

The Movement of General Conferences on the Issue of Homosexuality

1972 A four-year denominational study on United Methodist Social Principles offered this proposal:
“Homosexuals no less than heterosexuals are persons of sacred worth, who need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. Further we insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured.”

In the floor debate, the following phrase was added to the above statement following the word ensured: *“although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider the practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”*

Note: In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the official manual that lists mental and emotional disorders. Two years later the American Psychological Association passed a resolution supporting the removal.

1976 Motions to rescind the official condemnation of homosexual practice were made; they failed and the denomination maintained its 1972 position.

In addition, three other reports were adopted, focusing on church funding:

The first ordered *“that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodists funds to any ‘gay’ caucus or group or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.”*

The second mandated the use of resources and funds by boards and agencies *“only in support of those programs consistent with the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church.”*

The third prohibited *“funds for projects favoring homosexual practice.”*

1980 This General Conference focused much of its debate on questions of ordination. Proposals denying the ordination of homosexuals were defeated. The 1972 and 1976 positions were left intact.

1984 This Conference adopted, as a standard for ordained clergy, commitment to *“fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness.”*

It also added the following language on homosexuality: *“Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”*

1988 This General Conference ordered an official study by the General Council on Ministries to be reported to the 1992 General Conference.

One change was made in the Social Principle’s statement. *“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.”*

1992 Delegates voted to retain the church’s stand that homosexual practice is “incompatible with Christian teaching” and left in place the ban on ordination, the prohibition of church funding to ‘promote the acceptance of homosexuality’, and the statement of the social principles.

1996 This General Conference added three significant points to the church’s position on homosexuality.

- A footnote defining self-avowed practicing homosexuality. *“Self-avowed practicing homosexual”* is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, a district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual.
- The following language was added: *“Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”*
- A call for the United States military not to exclude persons from service *“solely on the basis of sexual orientation.”*

An attempt to replace the “incompatibility” clause with one acknowledging that United Methodists are “unable to arrive at a common mind” failed to pass 577 to 378.

Fifteen United Methodist Bishops, now called the *Denver 15*, wrote a letter stating their opposition to the exclusive position of the UMC.

THE LETTER OF THE DENVER 15

We the undersigned bishops wish to affirm the commitment made at our consecration to the vows to uphold the *Discipline* of the church. However, we must confess the pain we feel over our personal convictions that are contradicted by the proscriptions in the *Discipline* against gay and lesbian persons within our church and from our ordained and diaconal ministers. Those sections are paragraphs 71F (last paragraph); 402.2; 906.12; and footnote, p205. We believe it is time to break the silence and state where we are on this issue that is hurting and silencing countless faithful Christians. We will continue our responsibility to the order and discipline of the church but urge United Methodist churches to open the doors in gracious hospitality to all brothers and sisters in the faith.

2000 This General Conference added a new statement to the Social Principles: “*We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends.*”

By a vote of 705 - 210, delegates declined to add to the church’s law book a stipulation that before pastors could be assigned to any church they had to sign a statement, “I do not believe that homosexuality is God’s perfect will for any person. I will not practice it. I will not promote it. I will not allow its promotion to be encouraged under my authority.”

The delegates also passed a resolution directing the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns to engage the church in a continued dialogue about homosexuality.

A protest was held on the conference floor following the vote to retain the church’s stances on homosexuality. This witness led to the arrest of 29 individuals, including two United Methodist bishops.

2004 This General Conference added a new statement to the Social Principles: “*We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union between one man and one woman.*”

This General Conference also added this to the list of Chargeable Offenses:

a) immorality, “*including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage;*”

(b) practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teaching, “*including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies...*”

2008 This General Conference made the following changes to the Book of Discipline:

¶161.a (The Family) is changed to read, “We affirm the importance of *loving parents* for all children.... We affirm shared responsibility for parenting where there are *two parents...*” (Replacing “mother and father”)

Adds to ¶ 161.g (Human Sexuality) “*We will live together in Christian community; welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.*”

Adds to ¶ 612.19 (Funding Ban) “...or otherwise use funds to promote the acceptance of *homosexuality* or violate the express commitment of the *UMCD* ‘not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends....’”

A peaceful demonstration by GLBT people and their allies takes place on the floor of General Conference after inclusive legislation is defeated.