open dialogue about the actions of the 2019 General Conference, the Traditional Plan, and these four commitments.

Any Annual Conference petition is different than General Conference legislation. Petitions have no binding power over any local church or pastor. They are expressions of opinion at the time they are past. Since June of 2019 when these resolutions were passed, the Judicial Council ruled that some of the most severe penalties of the Traditional Plan violated the Constitution and could not be enforced. Since then, no petitions on this subject have passed the Annual Conference.