

Title: Resolution that the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church supports the removal of all provisions in the Book of Discipline and Social Principles that discriminate against or restrict the participation of laity or clergy based on their sexuality identity.

Budget Implications: None

Rationale

All changes in United Methodist Church doctrine or policies occur at the quadrennial General Conference. In 1972, after 170 years of Methodist conferencing, the General Conference voted to approve a policy that is enunciated in several references in both the Book of Discipline and the Social Principles. Although the policy covers many restrictions on both laity and clergy, this self-conflicting policy is best represented by one current section that reads, “Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, we affirm that God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

The 1972 action came at a time of great social upheaval and major changes in sexual attitudes and conduct. It was a period when LGBT individuals were emerging from lives lived in secrecy to confront and overcome centuries of discrimination and even violence. There was a great deal of misinformation and ignorance at the time about human sexuality, and many in the church felt threatened by what they did not understand. At the same time, many Methodists were in strong and vocal opposition to the actions of the 1972 conference.

The decisions of 1972 and subsequent General Conferences have unleashed four decades of debate and dissent within the Methodist Church. The overt discrimination against a minority is exceptionally unique in Methodist history, with the primary parallel being the rancorous and divisive debates on slavery held in the first 50 years of conferencing. Not surprisingly, the singling out of a minority as being “incompatible” created major conflicts with other more established and longstanding Methodist principles such as the primacy of equality and inclusion. In recent years, the church has created a convoluted narrative and rationale to try, with only limited success, to reconcile these opposing directives.

Today, U.S. society has moved very rapidly in its understanding of human sexuality and its shedding of old prejudices. Although the bigotry of old has not fully disappeared, it has greatly diminished, and LGBT persons can expect full inclusion in all aspects of U.S. social and political life.

What has changed since 1972? On one level, nothing has changed. LGBT persons have become ordinary members of society, and the fears of those in our church who felt threatened in 1972 have proven to be groundless. On another level, we have all changed because we have learned to love our neighbors as ourselves. Each of us now knows an LGBT person as a beloved sibling or cousin or co-worker or church member, and we are aghast and humiliated to learn that our church denigrates our family and friends because of their sexuality.

Today's young people see less color and harbor less prejudices than any generation of youth in history. Despite our award-winning Methodist tagline proclaiming "Open hearts. Open minds. Open Doors," we will see today's youth walk past our churches when they find inside an institutionalized form of discrimination.

It is much easier to enact a bad policy than to repeal it. Yet, The United Methodist Church, with its anachronistic social policy on homosexuality, has much to lose by remaining silent and inactive. We not only put the Church's future at risk, we miss the opportunity to right a wrong that has for far too long caused pain and anguish to our own.

Submitted By: Douglas M. Schmidt, lay member, Grace United Methodist Church, Baltimore, Maryland, supported by the Reconciling Committee of Grace United Methodist Church.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church stands firm in a belief in the equality and dignity of all children of God.

Be it further resolved that the Baltimore-Washington Conference declares its opposition to all provisions in the Book of Discipline and Social Principles that discriminate against or restrict the participation of laity or clergy based on their sexuality identity.

Be it further resolved that we empower our bishop and conference representatives, current and future, to work on behalf of the Baltimore-Washington Conference toward the eventual removal of all discriminatory references and policies in the Book of Discipline and Social Principles that are based on sexual identity.