



The Messenger

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SPECIAL EDITION

Letter to the Congregation from your Pastors Re: Same-Gender Marriage

Dear Members and Friends at Pasadena First:

Each year in June, the California-Pacific Conference meets for its annual meeting at the University of Redlands. It is the responsibility of the pastors and lay delegates to effectively communicate back to the congregation all matters of significance. In most years, the news can be fairly ordinary. This year, however, the Cal-Pac Conference took an unprecedented step in approving three resolutions on the issue of “same gender or same-sex marriage” – all of which are in direct contradiction to The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, and all of which have come as a result of the recent ruling by the California Supreme Court declaring same-sex marriage legal in the State of California.

During the same week that the Cal-Pac Conference was in session, the California-Nevada Conference, our sister conference to the north, approved similar resolutions that echoed the intent of the ones that were approved in Redlands. They took an additional step and recruited a list of 67 retired clergy who would be willing to perform such marriages.

Because these issues are so controversial, and ground-breaking, your pastors believe that we should provide you with the exact wording of each of the three approved resolutions as well as the Response to these actions by the Bishop, Cabinet, and Leadership Team of the Cal-Pac Annual Conference. We are printing them in their entirety on the following pages. Additional news stories can be found at www.umc.org.

In an effort to invite all of you into this very difficult and very important conversation, Dr. Trotter will dedicate his sermon on Sunday, July 20, to these events. Following the service, we will have a “talk back session” in the Sanctuary for any of you who would like to ask questions or offer responses of your own. If you are in town and are able to come, we hope you will be with us.

This is an important time in the life of the church. We hope that you will keep the members of the Cal-Pac Conference, the Cal-Nevada Conference, and the entire United Methodist Church in your prayers for guidance and discernment in the days ahead.

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I. Resolution: Pastoral Response to Legality of Same-Gender Marriage in California

Whereas many people who we know and love in our parishes are celebrating with overflowing joy the recent California Supreme Court decision to recognize their place in society and their right to be married, and

Whereas beloved same-gender couples in our parishes are coming to us with their desire to celebrate their love and commitment, and to have those affirmed not only by the state but by their faith community as well, and

Whereas the legality of same-sex marriage in California, the needs of our parishes, and the demands of love require a pastoral response from the clergy and congregations of the California-Pacific Annual Conference,

Therefore, be it resolved that we recognize the pastoral need and prophetic authority of our clergy and congregations to offer the ministry of marriage ceremonies for same-gender couples.

Be it further resolved, while we recognize that we are governed by the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, we support those pastors who conscientiously respond to the needs of their parishes by celebrating same-gender marriages, and we envision compassion and understanding in any resulting disciplinary actions.

II. Resolution: Protecting Marriage Equality in California

[Opposition to “California Marriage Protection Act”]

Whereas the Book of Discipline 2004 states in ¶162(h) that: “Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons,” and “We insist that all persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured,” and

Whereas the 2008 session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, held in Fort Worth, Texas, has adopted the resolution titled Opposition to Homophobia and Heterosexism, calling on: “The United Methodist Church strengthen its advocacy of the eradication of sexism by opposing all forms of violence or discrimination based on gender, gender identity, sexual practice or sexual orientation,” and

Whereas the Supreme Court of the State of California ruled in the case of *In re: Marriage Cases* (2008), when it struck down a state ban on same-sex marriage, has found the right to marry to be civil right of all citizens, and that “the essence of the right to marry is freedom to join in marriage with the person of one’s choice,” and that “An individual’s sexual orientation – like a person’s race or gender – does not constitute a legitimate basis upon which to deny or withhold legal rights.”

Whereas a so called “California Marriage Protection Amendment” will appear on the November 4, 2008 General Election ballot, seeking to overturn the California Supreme Court decision, and

Whereas this amendment would be a profound misuse of our state constitution for the purpose of restricting the civil rights of one group of citizens, such an amendment would be in direct contradiction of the principles and spirit of the United Methodist Church:

Therefore, be it resolved that the 2008 Session of the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church Opposes the California Marriage Protection Amendment, and calls upon United Methodists in favor of the defeat of this act to work with all their might for its defeat, and

Be it further resolved that we call upon the laity and clergy of our churches in the California-Pacific Annual Conference to answer the call of General Conference by providing a witness against heterosexism and any discrimination based on sexual orientation, and in so doing, to be actively

involved in protecting the civil rights of all Californians as they pertain to the right to civil marriage, working through correspondence with elected officials, through public venues such as newspapers, periodicals, radio and television, and the venues offered by the internet, and through other opportunities as they rise.

III. Resolution: An Affirmation of Marriage Equality in California

Background

On May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court issued its decision holding that marriage is a basic civil right of personal autonomy and liberty to which all persons are entitled without regard to their sexual orientation. The week the California-Pacific Annual Conference 2008 will be in session, history will be made in California as legal marriage becomes available to gay and lesbian couples. Gay and lesbian couples in many of our churches will be married in the weeks and months to come.

Whereas California has led the marriage equality movement, beginning 60 years ago, by striking down laws prohibiting marriage between interracial couples (*Perez v. Sharp*, 1948);

Whereas on May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court issued its decision holding that marriage is a basic civil right of personal autonomy and liberty to which all persons are entitled without regard to their sexual orientation; and

Whereas as a result of the Supreme Court's decision, the State of California will begin to license and recognize same-gender marriages on June 16, 2008;

Whereas the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states that "certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons." (§162.H)

Whereas the United Methodist Church understands family "to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity." (§161.A)

Whereas the California-Pacific Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church has had a long history of ministry with, by and for lesbians and gay men through which the Holy Spirit has taught us the sacred worth of all persons and our ministries have been shaped accordingly;

Therefore be it resolved that the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church celebrates the Supreme Court decision regarding marriage equality;

Be it further resolved that the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church support same-gender couples who enter into the marriage covenant and encourage both congregations and pastors to welcome, embrace and provide spiritual nurture and pastoral care for these families.

IV. Response from the Leadership Team and Cabinet

A Statement Offered by the Bishop, Cabinet and Leadership Team

in response to inquiries regarding same gender marriages;

shared with the Cal-Pac Annual Conference meeting in session in Redlands, CA

Sunday, June 22, 2008

With the change in California law regarding same gender marriages, pastors and congregations have been asking how they can respond. Our Holy Conferencing and action on resolutions at this Annual Conference have sought common ground in this regard. Neither our actions nor the actions of the

state of California change the present Discipline of the United Methodist Church. The 2008 General Conference did add clarification that the prohibition against holy unions (Ph 341.6) applies even when same gender marriage is legal. This provision becomes effective in 2009.

The Episcopal office and its extension through the District Superintendents fulfill two roles, pastoral and supervisory (presidential). In the pastoral role, we want to affirm that your Bishop and Cabinet are available for counsel, encouragement, support, and reflection. In the supervisory or presidential role, we are officers of the church and responsible for upholding the order of the Discipline. Despite our diverse individual perspectives, we are obligated to process complaints arising from breaches of these provisions in a manner appropriate to the circumstances.

In considering pastoral care, rituals and celebrations, pastors and congregations will need to understand the rules, risks and the scope of consequences as well as recognizing the continuum of possible ministries which can be offered.

As we seek to remain in compassionate solidarity with our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, this may be a time to promote ecumenical partnerships and a variety of engaging ministries.

Ultimately, the Annual Conference, Cabinet and UMC, cannot make the decision regarding your course. We cannot eliminate risks or consequences or determine your heart or behavior. These decisions reside in the space between you and the call of God. As a Cabinet, we will be in prayer for our pastors and congregations as we all seek to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in responding to the heart of Christ as we extend compassion and hospitality to those seeking the sacral agencies of the church.



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