



## THE RESOLUTION FOR FULL INCLUSIVITY AS A PATH TO THE GROWTH AND VITALITY OF THE CHURCH

### Q&A

#### 1. How will this resolution impact our local church?

For many years now, United Methodist churches have understood their mission to be “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” This was to be accomplished through ministry in local churches which would be places of “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.” Yet in reality, some of our churches have not been as open as that slogan proclaims. The resolution addresses the need for our churches to continue to be intentional about embracing the diversity in humanity so that churches are clear about affirming diversity and will hopefully experience greater growth and greater vitality.

#### 2. How does this resolution relate to the mandate given to the Council of Bishops at General Conference?

At the General Conference, in the midst of an effort to solve our differences through legislative processes, a decision was made to ask the bishops to lead the denomination. The Council of Bishops responded with a request to defer all votes on human sexuality and refer this subject to a special Commission. This Commission will hopefully find a way to address the differences in theological understanding of matters of human sexuality. The Council also encouraged a moratorium on church trials as a means of resolving complaints in this regard. Our Desert Southwest resolution calls for such a moratorium in urging non-discrimination toward LGBTQ persons and is in concert with the work that the Council of Bishops is doing.

#### 3. Does this mean we do not have to follow the Book of Discipline in General? Isn't this an invitation for anarchy? Does this resolution suggest that anything goes if we do not agree with the Book of Discipline?

The Book of Discipline is the book of rules by which we order our lives in The United Methodist Church. As such, it contains historic documents such as our Constitution and our Social Principles. Much of the rest of the Book of Discipline is devoted to very specific instruction and requirements for process in our Church. The resolution challenges us to look at the world with different eyes, not always depending on the book of rules to determine what is just in God's eyes. Regarding the question of whether the resolution moves us to anarchy, it is not anarchy when we question and move counter to the prevailing authority. If there is harm being done or if the rules are unjust, to advocate for change is justice and compassion in action. Wesley encouraged us to depend on the leading of the Holy Spirit as we strive to go on to perfection in this life. This resolution invites us to learn and grow so that we can more completely mirror the image of what God wants of us.

4. How does the resolution apply to the disciplinary prohibition on same-sex marriage? Would this mean a pastor must perform a same-sex wedding if asked to do so? What will happen if a charge is brought against a pastor or a church for celebrating a same-sex marriage?

Now that same-sex marriage is legal in the United States, these are interesting and important questions. First and foremost, a pastor maintains the freedom and responsibility to discern which marriages to perform. In all cases, pastors are to spend time with couples in counseling session to assist them in determining whether the couple is fit and ready to enter into the covenant of marriage. It is always the pastor's discretion whether or not to perform a wedding ceremony for a couple.

In regard to same-sex marriage, although the Book of Discipline prohibits a United Methodist pastor from officiating at a same-sex marriage, the Book of Discipline also is in conflict with itself when it commits us to be in ministry for and with all persons. Pastors who choose to officiate at a same-sex wedding are making a personal and professional decision and should do so because they are being called to serve as the pastor for all persons regardless of sexual orientation. Charges against a pastor may still be filed; however, the resolution encourages us not to rush to a judicial process if someone does not agree with the other pastor's decision. Bishop Hoshibata has been clear that he does not believe a judicial process is a healthy means of settling disputes in the church. Conversation builds up relationships while the judicial process tears down relationship. Rather, the Biblical mandate to engage in prayerful conversation with a person you disagree with is a Christ-like preferred option.

5. What does the resolution do about complaints against pastors?

In every situation when there is an issue regarding a pastor's ministry, we are to first work toward resolution through a supervisory, relational process, not a legalistic and adversarial process. The first response to disagreement has always been to engage in one-with-one conversation and prayer and not to depend on a more adversarial judicial process. Through scripture, we know this is how Jesus taught us to work through our differences (for example in Matthew 18:15-16). However, if the supervisory process does not result in resolution of the complaint, this resolution does not eliminate the possibility of written complaints against pastors. Complaints can still be written against pastors who are accused of commission of a chargeable offense as listed in paragraph 2702.1 of the 2012 Book of Discipline. However, regarding complaints against our clergy for performing same gender weddings or being in same gender unions/marriages themselves, the resolution asks that we not put our energy, time, or focus on bringing disciplinary charges against them. If our passion is to reach persons for Christ these disciplinary processes divert us from fulfilling our calling.

6. Regarding the question of whether members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender communities may be ordained or appointed, does the resolution take away any of the power or authority of the district or the conference Board of Ordained Ministry, which are the bodies responsible for the approval of candidates for ministry and ordination?

The Board of Ordained Ministry is given the authority to approve candidates for ministry. No body of the Annual Conference may make any resolution that dictates or prescribes the actions of the District Committee on Ordained Ministry, the Board of Ordained Ministry or the Clergy Session of the Annual Conference. In matters of candidacy, the clergy session has the power and the final authority to make decisions about whether a person is ordained. The Book of Discipline mandates that persons determined to be fit and ready for ministry by vote of the clergy session are to be appointed by the Bishop. The Resolution does not in any way change that authority but it does make a strong statement of the desire of the Annual Conference that no discrimination be directed toward LGBTQ persons, including employees and clergy. We anticipate that prayerful conversations among our clergy about the process of the Board of Ordained Ministry and the clergy session in dealing with these matters related to candidacy and ordination will take place as had been planned.

7. Does this resolution encourage schism?

The resolution does not create nor does it advocate for schism in The United Methodist Church. Rather, it affirms that we are a diverse people. Faithful United Methodists differ widely on matters of human sexuality. Yet the resolution calls us to work toward full inclusivity to endeavor to tear down the walls that divide the human family. Matters such as racism, oppression, and ageism are just some of the concerns that divide us. Highlighted is the increasingly unsustainable nature of the current prohibitions in the Book of Discipline against the LGBTQ community. We are urged to continue our efforts to be a church open to all people. Although much is being done in this regard, we are being encouraged to be a church that is not composed of people who all think exactly alike, but rather are unified in their desire to be engaged in life-changing mission and ministry.

8. Do the provisions of the resolution contradict Biblical teaching?

This is a very complex subject, and it is difficult to try to address it briefly. Much of what we know now and understand about what the Bible says about homosexuality has been amplified by more recent research and theological inquiry. But what we know and understand about what Jesus taught and practiced is clear. Jesus did not speak about homosexuality. But he did address other justice issues of his day in his preaching and teaching and in the conduct of his life and ministry. Without question, Jesus taught that a humble and caring heart were precious to God. The resolution speaks to this kind of spirit, calling the Desert Southwest Conference to develop programs that will help us to become more understanding of others by encouraging cultural competency, and by working to eliminate racism, ageism, sexism, oppression in whatever form they present themselves, including bringing about fear of the members of the LGBTQ community.