

General Conference Petition:
To Prohibit Discrimination in Receiving Members
into United Methodist Congregations

WHEREAS, the United Methodist Church (UMC) has historically welcomed into membership “all persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition” per Article IV of the Constitution; and

WHEREAS, in its Decision 1032 the United Methodist Judicial Council supported one UMC pastor’s refusal of membership to a person seeking membership because of the “aspiring member’s sexual orientation and practice”, and overruled decisions by the district superintendent, bishop, and the Annual Conference clergy session requiring that the pastor welcome this individual into membership; and

WHEREAS, the UMC Bishops unanimously stated in a November 2, 2005 Council of Bishops Pastoral Letter that “homosexuality is not a barrier [for membership] ...and ... the General Conference has clearly spoken through the denomination’s Constitution on inclusiveness and justice for all as it relates to church membership”;¹ and quoted from paragraph 161g of the Book of Discipline: “... God’s grace is available to all, and we will seek to live together in Christian community. 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”; and

WHEREAS, the Council of Bishops Pastoral Letter (Nov. 2, 2005) further affirmed “our Wesleyan practice that pastors are accountable to the bishop, superintendent, and the clergy on matters of ministry and membership”²; and

WHEREAS, the United Methodist Church has implemented the advertising strategy “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors” which includes a “Diversity Expression” that “by communicating the myriad beliefs and cultural diversity of the church, this expression invites anyone to attend, wherever they are on the journey toward finding a spiritual home” (United Methodist Communication’s Website: <http://www.ignitingministry.org/advertising/diversity.aspx>); and

WHEREAS, John Wesley preached that the church is the means of dispensing the grace of God to all who seek it; Romans 15:7 says “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you”; Mark 10:14 says “But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God”; 1 Corinthians 12:13a says “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”; Galatians 3:28 says “There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”; and John 13:35 says “everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another;” and

Now, THEREFORE, be it resolved that the _____ Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church declares that it believes Judicial Council Decision to be in error.

FURTHER be it resolved that paragraph 214 be amended to insert the following sentence after the words “in any local church in the connection” (Par. 4): **No person shall be excluded from the United Methodist Church for reasons related to his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.**

¹ Article IV of the United Methodist Constitution: “**Inclusiveness of the Church** - The United Methodist Church ... acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking the vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.”

² The rules on accountability are in The Book of Discipline at ¶¶ 304.1i, 306, 307, 325, 326.3, 332, 343.1, et cetera.

**General Conference Petitions Resolving Certain Issues of Discrimination
in the United Methodist Church**

WHEREAS, Christians of good faith (including theologians) are not of one mind regarding scripture and the practice of homosexuality; and

WHEREAS, John Wesley in his sermon #39 on 2 Kings 10:15 said: "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. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences"; and

WHEREAS, the United Methodist Discipline ¶102 of our Doctrinal History states the following: "Beyond the essentials of vital religion, United Methodists respect the diversity of opinions held by conscientious persons of faith. Wesley followed the time-tested approach: 'In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.' ... The crucial matter in religion is steadfast love for God and neighbor, empowered by the redeeming and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit"; and

WHEREAS, Romans 14:13-14 says "Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean"; Acts 10:15b says: "What God has made clean, you must not call unclean"; Romans 15:7 says "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you"; 1 Corinthians 12:13a says "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"; Galatians 3:28 says "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"; and John 13:35 says "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"; and

WHEREAS, "the annual conference is the basic body in the Church and as such shall have reserved to it the right to vote... on all matters relating to the character and conference relations of its clergy members, and on the ordination of clergy and such other rights as have not been delegated to the General Conference under the Constitution..." (¶ 33. Article II)

Now, THEREFORE, be it resolved that the _____ Annual Conference petition the 2008 General Conference to adopt the following seven petitions:

PETITION 1 – CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE TO ARTICLE IV

¶ 4. Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church

Financial Implications: None

Amend Article IV, as follows: The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, economic condition, **gender, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, and ability** shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking the vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. 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, economic condition, **gender, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, or ability.**

PETITION 2 – MARRIAGE

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES ¶161C "Marriage"

Financial Implications: None

Amend ¶161C, as follows:

We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between **a man and a woman two persons**. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject

social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. ~~We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.~~

PETITION 3 – HUMAN SEXUALITY

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES ¶161G “The Nurturing Community: Human Sexuality”

Financial Implications: None

Amend ¶161G, as follows:

We recognize 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. We call all persons to the disciplined, responsible fulfillment of themselves, others, and society in the stewardship of this gift. We also recognize our limited understanding of this complex gift and encourage the medical, theological, and social science disciplines to combine in a determined effort to understand human sexuality more completely. We call the Church to take the leadership role in bringing together these disciplines to address this most complex issue. Further, within the context of our understanding of this gift of God, we recognize that God challenges us to find responsible, committed, and loving forms of expression.

Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, **we believe** sexual relations are only clearly affirmed in the marriage bond. We reject all sexual expressions that damage or destroy the humanity God has given us as birthright, and we affirm only that sexual expression that enhances that same humanity. We believe that sexual relations where one or both partners are exploitative, abusive, or promiscuous are beyond the parameters of acceptable Christian behavior and are ultimately destructive to individuals, families, and the social order.

We deplore all forms of the commercialization and exploitation of sex, with their consequent cheapening and degradation of human personality. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation or use of children by adults and encourage efforts to hold perpetrators legally and financially responsible. We call for the establishment of adequate protective services, guidance, and counseling opportunities for children thus abused. We insist that all persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured. **We encourage civil authorities to enact laws that will ensure full civil and economic rights for persons in civil unions and marriages without regard to the gender of the partners.**

We recognize the continuing need for full, positive, age-appropriate and factual sex education opportunities for children, young people, and adults. The Church offers a unique opportunity to give quality guidance and education in this area. Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons 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 that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. ~~**The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We While Christians of good faith are not of one mind regarding whether the practice of homosexuality is compatible with Christian teaching, we**~~ affirm that God's grace is available to all, and we will seek to live together in Christian community. 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.¹

PETITION 4 - BROADER STATEMENT OF EQUAL RIGHTS

Social Principles ¶162H “The Social Community: Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation”

Financial Implications: None

Amend ¶162H, as follows:

Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for ~~homosexual~~ all persons, **regardless of sexual orientation**. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting ~~their~~ rightful claims where **they two people** 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 ~~gays and lesbians~~ **all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation. We also commit ourselves to social witness against the coercion and marginalization of former homosexuals.**

PETITION 5 - QUALIFICATIONS FOR ORDINATION

~~- Delete "self-avowed practicing homosexual" Exclusion~~

~~Discipline ¶304 "Qualifications for Ordination"~~

~~Financial Implications: None~~

Amend ¶304, item 3, as follows:

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. ~~The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals¹ are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.²~~

PETITION 6 – UNAUTHORIZED CONDUCT FOR CLERGY

~~Discipline ¶332 "Unauthorized Conduct"~~

~~Financial Implications: None~~

Amend ¶341, item 6, as follows:

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

PETITION 7 - REMOVE FINANCIAL RESTRICTION CLAUSE

~~Discipline ¶806 "General Council on Finance and Administration, Fiscal Responsibilities"~~

~~Financial Implications: None~~

Delete ¶806, item 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. The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. This restriction shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic.~~

Note: Conferences not ready to endorse any of the foregoing might be willing to pass resolutions endorsing the pastoral letter of the Council of Bishops and commending their own bishop of signing it.

A second tier of conferences might want to add one or more of the foregoing proposals to such a resolution of commendation.