



Foundry United Methodist Church
1500 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Rev. Dean Snyder, Senior Minister

November 11, 2007

***A Pastoral Letter Concerning the Institution of a Service to
Recognize and Honor Lesbian and Gay Committed Relationships***

Dear Friends:

As a loyal United Methodist pastor, it is my desire and commitment to live within the covenant of the United Methodist Church as set forth in our Church's Constitution, General Rules, and *Book of Discipline*. It is my desire to be obedient to the covenant and order of the Church even in matters on which I may disagree.

The *Book of Discipline* states: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." (Para 341.6)

It is also my strong desire to be a faithful and effective pastor by providing pastoral care and services to the members and constituents of the congregation I am appointed to serve. Foundry United Methodist Church, reflective of its community, includes a significant presence of lesbian and gay people, some of whom are in committed relationships. The failure of their Christian community and their pastor to properly recognize and honor their committed relationships formally denies them, at the very least, an encouragement and spiritual support the Church provides to other couples. At the worst, it undermines and dishonors their commitments by withholding recognition and prayerful support.

I am reminded of this disparity whenever I read the Church's Constitution, which states, in part:

"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. In the United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition." (BOD Division 1.4)

I am also reminded of the consequences of failing to recognize and honor some of our congregants' commitments when I recall the General Rules established by John Wesley:

“It is therefore expected of all who continue [in Methodist societies] that they should continue to evidence their desire for salvation, First, by doing no harm ... Secondly, By doing good.”(BOD, Para 103)

Our failure to recognize and honor the committed relationships of our lesbian and gay members does harm to them and to the larger society by failing to provide spiritual and communal support for commitment and stability within gay and lesbian relationships.

The topic of same-sex unions has been discussed formally at Foundry Church for more than three years and informally for a much longer time. I am appreciative for all the leaders and members of this congregation who have studied and shared with each other and with me as we have deliberated about what it means to be a faithful congregation and as I have pondered what it means to be a faithful pastor.

Because of my desire to be to be obedient to the covenant and order of the Church, and at the same time to provide faithful and effective pastoral ministry to our lesbian and gay members and constituents, I am announcing my intention to make myself pastorally available to lead services which recognize and honor lesbian and gay committed relationships. These will not be “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions,” but will instead be worship services which recognize and honor committed relationships of lesbian and gay members and constituents.

The following principles will guide such gatherings for worship:

1. Such services will be offered for couples who are members or constituents of Foundry Church who have participated in a Pre-Cana weekend or other preparations with the pastor.
2. Couples will make their commitment and vows to each other in a setting other than the service. Ceremonies in which these commitments and vows are made “shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.” Such a ceremony may be a personal gathering in which the pastor is present but does not conduct the ceremony; it may be a ceremony conducted by a lay person within the congregation trained and authorized to do so; it may be a wedding or civil ceremony in a jurisdiction in which such ceremonies are legal; or it may be any other ceremony which does not violate Para 341.6 of the *Book of Discipline*.
3. At the request of the couple, I will then lead a service at Foundry Church or at another location. The service will include the worship of God and recognize and honor the commitment which has previously been made. Vows and/or other statements of commitment previously made will be shared with and reported to the gathered congregation.

4. Other details of such worship services will follow the practices and principles established in Foundry Church's wedding policies so long as they do not violate Para 341.6 of the *Book of Discipline*.

I would also implore the Foundry congregation and others of good will to continue to work to change the *Book of Discipline* by removing Para. 341.6 and everything else in the *Discipline* which discriminates against people because of their sexual orientation. I would encourage us to continue to work to help our beloved Church become a Church in which all people are affirmed, included, valued, honored and loved.

I would like to invite the congregation of Foundry Church to meet in the church sanctuary to discuss this letter on Sunday, December 16 at 12:30 PM. I will also invite additional discussion by Foundry's Church Council at its meeting on December 18. Other meetings, as appropriate, will be scheduled during January 2008. It is my intention to make myself pastorally available for such services effective February 1, 2008.

Thank you for your prayers, thoughts and feelings. May the Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on us and melt, mold, fill and use us!

In the love of Christ,

Dean Snyder, Senior Pastor
Foundry United Methodist Church