

The Request:

Bishop Johnson > ...request to speak at the forum at Asbury UMC Allentown on Sat. May 20th 2017 from 9 AM – 12 noon. There will also be a speaker talking about Religious Liberty. I would like to ask you to speak about the issues that divide us on human sexuality and what is needed to maintain unity in the UMC. About 20 minutes. Then Q&A.

Bishop Johnson > Thank you for being willing to speak at the May 20th event. Rev. Joe Dipaolo is the conservative speaker on the topic that you are discussing. We are also having a conversation about Religious Freedom and discrimination. Mr. Bud Droke from Grandview will give the progressive side.

My Statement:

When I say LGBTQ, I mean lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning.

Are there any LGBTQ people here? Don't identify yourself if you are not out, of course....

With one in twenty people in society being LGBTQ, there is a good chance a few people here are part of that community and some are not identifying themselves. As a society, we are realizing sexuality is so diverse beyond straight or gay, that there may be people here today dealing with questions about their own sexuality or have dealt with those questions in the past. We are not going to give you answers for your personal struggles today but I want you to know, you are welcome here in our discussion about your lives in this denomination.

- My name is Jim Palmquist. I am a straight man, married for 49 years with no LGBTQ parents, siblings, children or grandchildren, though I know a lot of LGBTQ people. They are good people.
- I have been a member of eight churches including six Methodist churches. I was a member here at Asbury-Allentown for 30 years.
- I was Lay Leader of Cokesbury United Methodist Church in Pensacola, Florida.
- I was an Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference Equalizing Delegate in 2002 and 2005.
- I have been to three General Conferences; 2000 in Cleveland, 2004 in Pittsburgh and 2008 in Ft. Worth. I chose not to go to General Conference in Tampa in 2012 while I reevaluated my relationship to the United Methodist Church. The prejudice I find in the United Methodist Church makes me question its Christian foundation.
- Since 2000, I have helped lead Affirmation, the LGBTQ caucus of the United Methodist Church.
- In Cleveland at General Conference 2000, I was arrested with SoulForce protesting the United Methodist Church stand on LGBTQ issues. 190 people were arrested with me, including Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and Yolanda King, daughter of MLK.
- I do not speak for any organization today. These are my statements alone.

- My story briefly:
 - In the early 1990's, I regretted not being involved in the 1960s civil rights struggle.
 - What struggle can I get involved with today? LGBTQ welcome!
 - Taught adult Sunday school in this church several weeks a year for about 20 years.
 - Taught on topics from many books, including several by Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong.
 - Bishop Spong severely criticized the Christian Church for its abuse of LGBTQ people. I did not know anything about that issue but it made me receptive to learning more.
 - In 1996, I attended a multi-day conference at Moravian Theological Seminary called "Cease Fire: Living through the Culture Wars".

- One of the speakers was Rev. Dr. Mel White, an out gay pastor, a Christian video producer and, before he came out, he ghost wrote Jerry Falwell's autobiography.
- Mel wrote the book Stranger at the Gate about his coming out and it resonated with me.
- That encouraged me to attend General Conference 2000 in Cleveland, be arrested with Mel White's SoulForce organization and join the leadership of Affirmation, the LGBTQ Caucus of the United Methodist Church.

My talk today is going to cover four segments:

Current issues people have with the United Methodist Church.
 United Methodist history.
 Demographics.
 Possible solutions.

So let's get into the issues.

Current Issues People Have with the United Methodist Church:

<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-is-the-denominations-position-on-homosexuality>

Here are some perspectives I have on the 2016 Book of Discipline which constitutes the law and doctrine of the United Methodist Church:

Regarding church membership

¶ 4. Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church:

The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. *Originally dates back to 1992.*

Do you notice that the "all persons" definition specifically excludes LGBTQ people?

Apparently the denomination has prejudged LGBTQ people as a class and determined that none of them are welcome.

Regarding the ministry of the ordained

¶ 304.3:The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. 1972

This is an obviously false statement.

Homosexuality cannot be incompatible with Christian teaching!

1. **Christ never talked about homosexuality but he talked against divorce. But notice that protestant churches rarely talk about divorce from the pulpit. LGBTQ people are targets of abuse in this denomination but divorced people get a pass. Is that the United Methodist position? Are we going to enforce "Christian" teachings that Christ never said that fit our prejudices but skirt around divorce, where Christ spoke clearly?**
1. **The church has used faulty biblical translation and transcription to persecute LGBTQ people.**
 - A. **The bible has been translated and recopied many times and some of those copies involved changes to the wording in the bible. For example, the King James Version in 1611 of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 uses the term 'effeminate'. Subsequent versions such as the New International Version bible of 1968 translated the King James term 'effeminate' into 'men who have sex with men', which is a translation error.**

B. The bible was written by people 2,000 years ago and has many understandings we don't accept today.

- 1. Slaves do not have to be subservient to their masters today. Do we agree? Give me a show of hands if you agree!**
- 2. Women don't have to be silent in church today. Do we agree? Give me a show of hands if you agree!**
- 3. We don't sanction beating our children with a rod today. Do we agree? Give me a show of hands if you agree!**
- 4. People 2,000 years ago had different ideas about sexual activity than we have and some of their ideas about it are not relevant today.**
- 5. The term "homosexuality" was coined in the 19th century, when society began to realize same sex attraction exists and was different than heterosexual attraction. So 2,000 year old writings are not well enough informed to be relied upon in this area.**

C. I could spend hours citing 68 inconsistencies in the bible. We don't have time for that but if our bible interpretation is going to be used to abuse LGBTQ members of the Church, we had better be real clear on what it is and what it is not. It cannot be used as justification to abuse LGBTQ people!

7+30

2. I have shown that the bible cannot be a reliable source of persecution of our LGBTQ members and I believe that supports my conclusion that the animosity towards LGBTQ people in the United Methodist Church comes out of prejudice alone.

A. In the Discipline quotation cited above referring to 'incompatible with Christian teaching' and 'self-avowed practicing homosexuals', what the United Methodist Church is really saying is 'homosexuality is incompatible with its prejudgments about people, false understanding of Christ's teachings and incorrect biblical interpretation'.

B. The Discipline quotation is an embarrassing statement to come from a Christian denomination.

C. And it is further evidence that the United Methodist Church is prejudiced.

¶ 341.6: Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

- The most significant event in your and my life is when we make a commitment to another person in marriage. We do it in our community among friends and family and in our churches. And United Methodist Church denies that support to its LGBTQ members. *Tell the AUMC story...***
- Both families involved in a planned marriage that our denomination cannot support see the persecution of the United Methodist Church and it drives them away. Both sets of siblings, parents, extended family and friend networks learn to avoid the United Methodist Church.**
- This statement in the Discipline is more evidence of prejudice, prejudging that some people are not worthy to get the support of the church community in their most important life event.**
- Where does this hate come from? It clearly does not come from Christ.**

9+50

¶ 2702: Chargeable Offenses – a pastor can be charged with the following offenses:

... "(b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies;"...

- **This LGBTQ hatred is so vile the United Methodist Church would attempt to throw away more than 27 pastors careers through a wrenching church trial affecting them, their families, congregations and activists on all sides. These pastors deny the United Methodist Church prejudice-based statements in the Book of Discipline but live Christ's teaching.**
- **I attended the two day trial of the previous Reverend Beth Stroud in Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference in 2004. It was a travesty of justice to take away the ordination of this especially talented and loved pastor but the United Methodist Church did just that. Not one piece of evidence was presented challenging her ministry but rather she was complimented on her strong spirituality and talents.**
- **We have LGBTQ United Methodist Church pastors today who are in the closet and lying to us about who they are and who they love to avoid the disaster of losing their calling and careers. We have many others who have conducted private same sex marriages in support of people they love and followed Christ's calling to love.**

Regarding United Methodist funds

¶ 613.19. To ensure that no annual conference board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures.

This undermines the church's learning about this issue, a particularly insidious and hateful action. This prevents enlightenment of the Church. It impedes the Holy Spirit moving through the denomination.

- **Either the Church pompously knows its vicious abuse of LGBTQ people is correct and does not need more information to increase its understanding....**
- **Or does the Church sense its position violates Christian teaching and does not want the Church materials to study it which might call the United Methodist Church to account for its prejudice.**

Either way, it is another example of very clear prejudice by the denomination, prejudging a class of people. This is despicable and must stop!

In conclusion to my comments on the Discipline, the bible has been used viciously to persecute women, to persecute black people keeping them in slavery and minimized in the denomination and to persecute homosexual people. This must stop if the United Methodist Church is to move into the later part of this century.

Let's look at a little of United Methodist history

This era today is similar to a time in recent history where the church was split on racial lines.

CLEVELAND, May 5, 2000 (Religion News Service)--Methodists Issue Sweeping Apology for Church's Racism

Subtitle - Representatives of three black Methodist denominations that split from the main white-led church over racism, witnessed the apology.

Putting on sackcloth and ashes, the United Methodist Church confronted more than 200 years of institutional racism and discrimination that split John Wesley's Methodist followers into two distinct camps--black and white.

In a stirring three-hour ceremony Thursday night May 4th, delegates to the church's 2000 General Conference apologized to black churches that left the Methodist church because of pervasive racial discrimination. In addition, they apologized to black United Methodists who still face racial prejudice.

Read more at <http://www.beliefnet.com/news/2000/05/methodists-issue-sweeping-apology-for-churchs-racism.aspx#ccvz15FKm7cv0cjU.99>

The 'biblical interpretation' supported slavery and the denomination was weak-kneed and supported grave, grave injustice for 200 years that lasted all the way until 1968. And it was pressure from society that forced the church to apologize for centuries of racism.

Do you see the connection of our situation today involving LGBTQ people to the institutional racism the United Methodist Church promoted for two centuries? We like to think the Discipline is our unapologetic statement to the world. But society has undermined church errors in the past and society now calls the United Methodist Church to account for its hatred and abuse of LGBTQ people.

Again today, the United Methodist Church is weak-kneed and supporting grave injustice towards our LGBTQ brothers and sisters.

Let's look at demographics briefly

Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage by Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life, May 12, 2016
<http://www.pewforum.org/2016/05/12/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>

Public opinion on same-sex marriage in America

- In 15 years, support for same-sex marriage shifted from 35% in 2001 to 55% in 2016. I believe this dramatic shift is continuing.

Attitudes on same-sex marriage by generation

The increase in the share of adults who favor same-sex marriage is due in part to generational change. Younger generations express higher levels of support for same-sex marriage. However, older generations also have become more supportive of same-sex marriage in the past decade.

Year	Silent Generation (1928-45)	Baby Boomers (1946-64)	Generation X (1965-80)	Millennials (1981 or later)
2016	38%	46%	56%	71%

So American society is rejecting the prejudiced Book of Discipline entries about LGBTQ people and the United Methodist Church is not getting people in their 20s, 30s and even 40s as members. The denomination is getting its payback from society for hatred and abuse of LGBTQ people and the future of the denomination looks grim.

And I leave you with the question, where is Christ's call to love in all this?

- Our role is not to judge but to love. When will the United Methodist Church get back to loving all its members?
- When will love supersede the law in our day? This is the same question Christ answered in his day. The Old Covenant that God had established with his people required strict obedience to the Mosaic Law. Then Christ brought the new covenant and love for all. When will the United Methodist Church quit denouncing Christ and love as he called us to love?

What do I suggest as possible solutions?

1. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral states the principal factors that John Wesley believed illuminate the core of the Christian faith for the believer. Wesley did not formulate the Wesley Quadrilateral. Building on the Anglican theological tradition, Wesley added a fourth emphasis and that is 'experience'. The four components of the quadrilateral are (1) scripture, (2) tradition, (3) reason, and (4) experience. These four elements taken together bring the individual Christian to a mature and fulfilling understanding of the Christian faith and the required response of worship and service.
 - a. How does the Wesleyan Quadrilateral apply to human sexuality?

- i. Scripture – verses may seem to justify the abuse of LGBTQ people but based on my statements today, they cannot be used as guidance for us.
 - ii. Tradition – Our tradition is that Jesus welcomed all to him. Why would we abuse and marginalize a group of people who have been the targets of prejudice in our society. These were exactly the type of people Jesus reached out to engage.
 - iii. Reason – We are trying to grow the church and faith. Why would we exclude a group of people as large as the LGBTQ community, their siblings, parents, children and friends? That is clearly unreasonable.
 - iv. Experience – Just like every other community, the LGBTQ community has many devout and exceptional leaders and passionate followers of Jesus. Let’s engage the LGBTQ community to build the denomination.
- b. We know the denomination emphasizes the primacy of the scripture but this focus has led us to 200 years of support for slavery and racism, a grave injustice, and centuries of suppressing women’s talents in the leadership of the church, another grave injustice. And we now have at least 45 years of abusing our LGBTQ members and potential members which has also cost us dearly.
- i. We need to balance scripture with the other three aspects of the Quadrilateral to avoid further grievous errors in our actions. The survival of our denomination depends on this.
- c. **Call to Action:** We must eliminate the prejudicial statements from the Discipline, develop training and experiential activities to break down the prejudice in our clergy and congregations and move forward to resolve the other existential issues facing the denomination. The LGBTQ caucus groups like Reconciling Ministries Network, Affirmation and others are willing to help develop these plans. And let’s recruit more LGBTQ people into church leadership, as they have shown they have great faith and energy over these 45 years.
2. Here is an administrative alternative. Allow church regions to set their own Discipline in these issues. The Moravian Church is using that tactic today.
3. If neither of those options are possible, a split in the Church is coming. This is because an English writer in the 1700s and arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history, Samuel Johnson wrote:
 “Prejudice, not being founded on reason, cannot be removed by argument”.
 If there can be no reasoning, how can the split be prevented?

Thank you for your attention today.