

# Scripture Team Presentation The Way Forward

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PRESENTATION FEBRUARY 11 AND 15, 2024

LYTTLETON STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

# Agenda

- **Setting the Stage**
- **Opening Prayer**
- **Exploration of Key Controversies**
  - ✓ Interpretations of Biblical Passages
  - ✓ Balancing Law and Grace
  - ✓ Marriage and Clergy Leadership
- **Closing Prayer**



# Common Ground

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- *We all love LSUMC and its members!*
- *We take the Bible seriously, love God and want to honor and follow Christ in our actions and decisions.*
- *We believe that all of scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. (2 Tim 3:16)*
- *We don't hate LGBTQ+ people.*
- *We know this issue is VERY personal and many on both sides have family and friends who are in the gay community. We seek to avoid hurt, build understanding and grow spiritually in this process.*

It's likely that  
many of you  
have already  
made up your  
mind...

- We are not Bible Scholars.
- We can't cover everything.
- We are confining this scripture discussion to gay/lesbian relationships. (LGBTQ+ only for global inclusion)
- We need *everyone* to have an open mind, whether you change it or not.
- We will undoubtedly say something that makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.
- We realize that there are extremists on both sides who have hidden agendas on this topic. We pray for wisdom and a godly discernment.
- We remember – Our children and grandchildren are watching our decisions and our methods.

A silhouette of a person in a prayerful pose, with hands clasped together, set against a dark background. The person's head is bowed, and their hands are raised towards their face. The overall mood is solemn and reflective.

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# Opening Prayer

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# Interpretations of Biblical Passages

# Why all the confusion in Understanding Scripture?

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- **The Bible is simple but complex.** Milk to meat. Doesn't give all the answers we seek, so we long for understanding. Like the parables, God wants us to seek Him.
- **Meditation Literature** -- Dense writing is loaded with ambiguity (some intentional) and layers that lead to an adventure of discovery through personal study and corporate conversation. (CS Lewis – learning for eternity)
- **Variety of translations.**
- **Variety of styles** -- History, narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, etc.
- **Variety of Uses** -- rule book, history book, inspirational book, science book, diet book, theological encyclopedia, emotional grab bag, source of moral guidance, etc.
- **Specific Verses vs Contextual Reading and a Single Story.**
- **Misunderstanding the audience – Audience at the time or us or both?**
- **Denominational emphasis**

# The Potential Danger of Pulling Verses Out of Context

(Exegesis vs Eisegesis)

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**United Methodist Progressives and Traditionalists both agree that some single verses shouldn't be taken at face value (just a few examples):**

- Stop drinking only water and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. [1 Tim 5:23](#)
- From now on, let those having wives act as not having them. [1 Cor 7:29b](#)
- Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him. [1 Cor 11:14](#)
- Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. [1 Cor 13:34-35](#)
- For if a woman will not cover her head, she should cut off her hair. [1 Cor 11:6a](#)
- You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. [Ex 31:14a](#)



# Controversy Over Sexual Orientation Terms: A Long-time Debate

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**Historically, the Gay community has been called by several names (Mostly derogatory).** Identity vs gender practices or preferences

- “Homosexual” first coined in Germany in 1868.
- “Homosexual” first in the bible in 1946 -- RSV spread to NASB, TLB and NIV. RSV changed again to “sexual perverts” in next translation but remained in other translations. (Baldock)

**The term LGBTQ dates to at least the 1920’s**, when the first documented gay rights organization was founded. The term LBGTQ+ has been used since the 1990’s.

- For LGBTQ, the term is inclusive.
- For many Christians, the term implies no sexual limits (e.g., sexual immorality)

**LGBTQIA+ added as society is more accepting of all sexual orientations.**

# Six primary verses quoted against Same-Sex Relationships

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## TRADITIONAL

Genesis 19

Leviticus 18:22

Leviticus 20:10-16

I Corinthians 6:9-11

Romans 1:18-32

I Timothy 1:9-10

## PROGRESSIVE

Counter-arguments to understand these verses in terms of:

- Word usage and translation
- Context within a biblical passage
- Historical and cultural context
- Distinction between loving same-sex relationships and those based on adultery and other forms of sexual misconduct such as fornication and rape.

# Start with the Old Testament: Sodom and Gomorrah

(Gen 19:1-11)

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## TRADITIONAL

Sodom and Gomorra, at least partially, is an example of sinful, same-sex behavior. The term “Sodomite” has become a synonym for *homosexual*. (BenHammond)

Some interpret this account as a sin of failing to show hospitality, but it is unlikely that breeches of hospitality are significant enough to cause God to bring utter destruction.

## PROGRESSIVE

Homosexuality is irrelevant to this account. What the angels witnessed was hatred, lust, and attempted abuse, violence, rape, mob brutality. (Kea)

Of the 12 references to Sodom and Gomorrah after the event, only 2 mention sexual sins at all and none mention same-sex behavior (Knowing Jesus). (Reformation Project and Hays)

- [Jude 7:7](#) reference to sexual immorality and perversion.
- [2 Peter 2:7](#) – sexual conduct of the wicked (no mention of same-sex)
- [Ezek 16:49](#) list pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease without aiding the poor and needy

# Leviticus follows Unambiguous, Old Testament Holiness Code (Thou Shalt Not...)

(Lev 18:22, Lev 20:13)

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## TRADITIONAL

1. Same-sex behavior is always an abomination.  
No exceptions. (Lev 18:22)

This passage expresses unqualified disapproval...The biblical witness against homosexual practices is univocal.” (Hays)

2. Lev 20:10-16 specifically mentions man lying with a man as an abomination.

Listed as a series of sexual offenses, along with adultery, incest and bestiality; all are punishable by death.

## PROGRESSIVE

1. Word for “Abomination” is “To-evah,” used 117 times and only 6 have connection to sexual behavior and none to loving, same-sex relations.

- Charging interest on loans (*Ez 18:13*)
- Burning incense (*IS 1:13*)
- Eating pork, rabbit, and shellfish (*Deut 14:3-21*)
- Applying death penalty for working on the Sabbath (*Ex 35:2*)

2. OT laws are not necessarily God’s will for all time, but “expressions of how best to manage sin in a particular people at a particular time.” (John Piper)

- Many have been disregarded or deemed obsolete by the church, for instance circumcision and sacrificial and dietary practices. (Hays)

# How Shall We Then Live?

*(Applying Israel's traditional norms to Jesus' teaching)*

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Church leaders were charged with interpreting the law for everyday living (e.g., Moses, Solomon, Paul). The early church (Jews) generally adopted the Old Testament's teachings on matters of sexual immorality.

Three primary verses show the issues they faced in this area (**the lists**):

- **I Corinthians 6:9-11** – Salvation brings spiritually exalted state where rules no longer apply.
- **Romans 1:18-32** – The only passage in the New Testament that seems to explain the condemnation of homosexual behavior theologically, as part of overall morality.
- **I Timothy 1:10** – Warnings against false teachers in Ephesus. Vise list highlights everything from lying to slave-trading to murdering one's parents in the context of behaviors "contrary to sound teaching."



# Paul Talked about Sex Because the Romans Talked about Sex *(Proboa)*

Pompeii (pop. 6000)  
Mt Vesuvius Aug 24, AD79

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- 13 “quickie” side rooms just off the streets (Yellow Triangles)
- 7 private sex clubs for the rich (behind the side rooms -- pictures)
- 9 baths, theaters and amphitheaters – Sex for a price (Orange Stars)
- 41 confirmed brothels (including Lupinare Grande) (Blue Dots)

# Being a Christian Doesn't Mean There are No Longer Laws

(I Cor 6:9-20)

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## TRADITIONAL

1. Some Corinthians thought themselves as above the law. In **1 Corinthians 6:9-13**, Paul warns that those who persist in a variety of sins (sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who have sex with men, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers) **will not inherit the kingdom of God. Applies to those who have already believed.**
2. In **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** Paul taught that **the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and should be treated with reverence and respect.** Bodies members with Christ Himself and temples of the Holy Spirit.
3. We can not be caring and say nothing about sinful behavior. (Parnell)

## PROGRESSIVE

1. **There is no indication that the Corinthians were concerned about homosexuality per se, more about sexual abuse and unbridled sex. Entire list is about taking advantage of others.** There are two words for “men having sex with men.” It describes an aggressor and a victim.
2. In all loving relationships, whether same-sex or not, the body is treated as a temple of the Holy Spirit, with reverence and respect.
3. There is no indication that same-sex relationships are sinful. Since sins are heart-issues, it would be difficult to judge except to focus on behaviors.

# The Foundation of Sinful Behavior is Idolatry

(Rom 1:18-32)

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## TRADITIONAL

1. Only real theological description.
2. Because “they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” ... God “gave them over to their shameful lusts. (Hays)
  - Idolatry is the root sin against the Creator.
  - God gives them the freedom to do what they want.
  - Paul follows with a list of actions that demonstrate a rejection of God’s design (including same-sex relations, envy, murder, gossips, disobeying parents, etc.).

## PROGRESSIVE

1. “You see that the whole of desire comes from an excess which cannot contain itself within its proper limits.” It’s about self-centeredness out of control. Paul isn’t specifically condemning being gay as opposed to being straight. He is condemning idolatry in the form of worshiping self. (Chrysostom)
2. Paul is condemning **any self-seeking excess and obsession** shown by the repeated use of the term “lustful” from a sexual standpoint and by the other sins in the list of uncontrolled obsessions.



# Timothy Charged to Oppose False Teachers

(I Tim 1:9-10)

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## TRADITIONAL

1. **The goal of the law is love.**
2. **Real purpose of the law is to show man his sinfulness.** All are sinners. If we think otherwise, check against the Law. If we realize we are sinners, we need Christ, not legalism.
3. Paul's list here is similar to I Corinthians 6:9-20 and Romans 1:18-32. (lawbreakers, rebels, ungodly, sinful, unholy, irreligious, murderers, sexually immoral, **those practicing homosexuality**, slave traders, liars and perjurers.)

## PROGRESSIVE

1. **Loving same-sex relationships are not sinful.** All sins on this list are about abusers and aggressors. The word for “sexual immorality” is the Greek word *porneia*, which means “illicit sexual intercourse.” For consistency, “practicing homosexuality” must also describe immoral sex.
2. **Jesus said, “It is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come,** fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.” (Mark 7:20-23). Loving relationships do not defile.



## Balancing Law and Grace

*Do not think that I have  
come to abolish the Law  
or the Prophets, I have  
not come to abolish them  
but to fulfill them.*

*Matt 5:17 NIV*

# Does the Law Change?

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1. **Adam and Eve (Gen 1) – One Law (Obedience)**
2. **Guidance from Where? Some Laws were common in all cultures in the ancient world.**
  - Cain and Abel – They knew the law
  - Tower of Babel – They replaced obedience with self-striving
  - Noah – God stops the downward spiral of unrestrained sin
3. **Abraham – One-way covenant -- Obedience**
4. **Mt. Sinai (Mt. Horeb) – Exodus 20 – Learning and Preparing for Wilderness temptations**
5. **Across the Jordan – Deuteronomy, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law – Restatement of the Law for a new generation. Covenant is conditional. (Example: Sabbath – Reminder of Creation vs Reminder of Moses)**
6. **Babylon – Mitzvah studies. Laws for captives. A people set apart. Law revisited after the wall.**
7. **Returning from Babylon – Ezra 8 (Law, Food), Nehemiah 12 (Celebration with music and the law)**

# Jesus – The Sermon on the Mount

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## The New Commandments (Matthew 5:1-16)

- Beatitudes
- Be Salt and Light

## Understanding the New in the Context of the Old (Matthew 5:17-6:34)

- Jesus fulfilled the OT laws with His life/death
- A Heart Standard, not External Laws

## Cautions (Matthew 7:1-27)

- Be cautious in judging others (Mt 7:1ff)
- Strive to discern the correct path (Mt 7:13)



# Jesus discussed other sexual sins, but never discussed the same-sex issue

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## TRADITIONAL

There are lots of topics Jesus never talked about (or at least weren't recorded in Scripture), e.g., kidnapping.

The goal was not to give a comprehensive list of sinful activities but a general guideline to avoid sexual immorality and examples of what that would mean.

## PROGRESSIVE

Jesus focuses on Adultery, Lust and Divorce as examples of sexual immorality, not same-sex relationships:

- **Adultery** (Woman brought before Him in John 8:3-4) – Sin no more
- (Matt 5:27-30) **Looking at a woman in Lust.**
- **Divorce** (Matt 5:31-37) Divorce forces wives to commit adultery. Don't break promises and don't swear an oath.

# Cornelius: First Gentile Conversion

## Are There Parallels? Differences? Lessons?

(Acts 10)

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CORNELIUS



PETER



# Jerusalem Council:

## Are There Parallels? Differences? Lessons to Learn?

(Acts 15:28-29)

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### TRADITIONAL

Jerusalem council is an example of the early church grappling with the OT laws and NT living by grace.

The final decision was that the Gentiles were no longer under the law but should “**abstain from blood sacrificed to idols, from the meat of strangled animals and blood and from fornication (*porneia*)**. You will do well to avoid these things.”

### PROGRESSIVE

**Paul and Barnabas proclaimed that Gentiles who put their faith in Christ and demonstrate the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives are no longer under the law. (Acts 15:8-9). They need Jesus, not the Law.**

Dietary decision was based on not offending the Jewish faithful. We eat rare meat now and don't follow Jewish dietary laws.

# Human Sexuality in the *Discipline* Today

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## The United Methodist Church book of *Discipline* states that:

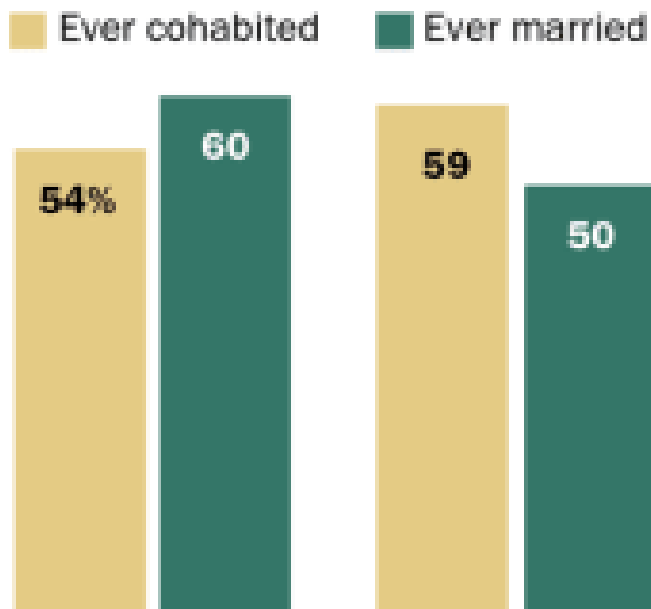
- “...self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”
  - Non-practicing homosexuals could hold these positions.
- “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”



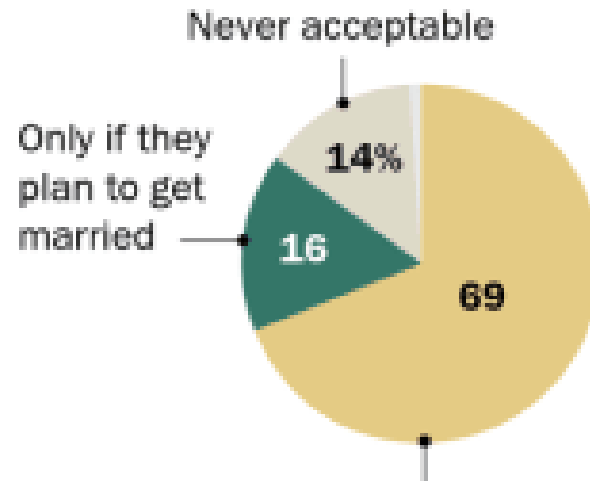


# Love, Marriage and Church Leadership

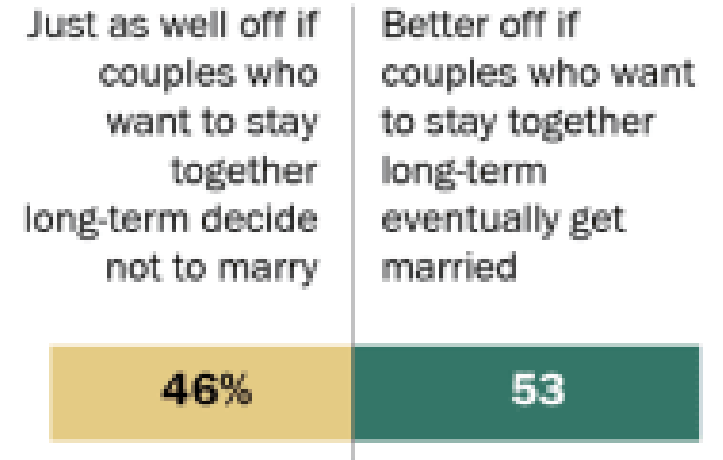
*% of adults ages 18 to 44 who have ...*



*% of adults saying it is acceptable for an unmarried couple to live together ...*



*% of adults saying society is ...*



# Reality of Marriage Today?

Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.  
(Horowitz, et. al., Pew Research Center, 2019)

# What is the Role of Marriage in the Bible?

(Gen 2:18-25)

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## TRADITIONAL

**God established the male/female marriage as the ideal.** Purpose cannot be fulfilled otherwise.

### **The Practical Purpose of marriage in Genesis:**

- Companionship, suitable helper
- United bond, one flesh
- Commitment in the Oneness of the relationship
- No hidden secrets between them (naked)
- Means of procreation and partnership in ruling the earth (Gen 1)

## PROGRESSIVE (REFORMATION PROJECT 2023)

**Marriage is fundamentally about commitment**—keeping covenant with a spouse reflects God’s own covenant with mankind through Jesus.

**Same-sex marriage is not mentioned in Genesis 1-2. All of these apply to same-sex relationships, except procreation, however:**

- Does not mean forever.
- No longer need to “fill the earth”.
- Gay couples can raise orphaned/foster children.
- Some heterosexual couples can’t or don’t want children. Should they be denied marriage?

# Marriage Like Christ and The Church

(Eph 5:28-32)

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## TRADITIONAL

**Complimentary, ideal marriage relationship --  
Husbands should love their wives like their  
own bodies. Wives submit themselves to  
their own husbands as they do to the Lord.**

This is a profound mystery about Christ and  
the Church. We can't fully understand it now,  
so we should stick to the male/female pattern  
of marriage in Genesis to ensure we are able  
to recognize truth when we see it in the end  
times.

## PROGRESSIVE

**The language in this passage is controversial.**

- It has been misrepresented and misused throughout history in male-dominated societies and/or households where men forget the loving part of the equation. (Ref. Gen 3)
- Same-sex couples can have mutually loving and submitting relationships. Otherwise, same as bad relationships.
- All healthy relationships, sexual or not, require a complimentary exchange that supports the other in their walk with the Lord.

**All we really know from this “profound  
mystery” is that marriage is about loving each  
other unconditionally and supporting each  
other on our journey to holiness until death.**

# Is Celibacy a Solution?

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## TRADITIONAL

1. “For there are eunuchs who ..... made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 19:12) Since gay marriage is not appropriate, celibacy is the best solution.
2. Many Christians choose singleness as a way to be available to further God’s kingdom.
3. Many civil laws have addressed financial concerns, and other issues of fairness for gays without the need for Christian marriage.

## PROGRESSIVE

1. Celibacy is a gift, not something that should be forced on someone.
2. Same-sex couples who meet the obligations of a marriage commitment, should be allowed to marry. Gender preference is not a factor.
3. “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain themselves, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.” (1Cor 7:8-9).

# Qualifications for Church Leadership

(Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-16)

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## TRADITIONAL

- 1. Titus 1:5-9** – Homosexual behavior violates the standards for elders:
  - “Husband of one wife,” indicates a male/female relationship.
  - Would not meet character requirements
  - Would not hold true to the Word or rebuke those who contradict it
- 2. 1 Timothy 3:1-16** -- Homosexual behavior violates the standards for overseers:
  - “Husband of one wife”
  - Managing a well-run household to demonstrate the ability to care for the church.

## PROGRESSIVE

- 1. Being a “husband of one wife” indicates there should not be more than one wife (polygamy).**
- 2. The focus on character underlines that Jesus sees the heart and not external factors.** His apostles were not seen as leaders on the surface. **The Holy Spirit undergirds the ability and selection for church leadership.**
- 4. Gender preferences do not mean a lack of character** or the inability to provide sound biblical teaching or caring for the church family.

# Churches are Slow to Change

## *Women as Clergy in the Methodical Methodist Church*

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1761 John Wesley authorized Sarah Crosby to be a licensed preacher.

1866 Helenor M. Davisson is ordained deacon by the North Indiana Conference, making her the first ordained woman in the Methodist tradition.

1869 Margaret Newton Van Cott is the first woman in the Methodist Episcopal Church to receive a local preacher's license.

1875 Pauline Williams Martindale is ordained as an elder in the Methodist Protestant Church.

MANY MORE.....

May 4, 1956 General Conference voted for full clergy rights for women. That decision forever changed the face of ordained ministers.

# Loving Others: A False Dichotomy?

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## TRADITIONAL

1. We can be loving, welcoming and accepting members of the LGBTQ+ gay community, without accepting them to lead our church or for our church to bless those marriages.
2. Many traditionals also have family and close friends that are LGBTQ+ with whom they interact regularly in a non-judgmental way.
3. Failing to acknowledge wrong behavior can keep self and others from flourishing.

## PROGRESSIVE

1. It is difficult to *feel* love if the other sees me as sinful. True love accepts me for who I am.
2. Withholding member privileges for Gays feels judgmental and condescending. They are treated as lesser people. Adulterers, gossips, liars are not treated the same.
3. There is a difference between individual actions and those of the entire congregation. The decision to leave a denomination because of LGBTQ+ feels like rejection from all and individual voices are not heard.



# Next Steps: Do Your Own Research, Prayer and Meditation

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What is God telling me in this study?

What do I need to explore further?

Can we agree to disagree on these issues?

The world is falling apart and needs Christ. Is this the most important issue? Should we be addressing another?

How can we ensure we can truly welcome all people into our congregation?

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A dark silhouette of a person with their hands clasped in prayer, set against a dark background. The person's head is bowed, and their hands are positioned near their chest. The overall mood is solemn and reflective.

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# Closing Prayer

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