Marriage Matters: The State of Marriage by State  
By Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR 
Updated 4/1/14. Sources: freedomtomarry.org; umc.org; hrc.org; marriageequality.org

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Marriage matters. "No matter what language people speak—from Arabic to Yiddish, from Chinook to Chinese—marriage is what we use to describe a specific relationship of love and dedication to another person. It is how we explain the families that are united because of that love. And it universally signifies a level of self-sacrifice and responsibility and a stage of life unlike any other." (Wolfson, Why Marriage Matters, p3, 2004)

Where does our country stand on marriage for our same sex children? Just 10 months after the Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act in June 2013 the number of states issuing marriage licenses to same sex couples has increased from 12 plus the District of Columbia to 17 plus DC. Currently 29 states have legislation relating to same sex marriage pending. Within the next few years many of those states are expected to join the ranks of those issuing licenses to same-sex couples. Marriage by our pastors and in our churches is sure to be an issue again at General Conference 2016. Can the UMC agree that we disagree or, better yet, look at Jesus’ and the Bible’s teachings on love? Let us hope so or society will have left the UMC severely behind!

Internationally some of the countries of our Central Conferences are examining same sex marriage also with love winning out. See tables—right and p. 8.

We celebrated and celebrated and felt blessed on the day of our sons’ wedding. Starting with a Holy Union, they reaffirmed their vows in a quiet wedding in Canada three years later. You see our boys believed in their right to be married in the eyes of the church and the nation and...so do we, their mothers.

So, we celebrated with our sons and around our sons embracing their joy and happiness and their commitment to each other and ultimately to us their families. We were so happy and proud that our wonderful, talented, kind sons had found that special person who loved them and with whom they would spend the rest of their lives. We laughed and prayed together on that warm summer afternoon under the canopy of aging trees. We listened to their minister share the blessings of the Lord. Our sons spoke of the love that they shared and of their dreams and hopes for their future lives together. Each of us, their families and friends, held them close as we witnessed the beginning of their new family, a new sprout on the tree of life.

And now after 10 years, their life together has proven to be strong, caring and committed. Yes, they have faced many of the challenges other young couples have encountered...leaking hot water heaters, unexpected bills, sicknesses, the death of loved ones, and challenging jobs. Even with life’s hurdles their love, teamwork, and commitment to each other have grown.

(Continued on page 2)
Hey have been in love for so long...found each other in college and made it through the tough years of medical school and first years of teaching. It’s been a typical relationship...patiently learning how to live together. Who will do the laundry and who does the dishes...yes, every night is best!

When I received the call that Colby had asked him to get married, my heart raced. Finally, after nine years they are making the commitment! Nate was so happy; his voice was quivering. Yes! Let the planning begin!

The wedding is still months away and we are in the throws of the many details. Through it all we see how normal it is. We are nervous, anxious and wondering if everything really has to cost that much! But my son finally gets to marry the love of his life! We will get through it all!

I give thanks for the people who support them and are encouraging them. It is such a blessing to be able to know that they can share their commitment with their friends and family. My earnest prayer is that my United Methodist Church would also be able to celebrate their happiness. O God, continue to inspire us!

Marriage Matters—a Matter of Pastoral Care and Social Justice
Why United Methodist Pastors Risk their Orders in the Cause of Marriage Equality
By Rev Jim Waugh, Grove City Trinity UMC, Grove City, OH

Marriage Matters after Nine Years
By Faith Geer—St Paul UMC, Allison Park, PA

While in some annual conferences, same gender weddings and commitment services are now being performed regularly in the spirit of “Biblical obedience.” In many other annual conferences, as we are well aware from the trial of the Rev. Frank Schaefer, clergy risk trial and the possible loss of orders as in the case of Rev. Schaefer.

I recently spoke with a clergy colleague of mine in the West Ohio Conference about his involvement in the wedding of two gay men. Pastor “Steve” as I will call him shared with me about his experience. In this case, one of the partners in the marriage was a former staff member of the congregation that Pastor Steve served. The staff member and his partner had moved out of state, but they told Pastor Steve that when they got married, they wanted him to perform the service.

The couple moved to a jurisdiction in which same gender marriage is legal, and when they were ready to get married they contacted Pastor Steve. He recommended a United Methodist congregation in which they could be married. Pastor Steve called the church to ask about the possibility of his involvement in the wedding service. He learned that the congregation has a policy that calls for at least two clergy to perform a same gender wedding. At the service three pastors including Pastor Steve participated in the marriage service for the couple. Family and friends joined them at the service.

I asked Pastor Steve why he decided to participate in the marriage service of these two gay men? Steve replied that he had been their pastor. He had the same responsibility to them as he did to any couple that wanted to be married. He felt it was his pastoral duty.

When I ask Pastor Steve why it is important for United Methodist pastors to have the right to share in marriages for same gender couples, Steve said, “It is a matter of pastoral care and social justice. We start the relationship at baptism. We welcome them. We can’t treat one differently from another. It is one of the joys and duties of being a pastor. I see no distinctions.”

In closing Pastor Steve described his theology of marriage. Steve believes that the couple and God are doing the work. The pastor is privileged to share in that experience. He declares that clergy should be grateful that folks turn to them for a blessing from the pastor whom the couple sees as God’s representative.

(Continued from page 1)

Three years ago when a beautiful newborn baby came into existence, our two sons’ happiness erupted again, binding their families and friends into an even tighter family circle. There was such joy. And there was a little exhaustion too.

So, we celebrated and celebrated and felt blessed with all of the joy and beauty that life holds for our sons. We celebrate now for our beautiful, incredible grandson.

With love from their Mothers—
Nancy Unger Lekberg
Cynthia D. Dickerson
I recently read a powerful story by a UMC parent whose LGBT child was deeply affected by bullying when he sought to join friends going on a Youth Mission Trip. For Julie Wood writing of her beliefs regarding her son’s sexual orientation, “Being gay is no different than my eyes are blue...Blue is not better or something that I chose, they are just blue....Sexual orientation is just no different than any other God given characteristic.” The youth minister felt differently; if you haven’t seen "Shamed: How the UMC contributed to my son’s death", please consider reading this moving -- and chilling -- blog posting at www.rmnblog.org/ and search for “shamed”.

I wish that I knew that this kind of bullying was an anomaly. But I have heard too many heart-rending true stories told by my LGBT brothers and sisters of their experiences of rejection by the Church they grew up in. I have wept to hear of the suffering that has taken place -- and continues to take place --because of attitudes and practices that discriminate against LGBT persons in the United Methodist Church.

I know that other denominations and religions have denounced, excluded, and punished individuals who are open about their sexual orientation or nonconforming gender expression. But there’s something about coming from a tradition based on the Three Simple Rules of John Wesley, the first of which is to “Do no harm”!

As a parent and as a Christian, I feel we have a moral imperative to protect the innocent from the harm that occurs as a result of bullying in all its forms.

Currently, there are two bills that are receiving strong bipartisan support in both the US House of Representatives and in the Senate: Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) and Student Non-Discrimination Act (SNDA). Surveys show that 80% of high school students who are or are perceived to be LGBT are subjected to bullying (including cyber bullying) by way of harassment, discrimination, intimidation and violence. Bullying is a serious problem that contributes to LGBT students’ higher risk for depression, self-harm including suicide, and dropping out of school.

Schools need to be safe places for LGBT students to know they will receive support if bullied and that they will be as free to learn as any other student. Churches need to be safe places for young people, and for all people. We can help make the United Methodist Church safe by not ignoring or excusing discriminatory or bullying behaviors if/when we see or hear of incidents. With others in your congregation you can make a public statement that clearly proclaims the church to be a safe place, a church where all are equally included and protected from harm -- a Reconciling Church.

7000 Stoles and Counting...

Started in time for the 2004 General Conference, rainbow stoles have been a part of United Methodist Annual and General Conferences throughout the US, worn by those wishing to proclaim that they are committed to full inclusion of lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender and queer person in the life and policy of the UMC. Signifying the diversity of God’s ordained kin-dom, PRN volunteers have faithfully made over 7000 stoles for General Conferences in 2004, 2008, and 2012 and at RMN convocations in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013. More are planned for GC 2016.

After many years of organizing this effort by Helen King, then Helen Andrew, a new Stoles Chair has volunteered to take on the task for our joint Convo with MFSA/RMN in the summer of 2015 and for General Conference in Portland, OR in 2016. Anne Lewis, long time member of Woodland Park UMC, in Seattle, WA, comes with years of quilting and sewing experience, preparing paraments and banners for the sanctuary, and quilts for children at risk. She is a skilled organizer, currently serving as office coordinator at her church. Says Anne, "This is a big challenge, but I am looking forward to it. I look forward to working with all the volunteers across the country." You can contact Anne at her home church at woodlandparkumc@gmail.com.
For years, most of us have heard only about two sexes—male and female and that image of “one or the other” has shaped our thinking in many ways. On most medical and legal forms, questionnaires and surveys, there are boxes to check “male” and “female”, and no other boxes. Laws in many states still state that marriage is only legal between one man and one woman. Very early children’s stories refer to boys and girls, men and women, but almost never to someone who is in between. We seldom read stories about children, declared male or female at birth, who think of themselves as completely the opposite sex. No wonder we have a hard time with the whole concept of gender. We don’t explore it because it seems so simple.

Same sex attraction, sexual orientation where a person has physical and emotional attraction to a person of the same sex, has become increasingly accepted and understood in much of the United States in the most recent decade. Variations in gender identity remain very poorly understood and are poorly accepted.

It is not uncommon to hear a parent of a recently out gay teen, say something like “I should have known. He never did want to play football” or “Now I understand why my daughter was always a tom-boy and refused to wear the dresses I bought her”. These behaviors are not really expressions of sexual orientation—i.e. gay, lesbian or bisexual. Rather they may be expressions of gender. Gender expression is often interpreted as an expression of sexual orientation.

"Gender expression encompasses all the ways you present yourself that are governed by gender norms” (Killermann, 2013, p 88)—just about everything including clothing, mannerisms, gait, pitch of voice, language choices, pronunciation of language, posture, grooming social interactions and much more, all things we can observe. What we cannot observe is gender identity. We don’t know a person’s gender identity unless that person tells us.

It is not uncommon for persons who are transgender to go through a portion of life as a gay man or a lesbian, only later finding that the issue was not sexual attraction to one of the same sex, but actually feeling like a person who was given the wrong gender label at birth.

Even biblical scholars confuse the issue. Concerning the story of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), many will interpret the story to demonstrate that the baptism of this beardless, high-voiced person proves that God does not exclude gay people. Rather, we have no idea of the sexual orientation of this person. Nor do we know the eunuch’s gender identity. We do know, however, that the eunuch’s physical expression of gender, surgically altered prior to puberty, was neither male nor female. In today’s language, we would call this person transgender or intersex. Most amazing is the interpretation that God does not exclude transgender or intersex persons from the kingdom of God.

Confused? You should be. Most of society is confused. I’m confused.

One of the best sources on understanding gender is Sam Killermann’s 2013 online book The Social Justice Advocate’s Handbook: A Guide to Gender (http://www.guidetogender.com). Written with humor and assuming you are confused, the book starts from the basic understanding of sex, gender, gender expression and gender norms, including many helpful cartoons and graphics.

Why should we be concerned? It is estimated that one in every 2000 babies is born neither male nor female (i.e. intersex) or about 65,000 each year in the US. One estimate is that there are about 700,000 transgender individuals in the US. Yet these groups suffer huge risks in housing discrimination, medical care, homelessness, suicide and murder rates, prisons and the military. These persons, too, are our children.

As parents of LGBTQ persons, we have a responsibility to get better educated about our children, their loves, their lives, their trials, and their gifts. In order to truly love our neighbors, we need to know our neighbors. To love the diversity of God’s creation means to know all the colors of the rainbow, to name them and to let them name themselves.
LGBTQ Children Need Protection from Bullying
By Sue Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN

This week Sam, 14, was called into the principal’s office regarding a note he had sent Nick in class. The principal wanted to know what this note was all about. Why had he sent Nick a note saying “I like you”? Nick’s parents had been in. Sam was bullying Nick they said, and he should be disciplined. Sam had come out to his Mom and Dad just this year. All Sam wanted to do was to share his feelings for Nick. There was no touching, no suggestion that there should be any further action just “I like you.” Who was the real bully here?

The hostility bullied LGBTQ youth experience makes them more prone to health risks such as skipping school, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse as well as risky sexual behavior. The National Youth Association reports that 9 out of 10 LGBT students have experienced bullying and more than one third have attempted suicide. Twenty-eight percent of youth who are victims of bullying due to their sexual orientation feel forced to drop out of school altogether. The American Association of University Women published an article in Outlook, winter 2014 issue, reporting that “LGBT students who experience high levels of victimization have lower grade point averages, are less likely to plan to pursue a postsecondary education and are three times as likely as other students to miss school because of safety concerns.”

The Human Rights Campaign reports that seventy-five percent of LGBTQ youth say that most of their peers do not have a problem with their LGBTQ identity. That leaves 25% whose attitudes may present risks for LGBTQ youth. We will lose a generation of young people if we cannot find a way to help these youth cope with those who continue to support gender stereotypes. Many of these young people do not report the harassment they receive out of fear that the bullying will escalate. Finding a safe place for our LGBT youth must be a priority.

Hopefully many will at least talk with their parents. What can Sam’s parents do to support him? They too must feel a sense of helplessness. Hopefully Sam’s Mom and Dad can find accepting young people with whom Sam can share his hopes and his fears. They may need to begin their own support group for Sam and parents of other LGBT youth.

Surely another step to keep Sam safe will be monitoring his cyberspace. HRC reports that roughly three-quarters of LGBT youth say that they are more honest about themselves online than in the real world. The internet can be a safe place, but it can also be a place for sexual predators. It is not only our LGBTQ children who experience this bullying, but also any of our young people who do not conform to the norm, who dress a little differently or who choose activities that cross accepted gender lines like girls wanting to play football or boys wanting to dance.

Parents are invaluable partners with teachers, youth group leaders and ministers as we support our children in their search for identity. Anti-bullying campaigns can be powerful in addressing issues of sexual orientation but fail to address the issues of gender identity. It is important that parents of LGBTQ youth insist that issues of gender identity be a part of the anti-bullying programs in which their children participate.

Sam’s Mom and Dad took him to the local Indiana Youth Group meeting where they knew other LGBT teens would support him. Like Sam’s parents, take time to take part in making sure your young person has a safe place to grow.

This morning I learned that another 14 year old in a local middle school committed suicide this week. His parents asked that memorial contributions be made to the “It Gets Better Campaign”. We parents have to be there in order for things to really get better.

Barbara Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC
Vernell Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC
Don Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN
Sue Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN
Beverly Cole, Trinity UMC, Salina, KS
Rev. Leigh Dry, Lexington UMC, Lexington, MA
Faith Geer, St Paul’s UMC, Allison Park, PA—PRN SC Chair
Dave Nuchols, Minnetonka, MN
Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR—Financial Secretary
Joy Watt, Uniontown UMC, Uniontown, OH
Rev. James Waugh, Grove City Trinity UMC, Grove City, OH
Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA—Newsletter Editor

Parents Steering Committee

The following members of the Parents Steering Committee direct the activities of the Parents Reconciling Network (PRN), an extension ministry of Reconciling Ministries Network. If you would like to contribute to this work, please contact Faith Geer (fgeer@stpaulsumc.com) or Carol Waymack (carolwaymack2@yahoo.com).

Steering Committee Members:
Blair Barbour, Euclid UMC, Oak Park, IL
David Braden, Chicago, IL—RMN Staff Member

Barbara Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC
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Don Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN
Sue Childers, North UMC, Indianapolis, IN
Beverly Cole, Trinity UMC, Salina, KS
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Joy Watt, Uniontown UMC, Uniontown, OH
Rev. James Waugh, Grove City Trinity UMC, Grove City, OH
Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA—Newsletter Editor
As a parent, grandparent, or other relative of an LGBT person, you have a personal opportunity to support that relative in public. You also have an opportunity and a responsibility to create change in our world, to make our entire society more inclusive of all people. Here are some ways you can be a great straight ally.

- Ask questions. Ask a gay person if the letter to the editor you've written about LGBT inclusion contains any offensive language. Ask a person you think might be trans what pronouns that person prefers. Ask what terms your GLBT friends and family prefer. Ask if your lesbian friend's new partner in marriage would like to be referred to as "wife".

- Be an LGBT friendly face in the crowd, your group, your church, your family.

- Come out as a straight ally. A small rainbow sticker on your bumper or an equal sign on your address labels communicates to others your inclusive attitudes. March in a Pride parade. Don't underestimate your ability to shape the attitudes of others.

- Don't assume everyone you know and meet is straight. Don't assume the sexual orientation or gender identity of every person in a committed relationship.

- Get informed. Yes, you may actually have to look up information about issues of LGBT folks. "When you hear about an issue on the news that you don't understand, look it up or ask a friend. When a gay friend uses a term that you don't understand—like 'queer'—ask: Why exactly are there rainbow flags all over the Pride parade each year? Is this about a culture? Look it up online. Chances are that your friends and colleagues will be pretty impressed that you took an interest in wanting to say the right thing or to understand what's going on." (PFLAG, Guide to Being a Straight Ally, 2007)

- Learn the terminology and use it correctly. Continue learning. The terminology changes, often for great reasons. Then get comfortable using the correct terms. Use "gay" and "lesbian" instead of "homosexual". Don't expect LGBT people to educate you. Do your own homework.

- Call out "Offensive!" when someone tells jokes about LGBT people. Don't let it slide by. Think about the one closeted person who could not reply. Think about the parent of an LGBT child who was afraid of coworkers comments.

- Confront stereotypes spoken as if they were facts. Misinformation can hurt as much as jokes.

- Don't ever out a transperson. This can be very dangerous to that person's life and safety.

- Speak about your LGBT friends and family members just as you do about your straight friends and family. If you are telling family stories, tell about the new child in your family who has two dads. But don't betray confidences or "out" someone who is still closeted.

- Use non-gender specific language when referring to romantic relationships. Use words like "partner", "significant other", "main squeeze".

- Introduce, support and vote in favor of LGBT-inclusive policies--at work, at church, in civic organizations, and in social groups. Let others know that diversity training is valuable, even if they claim it's a waste of time.

- Notice the many ways in which you reveal your heterosexuality and imagine how it would feel to keep it hidden. Recognize your heterosexual privilege.
What follows are my personal observations and reflections in counseling gay men in straight marriages and their experiences in ending these marriages.

Some gay men in straight marriages live lives of cover-up and lies, hiding secret affairs and masking their guilt. A gay man can’t give his wife what she wants and needs, especially deeply satisfying sexual intimacy because this goes against his true God-given nature. This leaves her feeling something is wrong with her. Husbands experience low self-esteem because they feel inadequate knowing they can’t make their wives happy—a feeling which quickly permeates through the entire family.

These men often try to “put the genie back in the bottle” in order to save the marriage or even suggest trying an “open marriage”. These attempts are often devastating and confusing to the rest of the family. Many men stay married because it is comfortable and convenient, but they soon realize this is selfish and protecting themselves from the pain of their guilt. Men come to realize that staying may be the easier thing to do but not the right thing to do. Intimacy with the wife declines more and more leaving her with damaged self-esteem or anger. Ultimately men come to realize that honesty is the best and right thing to do.

The husband and wife and even the children need to be prepared for a roller coaster ride of emotions. They will be overwhelmed with hurt, fear, guilt, anger and depression. The turmoil seems to never end. They will go through the grief process as the marriage shifts: shock and denial, anger and resentment, bargaining, withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and finally acceptance. When gay men do divorce, out of guilt, many of them tend to be overly generous in the settlement. All share in a hope for the future that can be a good connection with the ex-wife and children and that they will find a loving same sex relationship.

A positive, healthy social support network including a welcoming and accepting church is important as gay men end a straight marriage. There is a healing process that is psychological, behavioral and spiritual. The coming out process is ongoing. Men need to figure out who to tell, how much, and when.

It is important to include children in a way appropriate to their ages. In his book Over the Cliff, Gay Men in Straight Marriages, Doug Dittmer offers helpful suggestions for telling children. As we know, kids don’t want to hear about anything sexual regarding their parents. Dittmer suggests that anything shared in the coming out should be couched in terms of affection and love, not labels. Young people will need lots of time and support to accept having a gay dad. Both parents need to be alert to possible teasing or bullying as a result of the child sharing this new information with friends.

All in all, and over time, with knowledge and mutual support, care, kindness, and acceptance, gay men, their former wives and their children can live much happier lives.

Parent Reconciling Network Steering Committee is moving boldly into the 21st century and into the social media sphere. We will be launching a Facebook page in May. Through Facebook, we will spread the message of acceptance of our LGBTQ children beyond our borders, to those in areas without support, without welcoming churches, and even without welcoming families. We plan to post new resources that you and your church can use, updates in the news, writings from important leaders in the Reconciling movement and more. Look for us on Facebook, at Facebook.com/reconcilingparents

Doing a New Thing—PRN on Facebook

We hope you find the content helpful, provocative, inspiring and timely. We encourage you to check the site often. "Like us on FaceBook" so more and more people will see the personal face of full acceptance in our church and in our society.

We recognize that not everyone uses the internet with ease. We will continue to publish Kindred Connection on a yearly basis. It's important for families to have something printed that can be shared with family members, friends, pastors and colleagues to help them have needed conversations.

Extra copies will be available on request for distribution at Annual Conferences, local meetings and other places. If you need extra copies, please contact Faith Geer or Carol Waymack, via the email addresses listed on page 5. Additionally, old and current issues may be viewed, downloaded and printed from the RMN website: rmnetwork.org/parents.
MARRIAGE MATTERS—BY STATE

MARRIAGE MATTERS—A NEW FAMILY BEGINS

MARRIAGE MATTERS AFTER 9 YEARS

MARRIAGE MATTERS—PASTORAL CARE AND JUSTICE

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

7000 STOLES AND COUNTING

UNDERSTANDING THE T IN LGBT

LGBT CHILDREN AND BULLYING

BE A GREAT ALLY

DONATE NOW

GAY MEN IN STRAIGHT MARRIAGES

PRN ON FACEBOOK

PARENTS RECONCILING NETWORK—OUR MISSION

Parents Reconciling Network unconditionally walks with the parents and families of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities until all are fully accepted in their families, in their churches, and in society by advocating for acceptance, providing education, and promoting welcoming communities of faith.