



The United Methodist Church
GREAT PLAINS AREA

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SCOTT J. JONES
Resident Bishop

Statement by Bishop Scott Jones Regarding Approval of Petition
“Acknowledgement of Diverse Beliefs Regarding Homosexuality”
June 16, 2015

On June 13, the Great Plains Annual Conference passed a petition to General Conference entitled “Acknowledgement of Diverse Beliefs Regarding Homosexuality.” The petition was thoroughly discussed by many people with clear and cogent views expressed on both sides. The debate was forceful and mutually respectful. The conference’s petition will ask the Church’s General Conference to make changes in six parts of The Book of Discipline. It would recognize the diversity of beliefs about homosexuality and allow same-gender marriages and the ordination of self-avowed, practicing homosexual persons.

It is important to understand that the adoption of this petition by a majority of the members in attendance at the Great Plains Conference does not change the official teaching or the rules of the denomination. It expresses the desires of a majority of those who were present and voting at the Great Plains Conference session. Changes such as these can only be made by delegates from across the United States and around the world at the General Conference which will meet in May of 2016. The action taken by the Great Plains Conference is a request to the world-wide governing body to consider making those changes.

Nothing about our current doctrine or discipline has been changed. United Methodist clergy are not permitted to perform same-gender marriages and such ceremonies may not be held in our churches. The Church’s teaching on the practice of homosexuality remains unchanged and can be found in paragraph 161F of *The Book of Discipline, 2012*.

It is possible that same gender marriages may become legal in Kansas and Nebraska. If that happens, nothing changes regarding United Methodist discipline. Some clergy have asked what are the limits regarding what they can and cannot do. I have given the following guidelines to some clergy. For the sake of transparency I thought all of you should be aware of what may and may not be done without committing a chargeable offense.

- Clergy may not allow any United Methodist church building to be used for same-gender marriages.
 - They can help the persons find another venue—another church, home, etc.
 - They can suggest they hold the service outside the church and off church property.
- Clergy can participate in these ways:
 - Pre-marital counseling
 - Attend the ceremony
 - Read scripture, pray, or give the meditation
 - Lift up a same-gender, newly married couple in worship or by printed announcements. If clergy do this it would be best to talk about this as a church council first.



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- Clergy cannot participate in these ways:
 - Preside over the ceremony, specifically the vows, exchange of rings or the declaration and pronouncement of marriage.
 - Sign the certificate of marriage.
 - Clergy should not participate or stand during any ceremony where it might appear to those present or in photographs that you are presiding or conducting the ceremony. Clergy may engage in limited participation in the ways described above.

The United Methodist Church has been debating the practice of homosexuality for 43 years. I have learned that it is very important how we treat each other during this process. We are called to love and respect each other in the midst of disagreement. Our conference theme “Though Many, One” focused on the importance of unity in the midst of disagreements. I continue to pray for maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace even as we discuss important and difficult issues. Please join me in reading, meditating upon and inwardly digesting Ephesians 4:1-16.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott J. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott J. Jones