

A Statement of Counsel to the Church - 2011

Out of concern for the welfare of all God's people, and, out of special concern for the people of The United Methodist Church, we, United Methodist Bishops – retired, believe The United Methodist Church should remove the following statement from The Book of Discipline (2008):

“...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.” ¶304.3

Our lives and ministries over the years have included prayerful, thoughtful consideration of our Holy Bible, our Wesleyan heritage, reflection on our experience of the church and world, and our conviction of God's intention for a world transformed.

With this statement of conviction and counsel we seek:

- To affirm that the historic tests of “gifts and evidence of God's grace” for ordained ministry override any past or present temporal restrictions such as race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.
- To urge the Church, ecumenical and denominational, to change the manner in which it relates to gay, lesbian and transgendered persons in official statements, judicial proceedings, and in congregational life.
- To declare our conviction that the current disciplinary position of The United Methodist Church, a part of our historical development, need not, and should not, be embraced as the faithful position for the future.
- To make known our names and shared personal conviction on this matter and to encourage other church and Episcopal leaders to do the same.

With increasing frequency we observe and experience the following disturbing realities and know them to be detrimental to the mission of a Church of Jesus Christ:

- Laity and clergy, gay and straight, withdrawing membership or absenting themselves from the support of congregational and denominational Church life in order to maintain personal integrity.
- Young adults, especially, embarrassed to invite friends and expressing dismay at the unwillingness of our United Methodist Church to alter its 39-year exclusionary stance.
- Closeted pastors, currently called and ordained in our church, living divided lives while offering effective appreciated ministry.
- Bishops being drained of energy by upholding Church Discipline while regarding it as contrary to their convictions.
- Bishops caught between care for the Church by reappointing an effective gay or lesbian pastor and care for the Discipline by charging them under current legislation.

- Seminary leaders desiring greater flexibility and openness from the church in order to advance their mission of identifying, recruiting, enrolling, educating and spiritually forming Christian leaders.
- Christian gay men and women understanding themselves called of God to seek ministry opportunities within their United Methodist family Church home, but having to decide between:
 - leaving to go to accepting denominations, or
 - staying and praying for change, or
 - challenging Church law and accepting punitive actions.

Our United Methodist Church, ashamed and repentant in the past, ended official and unofficial restrictions on candidacy, ordination and appointment for reason of race, gender and ethnicity. We believe the God we know in Jesus is leading us to issue this counsel and call – a call to transform our church life and our world.

United Methodist Episcopal Leaders-Retired

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