

THE FORT DODGE DISTRICT
SUPERINTENDENT HAS APPROVED

AN OFFICIAL CHURCH CONFERENCE

**WHY: For the consideration
of the Statement of
Reconciliation**

**WHEN: October 8, 2000
2:30 - 5:00 p.m.**

WHERE: Wesley Hall

All members of Collegiate/Wesley are official members of a called Church Conference. You are urged to attend and engage in a process of discernment and discussion leading to a written ballot. "Talking sticks," used successfully at the sessions of the Iowa Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church this year, will be used during small group discussions. A panel of resource persons will facilitate participants' questions, comments, and suggestions.

Parents, please note: Youth between 7th and 12th grade will meet in their own discussion group. Children in 5th or 6th grade may attend, if their parents so desire. Child care will be provided for children through 6th grade.

The proposed Statement of Reconciliation follows. It is also on the bulletin board outside the main office. This statement is the result of more than four years' work by the Reconciling Congregation Ministry Team. On June 26, 2000, the Administrative Council adopted a plan for coming to a decision on the adoption of this statement. If the statement is approved, the Administrative Council will develop plans for its implementation.

Prayer: "We Tremble on the Edge of a Maybe"

O God of beginnings,
As your Spirit moved
Over the face of the deep
On the first day of creation,

Move with us now
In the time of beginnings,
When the air is rain-washed,
The bloom is on the bush,
And the world seems fresh
And full of possibilities
And we feel ready and full.

We tremble on the edge of a maybe,
A first time,
A new thing,
A tentative start,
And the wonder of it lays its finger on our lips.

In silence, Lord, we share now our eagerness
And our uneasiness about this something different
We would be or do;
And we listen for your leading to help us separate
The light from the darkness
In the change we seek to shape
And which is shaping us.

Amen.

Have You Wondered?

The proposed statement still has the word “reconciling” in it. Wasn’t that ruled against by the UM Judicial Council?

The Reconciling Congregation Program (note: capital “R”) is an unofficial grouping of UMs and congregations whose primary purpose is to welcome the full participation of all people in the life of the church, regardless of sexual orientation. The Judicial Council ruled against linking with an unofficial group, such as the RC program, so the revised statement does not ask for this alignment.

Instead, it declares that we are “welcoming and affirming” of all persons, committed to “loving acts of invitation, hospitality, and reconciliation.” (note: lower-case “R.”)

Why was this particular statement written?

The task team that wrote the statement believes that it names the common ground we already share as a congregation. It defines who we already are. The proposed statement does not try to resolve all issues relating to inclusiveness. It is not expected that everyone will come to a common understanding. The statement simply states what has been heard from CUMC members: “We welcome all persons into the family of God, without exception.” Period.

Can we do this? Does this statement break church law?

No. Local churches are not prohibited from issuing statements of taking stands.

Our statement of reconciliation is in keeping with church law because it upholds the *Book of Discipline* and the *Social Principles*.

What do the United Methodist Social Principles say about homosexuality?

The *Social Principles* overwhelmingly focus on ministry to all persons; when the topic is homosexuality, this focus on inclusion continues. In total, this is what the *Social Principles* say:

Paragraph 65G: Human Sexuality:

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. 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.

Paragraph 66H: Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation:

Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting their 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 gays and lesbians. We also commit ourselves to social witness against the coercion and marginalization of former homosexuals.

(These quotes are from the 1992 *Social Principles* in the *Book of Discipline*. The 2000 *Discipline* has not yet been released.)

Was anything changed by the General Conference this year related to homosexuality?

After many petitions and much debate, there was very little change. The one change to the language of the *United Methodist Discipline* was a statement added to Paragraph 65G of our UM Social Principles calling on churches and families “*not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends.*”

I don’t have any problem with or questions about the statement. Why should I come to the October 8 meeting?

or

I do have questions and concerns about the statement. Why should I come to the October 8 meeting?

As in any decision-making situation, some people think they know how they will vote, but some are still uncertain. Each person can contribute to the discussion to help others sort out their ideas. It is very important that all members of the church attend this meeting.

What about the other issues of controversy within the United Methodist Church, regarding holy union services and ordination of homosexuals.

Obviously, the proposed statement of reconciliation does not address those issues. The United Methodist Church does not currently allow ordination of “professing and practicing” gays and lesbians, nor does it allow its pastors or churches to perform services of holy union.

There are, of course, persons within the membership of Collegiate/Wesley who fully support the current UM stance. And there are many – including your current pastors – who believe that the denomination’s position should change; but that is not at issue in the statement. The statement should be read at face value.

Proposed Statement of Reconciliation

We believe that, in God's view, all human beings are persons of sacred worth. All are recipients of God's love and grace and deserve our love.

We believe that God is constantly being revealed to us through the ancient scriptures, the traditions of the church, and in very personal ways – both our individual experiences of God and our God-given reason.

We believe that God intends the church to be an inclusive community which embodies love, grace, and justice for all people.

We believe that the church is a covenant of people of diversity: many backgrounds, expectations, and styles, yet called by one Spirit revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, who encourages, challenges, and reforms the church and all persons.

We believe that Christ's message of love is central to our faith, and therefore, we feel strongly that no interpretation of scripture is correct that encourages judgment of or contempt for any individual. Above all, we must honor the command to love.

We believe that the Spirit calls us to recognize the gifts and graces of each person, to welcome all persons as our brothers and sisters into full participation in the life of the church, and to reject discrimination and exclusion however expressed.

We believe that, to truly be people of faith, actions must be consistent with words. If what we say we believe is not borne out by faithful and intentional action, then our words are empty.

And so:

Collegiate United Methodist Church welcomes and affirms all persons without regard to gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation, national origin, age, physical or mental ability, marital status, economic condition, or anything else which threatens to divide God's family. In our quest to follow the example of Christ, we will employ no circles of exclusion and we commit ourselves to loving acts of invitation, hospitality, and reconciliation, providing ministry to, for, and with all persons without exception.

Is it really necessary to make such a statement? Don't we already welcome everyone?

Many churches are very public about their exclusion and judgment of homosexuals. Gays and lesbians may feel welcome when they attend Collegiate/Wesley, but wonder if that attitude will change if they disclose their sexual orientation. Many wonder if they are absolutely alone in this world, and have not found a way to see themselves as God's included ones. They have not been fortunate enough to encounter others who see the face of Christ in their face, even though they are gay.

Doesn't it seem that there is too much focus on the issue of homosexuality? What about the others mentioned in the draft?

In today's church, as in society, homosexuality is a visible and controversial topic; that's why so much attention is focused there. We recognize that there is discrimination expressed also on the basis of gender, race, handicaps, age, socioeconomic status, etc. The statement itself does not overemphasize one group over another. We need to find ways to invite and receive all marginalized people to CUMC/WF.

The Statement of Reconciliation: A Timeline

May, 1992	The General (national) Conference of the United Methodist Church receives the Report of the Committee to Study Homosexuality, and encourages Annual Conferences and local congregations to use the official study of their report, <i>The Church Studies Homosexuality</i> .
June, 1995	Iowa Annual Conference passes its own resolutions encouraging every Iowa UM congregation to study <i>The Church Studies Homosexuality</i> , and to "consider what it would mean to become a Reconciling Congregation or a Transforming Congregation."
July, 1995	Revs. Scott Grotewold & Cindy McCalmont call together a group of interested persons to begin work on the General and Annual Conference resolutions.
November, 1996	The Collegiate/Wesley Administrative Council formally authorizes a group, to be known as the Reconciling Congregation Task Force (now "Ministry Team,") to "consider what it would mean for Collegiate UMC to become a Reconciling Congregation."
February, 1997	Three different studies of <i>The Church Studies Homosexuality</i> , each one lasting several sessions, are offered to the church/foundation community
June, 1997 – May, 1998	The Task Force holds a series of in-home dialogue sessions; the Administrative Council encourages every member of C/W to attend one of the sessions. Nearly 200 persons participate. Besides these, several church school classes and book studies have presentations and discuss the attendant issues, and there are a continuing series of articles in <u>The Communicator</u> .
April, 1998	A Bible study written jointly by the reconciling/affirming/welcoming groups of eight different denominations is published. Local congregations of the eight denominations, including C/W, hold studies of the book, <i>Claiming the Promise</i> , in 3 venues in the city.
April, 1998	The Task Force releases its first draft of the statement, proposing that Collegiate UMC welcomes "all persons without exception," and declare itself a Reconciling Congregation.
April, 1998	The C/W Administrative Council encourages an extended period of study, asking all church school classes and small groups to discuss the statement;
June, 1998	The Northwest Texas Annual Conference requests a ruling from the national UM Judicial Council, asking whether local UM congregations can adopt identifying labels of unofficial movements within the church. (Such as "Reconciling" or "Transforming" Congregation.) The Task Force postpones its request for final action on the proposed statement pending the Judicial Council ruling.
October, 1999	The Judicial Council finally releases its ruling, prohibiting local congregations from labeling themselves "as an unofficial body or movement."
February, 2000	In light of the Judicial Council ruling, the Reconciling Congregation Ministry Team revises the proposed statement. It now is a statement of full inclusion, without calling for alignment with the national Reconciling Congregation Program.
March, 2000	The Collegiate/Wesley Administrative Council authorizes a short-term Ministry Team to propose a process and a timeline leading to a decision on adoption of the statement
June, 2000	This Ministry Team proposes several response-gathering methods, culminating in an October Church Conference, during which a written ballot on the statement will be taken.

From the conclusions of the official United Methodist report, "The Church Studies Homosexuality," (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1994, pp. 35

The majority of the Committee . . . (concludes) that certain assertions are true:

- a) the seven biblical references and allusions (about homosexuality) cannot be taken as definitive for Christian teaching about homosexual practice because they represent cultural patterns of ancient society and not the will of God.
- b) the scientific evidence is sufficient to support the contention that homosexuality is not pathological or otherwise an inversion, developmental failure, or deviant form of life as such, but is rather a human variant, one that can be healthy and whole;
- c) the emerging scholarly views in biblical studies, ethics, and theology support a view that affirms homosexual relationships that are covenantal, committed, and monogamous; and
- d) the witness to God's grace of lesbian and gay Christians in the life of the church supports these conclusions.