

Title: Agree to Disagree on Issues Pertaining to Gender and Sexual Minorities

Budget Implications: None

Submitted by: Jan Lawrence for the Foundry UMC Management Board.

Mt Vernon Place UMC Congregational Council

The Reconciling Ministries Team at Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church (MMUMC), which includes Wesley United Methodist, Crossroad and Metropolitan UMC

Rationale:

The 2012 General Conference could not agree to disagree on LGBT inclusion in the church, marking 40 years of discussion and discord. The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church has stated that they are not of one mind on the full inclusion of LGBT people in the life of the church. Learned scholars disagree on the scriptural interpretation that is at the heart of the debate. The United Methodist Church continues a struggle that takes time and effort away from “being the church.” In recent actions, Rev. Frank Schaefer was stripped of his ordination by the Eastern Pennsylvania Board of Ordained Ministry. Multiple other ministers have had charges filed and cases may result in trials. The Council of Bishops have recommended that charges be brought against one of their own.

It is time for the United Methodist Church to move beyond the harm done and be in ministry with and to all of our neighbors, even those we don’t understand; as commanded in Mark 12:28-31:

*“... ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ...; ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’
There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

WHEREAS Biblical discernment with the aid of the Holy Spirit and John Wesley’s quadrilateral has created a divergence of thoughtful, theological and reasoned opinions among United Methodists as to whether the “practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching”¹, and this divergence was recognized by the Council of Bishops who stated in their report after the November 2013 Council of Bishops that “neither they nor the other members of the church they lead are of one mind regarding ministering with gays and lesbians,”² and,

WHEREAS, “A significant minority of our church read . . . the scriptures related to same-sex intimacy in the same way that they read the Bible’s passages on polygamy, concubinage, slavery and the role of women in the church.”³ Increasingly, modern Biblical scholarship supports this “minority” interpretation of scripture as legitimate⁴; and

WHEREAS, according to the Constitution of the United Methodist church, “all persons are of sacred worth”⁵ therefore entitled to the sacraments and blessings of the church, including the blessing of marriage, and a significant number of individual members, pastors, congregations,

bishops, committees and conferences view Social Principle ¶161F as contradicting the Constitution⁶; and

WHEREAS, the best scientific and experiential evidence strongly supports the view that homosexuality like heterosexuality is a dimension of “personhood” and not simply a behavioral choice, is not a moral choice, and is not an illness or affliction⁷; and

WHEREAS, this disagreement regarding homosexuality has unfortunately become one of the defining public images of United Methodism in the United States,⁸ has hampered reaching new disciples, particularly young adults and even created an exodus of members,⁹ has discouraged talented candidates from following God’s call to ministry¹⁰, and has drained resources¹¹ away from fulfilling the United Methodist Church’s traditional focus on fighting such evils as poverty, malnutrition, and promoting education while spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ ; and

WHEREAS, it is *crucial* that at least some parts of the United Methodist Church are fully welcoming and affirming of God’s love to all lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgendered (“LGBT”) persons¹² so as to uphold the Constitution of the United Methodist Church and to help forestall the use of Christianity as an excuse for bullying and violence toward gender and sexual minorities;¹³ and

WHEREAS, our United Methodist connection calls us to treat well-intentioned, well-reasoned differences of opinion with mutual respect (as this resolution proposes) rather than insisting upon a verdict or single position that rejects one side or the other¹⁴; and

WHEREAS, the Book of Discipline reflects John Wesley’s understanding that “every one must follow the dictates of his own conscience”,¹⁵ and is evident today in many respects including, for example, the freedom of the Central Conferences to establish their own provisions for a Book of Discipline based on local customs and culture;¹⁶ and

WHEREAS, the civil laws of the District of Columbia and the State of Maryland recognize the legitimacy of same sex marriages, and as of June 2013 at least 71,000 same-sex marriages were recorded in the United States¹⁷; and

WHEREAS, when asked which commandment in the law is the greatest, Jesus said, “ ‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39);

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE, be strongly encouraged to:

1. Support LGBT lay members who marry and to refrain from filing complaints against pastors who perform marriages between gender and sexual minorities, and
2. Refrain from using its resources to investigate or enforce a ban on marriages between gender and sexual minorities,¹⁸ or for church trials, or for otherwise disciplining clergy

that perform same-sex marriages; and

3. Refrain from using its resources to investigate the gender or sexual orientation of a minister or candidate for ministry, and not to use its resources to enforce a ban on the certification of an LGBT candidate for ministry, or the ban on ordination of an LGBT minister¹⁹; and

Be it further resolved that the Baltimore-Washington Conference implores Annual Conference members to work between now and the General Conference in 2016 to:

1. Be in ministry with all people, regardless of their economic status, race, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, or immigration status.
2. Put forth proposed changes to the Book of Discipline and Social Principles that permit matters concerning LGBT persons to be discerned by individual members, congregations, pastors, bishops, committees and conferences through Biblical obedience with the aid of the Holy Spirit and at the discretion of the individual members, pastors, congregations, bishops, conferences and committees; and
3. Put forth proposed changes to the Book of Discipline and Social Principles that permit those that disagree with one another with respect to homosexuality and LGBT persons to remain inside the United Methodist Church connection, which will require, at a minimum, deletion of Social Principle ¶161F, eliminating the ban on same-sex marriages ¶341.6 and eliminating the ban on ordination of homosexuals or LGBT persons ¶304.3.

¹ The United Methodist Church, Book of Discipline [2012 edition] Social Principle ¶161F), (hereafter referred to as “Social Principle ¶161F”). Book of Discipline ¶304.3.[2012 edition]

² Press Release from the Council of Bishops dated November 15, 2013.

³ Proposed Amendment by Substitution for Calendar Item 513 (DCA page number 2367), Petition Number 21032 (ADCA page number 270), General Conference 2012, offered by Adam Hamilton and Mike Slaughter.

⁴ *Ancient Laws & Contemporary Controversies*, C. Anderson, Oxford University Press, New York 2009. “Both Jesus and Paul were aware of the realities of the excluded and the hardships caused by those exclusions, and they expanded the boundaries of their faith communities to include those groups...”(p. 120)

⁵ United Methodist Church, Book of Discipline, Constitution, ¶4, Division One, Article IV. [2012 edition]

⁶ Indeed, “The Social Principles . . . [are] . . . not to be considered church law. . .” United Methodist Church, Book of Discipline, Part IV, Social Principles, Preface (2012 edition).

⁷ “Submission to the Church of England’s Listening Exercise on Human Sexuality”. The Royal College of Psychiatrists. Retrieved 16 December 2013. Found at: <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/workinpsychiatry/specialinterestgroups/gaylesbian/submissiontothecofe.aspx>

⁸ *For Methodists, a split close to home*, front page Washington Post, November 30, 2013.

⁹“ Kinnaman, David, You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . .and Rethinking Faith, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.

¹⁰ Book of Discipline ¶304.3, *supra*, at note 1, above.

¹¹ “Johnson said that the full cost of the [Rev. Schaefer] trial ... somewhere around \$50,000.” *Bishop Johnson Responds to Questions on Schaefer Trial*, United Methodist Reporter, November 20, 2013, found at: <http://unitedmethodistreporter.com/2013/11/20/bishop-johnson-responds-questions-schaefer-trial/>

¹² “Poll links religion to gay enmity, suicide”, Christian Century, October 21, 2010, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-10/americans-say-religious-messages-fuel-negatives-views-gays>

¹³ “After Gay Son’s Suicide, Mother Finds Blame in Herself and in her Church”, *New York Times*, August 24, 2012 by Kate Zernike. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/25/nyregion/after-tyler-clementis-suicide-his-parents-make-painful-changes-in-the-search-for-why.html?_r=0

¹⁴ “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike [?] May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion [?] Without all doubt, we may.” John Wesley Sermon 39 “The Catholic Spirit”. Copyright 1999 by the Wesley Center for Applied Theology

¹⁵ Sermons of John Wesley, Sermon 39 The Catholic Spirit, Copyright 1999 by the Wesley Center for Applied Theology <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-39-catholic-spirit/>
See also, Judicial Council Decision No. 1032, Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church, Decision No. 1032, October 2, 2005.

¹⁶ United Methodist Church, Book of Discipline ¶543 Par. 7 [2012 edition]

¹⁷ *How Many Same-Sex Marriages in the U.S? At least 71,165, probably more.* Pew Research Center, Fact Tank, by Drew DeSilver, June 26, 2013, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/26/how-many-same-sex-marriages-in-the-u-s-at-least-71165-probably-more/?moderated#comment-190458>

¹⁸ United Methodist Church, Book of Discipline, ¶341.6

¹⁹ United Methodist Church, Book of Discipline, ¶304.3, *supra*, at note 1, above.