



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 14, 2011

## Retired Methodist Bishops Call for Church to Drop Policy Against Homosexual Clergy

The retired bishops noted that in the past the UMC had been “ashamed and repentant” over its restrictions on the ordination of clergy over race, gender, and ethnicity. “We believe the God we know in Jesus is leading us to issue this counsel and call — a call to transform our church life and our world,” they said.

In their statement the bishops asked that the denomination’s traditional test for the “gifts and evidence of God’s grace” in clergy candidates would override past restriction on ordaining homosexuals, and that the denomination would “change the manner in which it relates to gay, lesbian, and transgendered persons in official statements, judicial proceedings, and in congregational life.”



The retired leaders said that they were prompted to step forward after watching clergy leave the church over the denomination’s position on homosexuality and UMC seminary leaders struggle over the policy. Retired UMC Bishops Sharon Z. Rader and Donald A. Ott took the lead in preparing the petition, persuading 40 percent of the denomination’s 85 retired bishops to sign the statement. Ott said,

This statement tells of a widespread concern that episcopal leaders have, and I hope that the church and the world see this as an opportunity to once again [face the issue] and maybe this time take the step of removing this. Once upon a time, it wasn’t there, and it doesn’t have to be there.

According to the [United Methodist News Service](#), “The subject of homosexuality has surfaced every four years at the gathering of the United Methodist Church’s General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking body. Only General Conference can change the Book of Discipline, and delegates consistently have voted to keep the restriction.”

The Rev. Timothy W. Whitaker, a Florida UMC bishop who supports the change, noted that “there are different understandings of human sexuality,” and the church “must be mindful of its responsibility to its members in all its cultural settings and not just select ones.”

While other mainline denominations — including the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) — have witnessed their leadership caving in to the demands of a vocal minority on the issue of ordaining open homosexuals, Mark Tooley of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, a conservative denominational watchdog group, said that the UMC’s leadership has continued to hold the biblical line on the issue.

“The United Methodist Church stands out almost uniquely among the liberal-dominated mainline



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denominations because it does still have official biblical standards on marriage and on moral conduct for its clergy,” Tooley told [OneNewsNow.com](#). He noted that it has been the activist efforts of liberal bishops such as Ott and Rader that have sought to compromise the UMC’s traditional scriptural foundations. He pointed out that “these retired bishops do represent the church’s past and are responsible for the church having lost three million members in the U.S. over the last 45 years. So we have already seen the fruits of their liberal theology.”

Another conservative leader, the American Family Association’s Buddy Smith, who serves as an elder in the UMC, told OneNewsNow.com that the retired bishops who signed the liberal statement “have abdicated their accountability to scripture on human sexuality for fear of being labeled judgmental.” Thankfully, he said, “the United Methodist Church still speaks for God as it labels homosexuality as sinful and prohibits the practice for its clergy.”

*Graphic: United Methodist Church logo*



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