

THE UNITED METHODIST BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

The Vision

***Inclusiveness of the Church* (¶ 4, Article IV)**

“In The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.”

***Inclusiveness* (¶139)**

“We recognize that God made all creation and saw that it was good. As a diverse people of God who bring special gifts and evidences of God's grace to the unity of the church and to society, we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to all persons. Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world; therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination.”

***Human Sexuality* (¶161F)**

“We affirm that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We believe persons may be fully human only when that gift is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church, and society.

All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence.

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self.

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.”

***Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation* (¶162J)**

“Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting the rightful claims where they have shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection before the law. Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against all persons, regardless of sexual orientation.”

The Reality

***Chargeable Offenses* (¶2702.1)**

“A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference, local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged ... with one or more of the following 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;...”

***Ordination* (¶304.2 and (¶304.3)**

“[Ordained ministers] ... agree to ... fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness¹ ...

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 the United Methodist Church.”

***Human Sexuality* (¶161F)**

“The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching”

***General Council on Finance and Administration* (¶806.9)**

“It shall be responsible for ensuring that no 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 United Methodist Church ‘not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends’. The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. It shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic.”

***Marriage* (¶161.B)**

“We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.”

***Holy Unions* (¶341.6)**

“Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”

¹ In 2003, Bishop Jack Tuell preached a sermon entitled, “How I Changed My Mind,” in which he recalled the story about how “Fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness” became part of the *Book of Discipline*. Bishop Tuell said, “It is February 1983, a little over 20 years ago. I am meeting in an airport in Albuquerque with two other United Methodist bishops and an executive of the Division of Ordained Ministry out of Nashville. We are doing preliminary work on legislation for the 1984 General Conference, our subject matter was ordained ministry. We worked on many aspects of the subject. But a particular concern being raised was: ‘How do we screen out homosexual persons from becoming ordained ministers?’ I proposed a seven-word addition to the list of things to which candidates for ministry must commit: ‘Fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness.’ ... You would think that on as important a matter as that we might look to Wesley's guidelines of discernment: that is scripture, tradition, experience and reason. But I'm here to tell you that we did not look at the scriptures; we never mentioned tradition; we did not refer to experience, and reason. Instead of those four classic words guiding our conversation, we were unconsciously guided by two other words: institutional protection.