

## Key Policy Events in the Greater United Methodist Church and at Foundry UMC Regarding Homosexuality

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### 1972

The UMC's debate over homosexuality begins publicly. General Conference (GC) adopts a statement affirming the sacred worth and civil rights of lesbians and gays but adds that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

### 1976

GC also changes the Social Principles' wording on gay unions to read, "We do not recognize a relationship between two persons of the same sex as constituting marriage" A "footnote" is approved "to restrict ordination of gays and lesbians" (RCP, 2000b, p. 9; Moore, 2000a). It is not printed in the 1976 *Book of Discipline* but does appear in later versions of the *Discipline*.

### 1980

At the UM GC, a futile attempt is made to include in the *Discipline* the phrase "no self-avowed practicing homosexual therefore shall be ordained or appointed in the United Methodist Church." GC adopts a statement saying, "The United Methodist Church has moved away from prohibitions of specific acts, for such prohibitions can be endless. We affirm our trust in the covenant community and the process by which we ordain ministers."

### 1982

The UM Judicial Council (JC) rules (Decision 513) that nothing in church law prohibits ordination of homosexual persons.

### 1984

GC adopts new language about homosexuality: "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve . . ."

The first Reconciling Congregations are formed shortly after the end of GC: Washington Square UMC in New York City and Wesley UMC in Fresno, CA.

### 1987

An "ecclesiastical trial" is held in St. John's UMC, Dover, New Hampshire, for Rose Mary Denman, a forty-year-old ordained United Methodist minister charged with being a 'self-avowed, practicing homosexual.' The jury votes 12 to one to suspend her until the 1988 General Conference. She considers the outcome a success, for

she didn't lose her ordination. The prosecution also thought the trial was a success, because the trial did not become a debate over church policy.

### 1988

A change in the Social Principles statement is made with the addition of the italicized phrase and sentence: "Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, *we affirm that God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.*"

### 1988–1992

Four year study by the UM Committee to Study Homosexuality.

### 1990

Foundry formally begins the process of considering whether or not to join the Reconciling Congregations Program.

### 1992

In a majority report, the Committee to Study Homosexuality asks GC to remove the language in the Social Principles "condemning homosexual practice and replace it with an acknowledgement that the church 'has been unable to arrive at a common mind' on the issue." GC delegates vote 710-238 to retain the 'incompatible' language.

The Reconciling Congregation Program establishes a national office in Chicago.

### 1995

Foundry votes to become a "Reconciling Congregation."

### 1996

GC legislation includes a ban on same-gender union ceremonies. "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches" An attempt to replace the "incompatibility" clause with one acknowledging that UMs are not able to arrive at a "common mind" fails.

The ban on ordination of homosexuals is left in place, and clarifying words are added to the *Discipline* that define "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" as one who "openly acknowledges to a bishop, district

superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual.”

### **1998**

The UM Council of Bishops issues a statement pledging to uphold the UM *Discipline*, “including the statements on homosexuality . . . contained in the Social Principles, including the prohibition of ceremonies celebrating homosexual unions by our ministers and in our churches.” They also affirm their “pastoral responsibility to all peoples, including those who feel excluded from the church.”

The UM Judicial Council reverses its earlier rulings and says that conferences “may not identify themselves with or take on the label of an unofficial body or movement.” This action retracts earlier JC Decisions 794 and 665 that allowed the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns and the Wisconsin Annual Conference to call themselves ‘Reconciling.’ When asked for an interpretation of JC Decision 847 regarding the use of the word ‘Reconciling,’ UM Bishop Joe Sprague says local UM Churches are included in the decision, thus meaning that local UM churches cannot call themselves ‘Reconciling.’

In August, the Judicial Council rules in Decision 844 that the Social Principles statement regarding same-sex unions has the force of law and that “clergy who conduct such ceremonies could be charged with disobeying the order and discipline of the church and could lose their ministerial credentials.”

### **2000**

GC Delegates vote down a recommended change to the wording of the Social Principles that would state that United Methodists are not of one mind with regard to homosexuality. Delegates vote to maintain the UMC’s position on homosexuality, to maintain the “incompatible” language, to uphold the ordination ban for homosexual persons, and to keep the same-sex union prohibition.

### **2004**

The GC adopts a resolution affirming the unity of the church in response to the circulation of a document suggesting the formation of a task force to study splitting the church. “As United Methodists we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and affirm our commitment to work together for our common mission of making disciples throughout the world.” It was introduced by the Rev. John Schol of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual (regional) Conference and approved by a vote of 869-41.

Delegates solidly reaffirmed the denomination’s positions on homosexuality, and their action was backed by Judicial Council decisions announced during

the conference. Paragraph 161.G of the church’s Social Principles continues to state that homosexual practice is “incompatible with Christian teaching,” although a clause was added that United Methodists “will seek to live in Christian community.” An attempt to add another sentence to the paragraph recognizing that Christians disagree on the homosexuality issue was defeated. Prohibitions against the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals were upheld, and attempts to adjust language in Paragraph 162.H, which deals with equal rights regardless of sexual orientation, were defeated by 2-1 margins.

Paragraph 2702 in the *Book of Discipline* was amended to clarify language and give bishops, pastors and diaconal ministers a list of chargeable offenses that could result in a church trial. Those offenses include not being celibate in singleness or being unfaithful in a heterosexual marriage; being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; conducting ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.

The Foundry UMC Church Council recommends beginning a dialogue on the issue of same-sex unions.

### **2005**

The Judicial Council issues Decision 1032 ruling that a Virginia United Methodist pastor had the right to refuse church membership to a gay man on the basis of the man’s sexual orientation.

### **2007**

The Same-Sex Union Issues Working Group issues a report to the Foundry UMC Church Council outlining options the Council may wish to consider adopting as church policy.

In November, Reverend Dean Snyder, Senior Pastor at Foundry UMC, issues “A Pastoral Letter Concerning the Institution of a Service to Recognize and Honor Lesbian and Gay Committed Relationships” announcing his intention to be pastorally available to lead services which recognize and honor lesbian and gay committed relationships beginning February 1, 2008.

### **2008**

Delegates to the 2008 General Conference on April 30 rejected changes to the United Methodist Social Principles that would have acknowledged that church members disagree on homosexuality.

Delegates instead adopted a minority report that retained language in the denomination’s 2004 *Book of Discipline* describing homosexual practice as “incompatible with Christian teaching.” In its majority report, the legislative committee, chaired by Frederick Brewington, New York Conference, recommended that delegates delete the incompatibility sentence and adopt the statement, “Faithful, thoughtful people who

have grappled with this issue deeply disagree with one another; yet all seek a faithful witness.” The revision also would have asked United Methodists and others “to refrain from judgment regarding homosexual persons and practices as the Spirit leads us to a new insight.”

The minority report presented the view that any United Methodist statement on human sexuality needs to be “clear, concise and faithful to biblical teaching” and that leaving out the statement that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching” would be confusing, especially for members of the church outside the United States.

After replacing the majority report with the minority report, delegates approved it 501-417.

### **2009**

The Judicial Council overturns a ruling by Baltimore-Washington Conference Bishop John Schol regarding the conference’s adoption of a statement declaring that “a more authentic and truthful representation of The United Methodist Church” is that “we disagree” on gay and lesbian issues.

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In addition to resources previously provided, material was adapted from the following sources:

[http://www.gumresearch.org/reference/umc\\_history/timeline\\_warning\\_long\\_very\\_detailed/](http://www.gumresearch.org/reference/umc_history/timeline_warning_long_very_detailed/)

<http://www.gc2004.org>

<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=lwL4KnN1LtH&b=2639513&ct=5315905>