



## **“A Third Way” Values and Context**

In developing this legislation, the Connectional Table Legislative Writing Team sought to hold together three key values:

- The centrality of mission
- Unity for the sake of mission
- Our identity as a people of grace

### **Context Is Important**

We also recognized that we are a worldwide denomination of more than 12.8 million people carrying out the ministry of the Gospel in very different contexts. We have tried to provide a way to respect the differing contexts within which we all do ministry.

#### **A Third Way:**

- Seeks to maintain the unity of The United Methodist Church for the sake of the mission of our church. We are stronger in mission together.
- Provides a way to take context into account. For instance, depending on the context of ministry, it may or may not be appropriate or advantageous to do same-gender ceremonies. The Third Way allows the freedom to consider the cultural, political and social context of ministry.
- Seeks to create spaces for grace and allow for diversity. We can live with our differences while staying in relationship with one another.
- Seeks to allow the practice of ministry with integrity. The Third Way allows the exercise of conscience among United Methodist clergy and allows GLBTQ persons to practice ministry while being open about who they are.
- Creates a way to invite all people fully into the ministry of The United Methodist Church without regard to gender identity or sexual orientation.
- Ends the financial, relational, missional and spiritual harm caused by trials. Witnesses to the biblical mandate of “...unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” (Ephesians 4:3).

## “A Third Way” & Pastoral Ministry

**“A Third Way” allows for the exercise of conscience and the consideration of ministry context by United Methodist clergy by restoring the authority of the clergy.**

- Clergy who, as a matter of conscience or because of their ministry context, wish to extend the ministry of marriage or holy union to same-gender couples would have the authority to do so.

*Clergy will be permitted to perform same-sex ceremonies.*

- Clergy who feel, as a matter of conscience or because of their ministry context, that they cannot extend such ministry to same-gender couples would have the authority to make that decision.

*Clergy will not be required to perform same-sex ceremonies.*

### **Authority of United Methodist Clergy**

- Clergy in The United Methodist Church are afforded the following authority given in ordination: “To perform the marriage ceremony after due counsel with the parties involved and in accordance with the laws of the state and the rules of The United Methodist Church. *The decision to perform the ceremony shall be the right and responsibility of the pastor*” (§340.2.a.(3).(a)).
- The only restriction placed upon the authority of the Ordained Clergy to determine suitability for marriage is as follows: “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches” (§341.6).
- This restriction is provided legal backing in the Chargeable Offenses, which names the following offense: “performing same sex wedding ceremonies” (§2702.1.b)

### **Recommended Changes**

- Therefore, to preserve unity for the sake of the mission, to allow for the exercise of conscience, and to allow clergy to practice ministry appropriate to their context, the Connectional Table of the United Methodist Church recommends the following changes to the Book of Discipline:
  - Removing the restrictions placed upon the **authority of the clergy** to determine suitability for marriage.
    - This would include deleting restrictive language in §304.3 and §341.6.
  - Removing the Chargeable Offenses which accompany such restrictions of authority of the clergy.
    - This would include deleting the second half of §2702.1.b.
  - Editing language concerning sexual orientation in the Social Principles to allow for the restoration of such authority and the removal of accompanying restrictions.
    - This would include minimal changes in §161.B and §161.F to affirm the “historic” or “traditional” position of The United Methodist Church

concerning Marriage and Human Sexuality without using language which restricts the authority granted to clergy by the Book of Discipline.

**What Would Be Possible:** It would be possible for United Methodist clergy to perform same-sex ceremonies in United Methodist churches where civil laws allow. It also would be possible for clergy, who feel that they cannot perform such ceremonies, to still offer pastoral ministry and support to a same-sex couple by referring the couple to a clergy colleague who would perform a same-sex ceremony.

**What Would Not be Possible:** In some of our central conferences and in some U.S. states, same-sex weddings are not legal. These changes do not require the breaking of civil laws.

### **What About the Local Church**

If the lay leadership of the local church and the pastor disagree about hosting a same-sex ceremony in the church, this would be worked out between the pastor and lay leadership. The pastor is ultimately in charge of worship. However, whatever conflict may arise is best dealt with in the realm of relationship rather than the realm of law.

## **“A Third Way” Ordination and Licensing**

**“A Third Way” allows for the context of ministry to be taken into account by restoring the authority of the annual conference.**

- Annual Conferences may ordain, license and invite into ministry all persons without regard to gender identity or sexual orientation.

*Annual Conferences could ordain or license openly GLBTQ persons but would not be required to do so. Bishops could appoint openly GLBTQ persons after the normal consultative process that matches the gifts and graces of a clergy person with the needs of the church and the context of ministry.*

### **Authority of the Annual Conference**

- As the “fundamental” and “basic body in the Church,” the Annual Conference is given by the Book of Discipline “the right to vote...on all matters relating to the character and conference relations of its clergy members and on the ordination of clergy” (§11; §33)
- The only restriction placed upon the authority of the Annual Conference to determine suitability for ordination is as follows: “...self avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church” (§304.2).
- This restriction is provided legal backing in the Chargeable Offenses, which names the following offense: “practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teaching, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual...” (§2702.1.b).

## Recommended Changes

- To preserve unity for the sake of the mission and to allow for the practice of ministry appropriate to a given context, the Connectional Table of the United Methodist Church recommends the following changes to the Book of Discipline:
  - Removing the restrictions placed upon the **authority of the Annual Conference** to determine suitability for ordination.
    - This would include deleting restrictive language in ¶304.3 and ¶341.6.
  - Removing the Chargeable Offenses which accompany such restrictions of authority of the Annual Conference.
    - This would include deleting the second half of ¶2702.1.b.
  - Editing language concerning sexual orientation in the Social Principles to allow for the restoration of such authority and the removal of accompanying restrictions.
    - This would include minimal changes in ¶161.B and ¶161.F to affirm the “historic” or “traditional” position of The United Methodist Church concerning Marriage and Human Sexuality without using language which restricts the constitutional authority granted to Annual Conferences by the Book of Discipline.