

111 LGBTQI UNITED METHODIST CLERGY COME OUT

PRESS RELEASE

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On the eve of the 10 day General Conference of The United Methodist Church, more than 100 lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning, transgender and intersex (LGBTQI) clergy and clergy candidates have come out, representing more than 1550 years of service in the church. In a pastoral letter to the church, the group reminded the legislative body of the covenant they share as baptized members of the Body of Christ and as clergy who have been affirmed as possessing the gifts and graces for ministry and who have served their charges faithfully.

“However, while we have sought to remain faithful to our call and covenant, you have not always remained faithful to us,” the letter explained. “While you have welcomed us as pastors, youth leaders, district superintendents, bishops, professors, missionaries and other forms of religious service, you have required that we not bring our full selves to ministry, that we hide from view our sexual orientations and gender identities. As long as we did this, you gladly affirmed our gifts and graces and used us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in the varied places you sent us.”

The United Methodist Church is a global denomination of twelve million members, both within The United States and in Central Conferences outside the US. Since 1972, The UMC has declared in its *Book of Discipline* that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Through successive General Conferences, the church has increased its discriminatory policies by adding more restrictions against the participation of LGBTQI persons in the life and ministry of the church—including ordination, marriage, and even membership—at a pastor’s discretion—membership in a local church, as well as a ban on use of funds that can further the church’s understanding of homosexuality.

Through the letter, the group reminded voting delegates that should they seek “more restrictive language against LGBTQI persons, know that God will continue to move mysteriously in the hearts of LGBTQI young people and adults and will call them to serve within this denomination. You cannot legislate against God’s call.”

The 111 clergy and candidates follow the actions of 15 clergy colleagues in the New York Annual Conference, who came out on May 2, 2016. The signers come from across the connectional church, including more than 20 annual conferences within The United States as well as outside the US. Rev. Dr. Israel Alvaran, a clergy member from the Philippines who is appointed by his bishop to work with the Reconciling Ministries Network, said “As a person from a Central Conference, I stand as a witness that our cause against the church’s discrimination of LGBTQI persons is not a white, or US, or Western Jurisdiction ‘issue.’ I know we have LGBTQI believers in our churches in the Philippines and in every place where we serve around the globe.”

“The discriminatory policies and harmful language of The Book of Discipline does soul violence,” said Rev. Dr. Karen Oliveto, General Conference delegate and senior pastor of the 11,000 member Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco, one of the denomination’s largest churches. “We who are LGBTQI clergy are saying we refuse to be complicit with the church’s ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy. We will speak the truth of our lives. We will give hope to young people who feel the church’s rejection. We will do all we can to remind The United Methodist Church that LGBTQI persons are beloved children of God.”