

# A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE UMC

## A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH FROM 75 LESBIAN/ GAY/ BISEXUAL/ TRANSGENDER UM CLERGY

*The way God designed our bodies  
Is a model for understanding our lives together as a church:  
Every part dependent on every other part,  
The parts we mention and the parts we don't,  
The parts we see and the parts we don't.  
If one part hurts,  
Every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing.  
If one part flourishes,  
Every other part enters into the exuberance.  
You are Christ's body -- that's who you are!  
You must never forget this.*

1 Corinthians 12:25-27 (Peterson, The Message)

We are 75 lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (lgbt) clergy in The United Methodist Church and we feel it is time our voices were heard in the debates regarding sexuality and the church.

We have known the church at its best through first hand experience. In baptism, we were welcomed into the loving, waiting arms of the family of God. The United Methodist Church both nurtured and confirmed our faith, saturating our lives in God's grace. You are the church that opened our minds and hearts to God's irrevocable call into ministry.

As your pastors, we have embodied God's presence in worship and in your lives, blessing your marriages, responding to midnight calls, holding your hands, wiping your tears, and laying your precious loved ones to rest. We have had the joy and privilege of baptizing you, your children, and your grandchildren, and we have experienced the profound mystery of the spirit of Christ in serving you Holy Communion.

At the same time, we have known the church at its worst. Since 1972, the UMC has been on a slow but steady course to exclude lgbt people from the life of the church as a whole. Many in our denomination support this dismembering of Christ's Body. Yet even while our sister Beth Stroud was stripped of her ordination credentials, lgbt clergy continue to serve the church faithfully at every level of leadership.

We serve our beloved United Methodist Church at great cost. We have experienced personally the church's power to harm as it rejects an elemental part of who we are. The UMC's official policy has pushed us, as well as our families, into closets of fear and isolation. We are not deceitful people, but the church has given us no choice. To deny God's calling in our lives would leave a void in the Body of Christ.

As lgbt clergy, we are also keenly aware of the suffering of lgbt laity who question whether they can con-

tinue to support the UMC with their ongoing prayers, faithful presence, personal and financial gifts, and dedicated service when the church has declared their lives to be incompatible with Christian teaching. Judicial Council Decision 1032 has revealed what we have known for a long time: there are those in the UMC whose agenda is not only antithetical to our Wesleyan heritage, but a dismembering of the Body of Christ.

Yet we know that it is ultimately impossible for the church to amputate us from Christ's Body. Even with the most restrictive legislation, lgbt people will still be raised up through the UMC's Sunday School and youth programs. They will hear God's voice calling them into ministry, and Boards of Ordained Ministry will continue to find them called and gifted candidates, regardless of their sexual orientation. Many will realize, as we have, that seeking ordination in another, more welcoming denomination, is impossible-for it is in the UMC that our spirituality is rooted.

If you are an ordained, commissioned, licensed, or lay lgbt person in The United Methodist Church, take heart! Hear the good news: If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. *You are not alone!*

We call upon our UM sisters and brothers to break the silence and bear witness to these truths. We implore you to do all in your power to support lgbt people and their families so that we may live our lives as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ with integrity and without fear.

John Wesley's prayer is our prayer, that we might serve the United Methodist Church with "*purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God... giving God all our heart...devoting, not a part, but all, our soul, body, and substance to God... loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.*" (John Wesley's Theology -- A Collection from His Works, 1982.)