



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 7, 2011

Renegade MN Methodist Clergy Would Bless Same-Sex Marriages

Seventy clergy with the United Methodist Church (UMC) in Minnesota have signed a statement saying that they would “offer the grace of the Church’s blessing” to same-sex couples, reported the United Methodist News Service.



Speaking during the UMC’s annual state denominational conference, the Rev. Bruce Robbins (left), pastor of the [Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church](#) in Minneapolis, said that clergy groups had been meeting “who want to challenge parts of the United Methodist polity with which we disagree — that which relates to the lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual community and Christian marriage.” Robbins said the issue had gained importance with the “possibility of a constitutional amendment in the state of Minnesota” that would define marriage as only between a man and a woman.

The UMC News Service reported that although only about a dozen clergy members had initially joined Robbins in signing the statement he read during a clergy session on the afternoon of June 1, by that evening the number of signers had increased to about 40, and by June 3 a total of 70 Minnesota UMC clergy were apparently prepared to defy Scripture and their denomination’s by-laws and offer their blessings to homosexual unions.

“We are convinced by the witness of others and are compelled by Spirit and conscience to act,” the ministers declared in their signed statement. “We realize that our church’s discriminatory policies tarnish the witness of the church to the world, and we are complicit. We value our covenant relationships and ask everyone to hold the divided community of the United Methodist Church in prayer.”

While the acceptability of homosexuality in the church has been debated for nearly 40 years among a divided Methodist clergy and the denomination’s leadership, currently the UMC’s [Book of Discipline](#), which guides church policy and the clergy’s official behavior, states that ceremonies celebrating “homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.” In fact, as reported by UMC News Service, “officiating at such unions is a chargeable offense,” and clergy convicted by a denominational court of breaking the church’s law face “a range of penalties, from revocation of conference membership or clergy credentials to suspension or lesser penalties.”



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Sidestepping the clear prohibition against homosexual behavior outlined throughout Scripture, Minnesota's head UMC Bishop, Sally Dyck, attempted to ride the fence in her response to the 70 defiant ministers, pointing out that her denomination "is not of one mind of this.... There are many ways in which families and churches and communities differ in their understanding about the way to go forward. It is important for us to be mindful of each other and recognize differences and hold each other in grace."

In a similar move in 2009 by pro-homosexual denominational ministers, more than 80 retired UMC clergy in northern California and Nevada said they would perform same-sex marriage ceremonies on behalf of active ministers, along with providing other ministry services to homosexual couples. A covenant signed by the group of defiant ministers stated: "We must not deny ministerial services to anybody because of their sexual orientation. We will witness that United Methodists in the California-Nevada Annual Conference do have Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors and we will not tolerate the exclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered people from our ministry."

In response to that covenant, the UMC's top court issued a ruling in April 2009, stating that no regional UMC conference may "negate, ignore, or violate provisions of the Discipline with which they disagree, even when the disagreements are based on conscientious objections to the provisions."

Most recently, in late May the UMC's Baltimore-Washington Conference approved a resolution that would allow clergy to perform same-sex ceremonies in jurisdictions where same-sex marriage laws have been passed. The resolution states that "in those civil jurisdictions where homosexual persons have been granted the right to same gender marriage or civil union, ceremonies celebrating those marriages or unions may be conducted in our churches and by our ministers, the decision being the right and responsibility of the pastor."

As reported by the [Christian Post](#), passage of the resolution, by a very slender margin, "came as a surprise to many, including those responsible for putting the resolution forward in the first place. Members of Washington's Foundry United Methodist, which proposed the resolution, did not expect it to be approved." The [Washington Post](#) quoted the Rev. Dean Snyder as saying that a group of clergy "presented the resolution as an occasion to have a conversation. Frankly, I didn't think it would pass. This is very exciting, very moving."

At least one such resolution is expected to come before the denomination's General Conference, scheduled for April 2012 in Tampa, where some 1,000 national delegates will most like be asked to vote on changing the Book of Discipline to allow clergy to marry homosexual couples.

At the UMC's last [General Conference in 2008](#), delegates rejected proposed changes to the United Methodist Social Principles that would have recognized efforts by homosexual activists to pressure the denomination into abandoning biblical truth on sexuality. Thankfully, instead, the delegates voted to retain the denomination's biblical stance, as stated in the 2004 edition of the Book of Discipline, confirming that homosexual practice is "incompatible with Christian teaching."



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