

FAULTLINES

Holy Conversations about Human Sexuality
and The United Methodist Church

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The United Methodist Church

Note: Information contained within this sampler is current as of the sampler's publication. Given that several of the publications outlined herein are under development, there may be slight modifications in the final product, particularly to those with later publication dates. We endeavored to adequately represent the content of each piece of the collection based on the information currently available.

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October 2017

Dear Friends:

Abingdon Press is pleased to introduce Faultlines, a suite of new resources to encourage and inform robust conversations about challenging questions being debated by faithful United Methodists.

This sampler provides detail about the publications that make up the Faultlines collection, which includes the following titles:

For group study:

1. *Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church* is a four-week small group study for adults (available now). Topics for discussion are: Is the practice of homosexuality incompatible with Christian teaching? Is same-gender marriage compatible with Christian teaching? Is ordaining practicing homosexuals compatible with Christian teaching? Where are we now?
2. Adolf Hansen, *Is It Time? Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question at a Time*. 11/2017. Twelve questions to help people individually and in groups think through various issues concerning homosexuality. Examples include: Is it time to stop using the word homosexuality without defining it? Is it time to stop confusing homosexual attraction with homosexual behavior? Is it time to stop interpreting the Bible as a static rather than a developing understanding of God's revelation? Is it time to stop calling homosexuality a sin without clarifying what we mean? Is it time to stop fearing persons who have a sexual orientation or gender identity different from our own? Is it time to start expending our full energy on the mission of The United Methodist Church: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?

3. David N. Field, *Our Purpose Is Love: The Wesleyan Way to Be the Church*. 5/2018. An engaging group study of essential and unique insights of the Wesleyan movement and rediscovery of an exhilarating and loving vision for living as the church now.

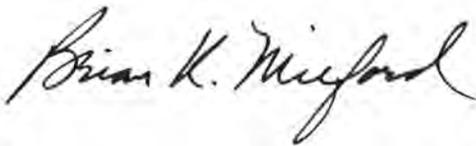
For pastors, leaders, and laity:

4. Brian K. Milford, editor, *Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists*. 2/2018. A collection of short articles by diverse UMC thought leaders who each answer: How might United Methodists bear witness to graceful and mutually respectful ways of living in the Wesleyan tradition amid enduring disagreements about same-gender relationships and related church practices? Essayists include Scott Kisker, Jim and Jennifer Cowart, Rob Fuquay, Jay Williams, Kim Reisman, Bryan Collier, Audrey Warren, Phil Wogaman, Eduard Kheday, Magrey deVega, Tom Lambrecht, Lacey Warner, Donna Pritchard, David Field, Diane Kenaston.
5. Matt Rawle, Juan Huertas, Katie McKay Simpson, *The Marks of Hope: Where the Spirit Is Moving*. 3/2018. Imagines hopeful models for how the church shows the world ways of coming together amid times of crisis and division. The authors acknowledge significant differences in the church, yet lift up powerful signs of hope for the present and future in how we deal with concerns around gender, technology, justice, mission, story, and more.
6. Phillip Cramer and William L. Harbison, *The Fight for Marriage: Church Conflicts and Courtroom Contests*. 4/2018. The authors, two UM laypersons, brought the case *Tanco v. Haslam* in Nashville federal court. The case ultimately went with similar cases in Kentucky, Ohio, and Michigan to the U. S. Supreme Court, resulting in the 2015 landmark court decision permitting same-gender marriage nationwide.
7. Rob Renfroe and Walter Fenton, *Are We Better Together? An Evangelical Perspective on the United Methodist Divide*. 4/2018. Explores moving forward by looking at the topics of theology, authority, covenant, and

unity. This book questions the idea that the diverse voices in The UMC are “better together,” and calls readers to consider ways in which separation might be beneficial.

8. Karen P. Oliveto, *Our Strangely Warmed Hearts: Coming Out into God's Call*. 4/2018. Bishop Oliveto includes stories of spiritual renewal of gay and lesbian Christians who came out to family, friends, and coworkers.
9. David McAllister-Wilson, *A New Church and a New Seminary: Theological Education is the Solution*. 5/2018. Examines causes of congregational decline and proposes what will likely happen to transform seminaries that forge partnerships with congregational leaders.
10. Carolyn Moore, *The Nineteen: Questions to Kindle a Wesleyan Spirit*. 5/2018. Walks readers through Wesley's nineteen historic questions, which newly ordained clergy still answer today. Covering topics from faith in Christ to spiritual practices, to handling debt, these questions lie at the heart of the covenant that binds clergy together. How we honor commitments to the rules of the Church is of particular urgency for contemporary readers.

We offer this array of books with differing perspectives for your study, reflection, and edification as together we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.



Brian K. Milford
Publisher
Abingdon Press

AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS



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Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church

Dave Barnhart is the founding pastor of Saint Junia United Methodist Church, a network of house churches in Birmingham, Alabama. He earned his B.A. from Oglethorpe University in 1994, his M.Div from Candler School of Theology in 1997, and his Ph.D. in homiletics and social ethics from Vanderbilt University in 2004. He has been a pastor in the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church for fifteen years. He is the author of *What's in the Bible About Church?* and *God Shows No Partiality*. He has contributed to *Abingdon Preaching Annual*, *FaithLink*, and *Ministry Matters*.



M. Garlinda Burton

Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

M. Garlinda Burton, a United Methodist deaconess in Nashville, TN, is a writer, editor, Biblical study leader, and consultant on cultural diversity and intersectionality. She also serves as project director for the Nashville Freedom School Partnership, a summer literacy program for at-risk children and teens.



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Bryan Collier is the Founding and Lead Pastor of The Orchard. He is a graduate of Mississippi State University and Asbury Theological Seminary. He hails from Etta, Mississippi, and lives in Tupelo, Mississippi. He is the author of *The Go-To Church*.



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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Jim Cowart

Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Phillip F. Cramer

The Fight for Marriage: Church Conflicts and Courtroom Contests

Phillip Cramer specializes in plaintiff's recovery cases and other litigation in the areas of antitrust, insurance coverage, false claims, property rights, and complex business disputes. He graduated with highest honors from the Vanderbilt University Law School. He represents clients in high profile civil rights cases, having brought cases to vindicate immigrant rights, women's rights, voting rights, privacy rights, and marriage equality. Previously, Cramer worked as a trial attorney in the Honors Program of the Department of Justice, Antitrust Division. He is an active member of Nashville's Belmont United Methodist Church where he serves as chair of the Administrative Board.



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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

Magrey deVega is the Senior Pastor at Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida. He is the author of *Awaiting the Already: An Advent Journey through the Gospels*. He is also the Leadership Editor for Covenant Bible Study, overseeing the weekly small group classroom experience. He is a contributor to the *The Abingdon Creative Preaching Annual 2016*; *Feasting on the Gospels: John*; and the forthcoming *Ultimate Lectionary Sermon Series Guide*. He has written leader's guides and program manuals for including *Counterfeit Christianity*, *Earn. Save. Give*, and *Five Marks of a Methodist*. He is a graduate of United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, and Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida.



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Are We Better Together? An Evangelical Perspective on the United Methodist Divide

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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Rebekah Jordan Gienapp

Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church

Rebekah Gienapp holds a Master of Divinity from Garrett Evangelical Seminary and is an ordained deacon in the Memphis Conference of The United Methodist Church. She writes regularly for United Methodist *FaithLink*, particularly on how issues of social justice intersect with Christian faith. She blogs about raising children to be global citizens and little change makers at *The Barefoot Mommy*. She is the founder and past executive director of Workers Interfaith Network in Memphis, Tennessee.



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Is it Time? Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question at a Time

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The Fight for Marriage: Church Conflicts and Courtroom Contests

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Juan Huertas

The Marks of Hope: Where the Spirit Is Moving in a Wounded Church

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Jill M. Johnson

Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church

Jill M. Johnson is a freelance writer and communications professional living in Austin, Texas. Over the past 25 years she has worked in nonprofit, legislative and faith-based arenas and has worked as a healthcare and education advocate. Jill loves to combine her working knowledge of public policy issues and current events with her inclination toward viewing all of life through a spiritual lens. She believes our faith doesn't just intersect culture; it nudges its way into our line of vision until God's presence permeates all we see. Jill has written for Cokesbury, Abingdon Press, United Methodist Publishing House and other organizations. Jill currently worships with the community of Christ that is Bethany United Methodist Church, and serves as their Director of Inviting Ministries. Her writer website can be viewed at www.jillmaxwelljohnson.com.



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Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church

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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

Tracy S. Malone is bishop to the East Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church. Malone serves on the Boards of Trustees at the United Methodist-affiliated colleges, seminaries and organizations in East Ohio. She also is currently the president of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, and is a member of the Board of Directors of The Connectional Table of The United Methodist Church. She has written chapters for several books, published articles, blogs and book reviews, and taught courses as an adjunct professor at Aurora University and at Northern Baptist Seminary in Lombard, Illinois. She earned her Doctorate of Ministry from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.



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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Are We Really Better Together? An Evangelical Perspective on the United Methodist Divide

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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Audrey Warren

Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

Audrey B. Warren, a native Floridian, did not venture too far from her hometown of Naples to plant some roots. Audrey resides in Miami, FL where she serves as Senior Pastor at First United Methodist Church of Miami. Audrey earned her Bachelor of Arts from Florida Southern College where she majored in Religion, a Master of Divinity from Duke Divinity School and a Doctorate of Ministry from Wesley Theological Seminary focusing on Children and Spirituality. She is an ordained Elder in the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church and currently serves Since 2013 Audrey has co-convoked the Fresh Expressions movement in the Florida Annual Conference. She co-authored *Fresh Expressions* with Kenneth H. Carter.



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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

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Living Faithfully

Human Sexuality
and The United
Methodist
Church

A Four-Week Small Group Study

LIVING FAITHFULLY

Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church

Contents

Introduction

1. Is the Practice of Homosexuality Incompatible with Christian Teaching?
2. Is Same-gender Marriage Compatible with Christian Teaching?
3. Is Ordaining Practicing Homosexuals Compatible with Christian Teaching?
4. Where Are We Now?

Leader Guide

Meet the Writers

Introduction

You and your small group may have chosen this book for a number of reasons. You may simply want to know more about what The United Methodist Church teaches about homosexuality, same-gender marriage, and the ordination of LGBTQ persons. You may have heard about recent events in the life of The United Methodist Church concerning these teachings, and you want to know more about what they mean for the denomination and your local church. You might be angered by the church's teachings or supportive of them; you may believe them to be unjust and unloving, or you may believe they are true to the way of life Christians are called to live. Or you may be conflicted, uncertain what it means to live faithfully in these circumstances.

Wherever you find yourself, this book is meant to help you understand and grapple with what The United Methodist Church teaches about homosexuality, same-gender marriage, and ordination of LGBTQ persons. It's meant to help you have honest, well-informed, and grace-filled conversations with others about these teachings and the various calls for change within the denomination. And it's meant to help you discern, in prayer and conversation, how you can respond faithfully in love of God and love of neighbor.

This four-session study is organized around four questions designed to invite consideration and debate: 1) Is the practice of homosexuality incompatible with Christian teaching? 2) Is same-gender marriage compatible with Christian teaching? 3) Is ordaining practicing homosexuals compatible with Christian teaching? 4) Where are we now? Each of the four chapters includes background on the Bible, Christian theology, history, and United Methodist structure and practice to guide thinking and conversation on each of the central questions. A Leader Guide, beginning on page 85, is included to facilitate small-group discussion based on each of the four chapters.

The first chapter describes the official United Methodist Church teaching on homosexuality and practice, as well as current prohibitions related to same-gender marriage and the ordination of practicing homosexuals. It explores the biblical and theological reasons for this teaching, as well as biblical and theological reasons behind calls for full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in The United Methodist Church.

The second chapter discusses the nature of Christian marriage as taught in existing church law by The United Methodist Church. It explores the rationale that results in prohibiting clergy from officiating or blessing same-gender marriages, and congregations from allowing such marriages to be performed in their churches. It also describes the outlook of those who call for a change in church teaching and practice regarding same-gender marriage. And it gives an overview of why and how people are resisting church law, along with a discussion of the various results of these actions.

The third chapter explores the nature of ordination in The United Methodist Church, including the reasons for the *Book of Discipline's* language against ordaining self-avowed practicing homosexuals within that context. It provides an overview of how LGBTQ clergy members and ordination candidates are affected by this language. And it describes the calls for a change in church teaching and practice, and how and why Boards of Ordained Ministry in various annual conferences are resisting this teaching.

The fourth chapter discusses recent events in the life of The United Methodist Church related to homosexuality, same-gender marriage, and ordination of LGBTQ persons, as well as the aspects of our denominational structure and policies that set these events in perspective. It explores how these events reflect larger questions of how to live faithfully and accountably as individuals and a community in the twenty-first century, and shows how The United Methodist Church is struggling with these questions through views about homosexuality and sexual ethics.

Each chapter also includes brief reflections from individuals who represent distinct perspectives within the church's debate about homosexuality, same-gender marriage, and ordination of LGBTQ persons. Several of these are from LGBTQ persons or their loved ones, who are affected directly by The United Methodist Church's teachings and practices and long to be fully included in the church's life. Others are from those who support current church teachings. Though it's impossible to include every perspective or lived reality, every effort has been made to represent a diverse range of voices. It's important to remember that these are not merely issues or events to be discussed, but people who are earnestly striving to live faithfully as United Methodists and as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Throughout this book, you will be invited to consider the various levels of the church's debate about human sexuality, to see the ways in which many different questions and tensions come together as the denomination seeks a way forward. You will be encouraged to look beyond typical labels such as liberal and conservative or traditional and progressive, and to appreciate how different individuals and communities strive to bear a faithful witness to the love of Jesus Christ in a complex and divisive world. Most importantly, you will be called to see the real people whose relationships, livelihood, and faith are affected deeply by the church's debate about homosexuality.

This debate is as sensitive and challenging for individuals and small groups as it is throughout the whole denomination. Whatever you believe about The United Methodist Church's teaching about homosexuality, you may well find that within your small group are

those who disagree with you, perhaps very strongly. You are urged to approach each session of your small group with openness, humility, a spirit of grace, and above all, love for your fellow group members. Pray for one another and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you read, think, and talk each time you gather. Pray for God to give each of you the mind of Christ Jesus, who put love for others before himself.

May you join this holy conversation with courage, confident that “nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38). And may the love of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you.

Adolf Hansen

Is It Time

Helping Laity and Clergy
Discuss Homosexuality
One Question at a Time



Is It Time?

*Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality
One Question at a Time*

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Part Two—Biblical and Theological

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Postscript

Is It Time to Start . . .

- . . . Expending our full energy on the mission of The United Methodist Church:
To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?

Resources

Preface

It may not be an exaggeration to say that millions of United Methodists yearn for a time when the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and its transforming power—in the lives of individuals and in the structures of society—can take center stage. For too long we have been engrossed with selected dimensions of the gospel—particularly homosexuality and its effect on human lives—to the exclusion of others.

The question—“Is It Time?”—identifies the overall question of the book. The subtitle—“Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question at a Time”—provides a description of audience, subject, and process. Although the primary audience of the book is the laity and clergy of The United Methodist Church, it can easily be adapted and used with other ecclesiastical judicatories and organizations that resonate with questions raised in some or all of the chapters.

The resources used in writing this book come not only from the academic training and personal experiences of the author, but also from the conceptual formulations and existential narratives of hundreds of other people who generously shared their ideas and told me their stories—in writings, videos, and most effectively in personal conversations. Some of these individuals were straight, and some were lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer or questioning. To them I pay tribute and express my deep gratitude.

Colleagues from various contexts read a part or all of the manuscript, and provided challenging as well as supportive commentary. I am profoundly appreciative of their input. They are too numerous to identify, but two of them deserve highest praise. First, Naomi Metzger Hansen, an incredibly gifted, caring, and generous individual with whom I have been married for 58 years. She worked with me throughout the process and assisted me not only with typing and proofreading, but also in the ongoing discussion of the issues in each chapter. And second, Holly Miller, a renowned author, professor, and editor, who read the entire draft and offered numerous suggestions for communicating more effectively what I was trying to say.

On a personal note, I want to express my heartfelt desire to you, the reader—whether you agree or disagree with what I have written—that you will pause to reflect on what I have expressed. I hope you will find those times of reflection helpful to you, and useful in your conversations with others—particularly those with whom you disagree.

And, most important to me, is my profound yearning that God will be honored and glorified through this book, and will find ways to speak through it when it coincides with what God wants to say.

Introduction

Many books have been written on the subject of homosexuality. So, it's natural to ask: Do we need another?

Most of those books either defend or attack a certain point of view. A limited number of them attempt to bring differing perspectives together. But none that I have located use a Socratic approach—asking questions rather than formulating answers—in dealing with the central issues involved in a discussion of homosexuality.

Articles, blogs, and social media postings on the subject have been far more prolific than books in recent years, but have employed the same overall approach. This has led readers to draw conclusions that agree or disagree with what they have read, sometimes without much reflection and deliberation.

The question that sets forth the title of the book—“Is it time?”—is used in the book in two distinct ways. The first is an extension of the overall question: “Is it time to stop?” It is repeated at the beginning of each of the first 12 chapters, and introduces a verb that initiates the subject matter of a given chapter. The second way is a different extension of the overall question: “Is it time to start?” It is used only one time as an introduction to the postscript.

On the title page for each of the twelve chapters, the words “Maybe yes . . . maybe no” follow the chapter title as an indication of openness to the response of the reader. An additional question comes after these titles: “What do you think?”

My hope is that persons who read this book will become aware of the wide variety of issues related to the subject of homosexuality; will be encouraged to reflect on each of them; will think through the meaning of whatever answers they give to the questions the book raises; will grapple with the implications of the stances they take; and will engage in conversations with others—both in a one-on-one setting and in a group.

The book is not an attempt to convert readers to my point of view. Rather, it is an effort to assist readers in understanding the issues that I and others have examined and critiqued many times. It has grown out of an intentional process, one that remains open to further development:

I study and learn.

I interact with others, especially those who have a view different from mine.

I reexamine what I think.

I follow the evidence wherever it leads.

I affirm an openness to change.

I began a time of reflection forty years ago when I was preparing to teach a college course called “The Meaning of Sex.” Having taught a course titled “The Meaning of Death” several times, I learned from students that they wanted a course on human sexuality. It was the 1970s and college students across the country wanted to examine two subjects that were relatively new to college curricula: death and sex!

As part of the course on human sexuality, I included a section on homosexuality, inviting gay men and lesbian women to class—in person and in film. I wanted students to learn from direct experiences of persons with sexual orientations other than my own. Ever since that

time, and even earlier in my experiences growing up in New York City, I connected with a variety of individuals and groups who had sexual orientations different from mine.

I write from a heterosexual perspective, since that is who I am. I address issues facing the heterosexual community more fully than those facing other communities, since that is the primary context for my understanding. However, I try my best to be as sensitive as I can to represent other perspectives in as fair a manner as I know how.

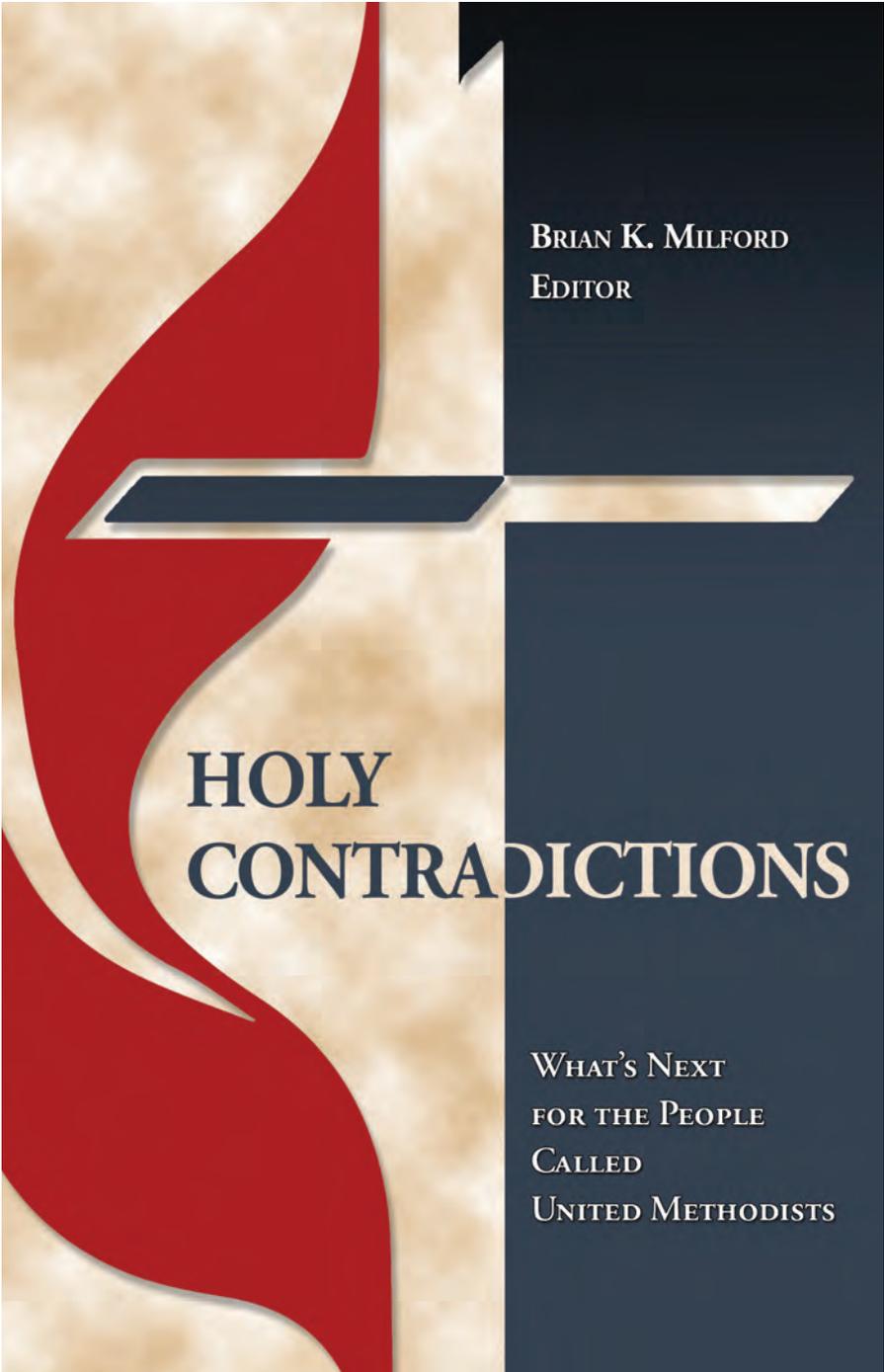
The time has now come for me, an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church for more than 50 years, to attempt to contribute to the conversations taking place throughout our denomination—in this country and around the world. The time is ripe to encourage open conversation by asking questions that have sometimes been unexamined, neglected, and/or cast aside as unimportant—before official actions are taken in the coming years that might lead to irreversible consequences!

The book is structured in three parts. The first—chapters 1 through 5—considers physical and psychological issues, utilizing terms and concepts consistent with the perspectives of the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The second—chapters 6 through 10—examines biblical and theological issues. The third—chapters 11 and 12—identifies relational and practical issues, connecting preceding chapters to everyday situations facing readers.

The “call” of the book is: (1) to understand more fully our own views, (2) to grasp more accurately views different from our own, (3) to follow the evidence wherever it leads, and (4) to share our thoughts and feelings with others with whom we agree and disagree—all in a spirit of mutual openness.

The outcome of following that “call”—hopefully—will be a time to start expending our full energy on the mission of The United Methodist Church:

To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.



BRIAN K. MILFORD
EDITOR

**HOLY
CONTRADICTIONS**

WHAT'S NEXT
FOR THE PEOPLE
CALLED
UNITED METHODISTS

HOLY CONTRADICTIONS

What's Next for the People Called United Methodists

Excerpts from six of multiple essays contained in *Holy Contradictions: What's Next for the People Called United Methodists* follow. The intention is to demonstrate the breadth of perspectives provided in the collection of essays, not to highlight any particular author or perspective above another.

From *Mutually Respectful Ways of Living* by Bryan D. Collier

One phrase in the assigned topic captured me and is the title I chose for my essay: “. . . mutually respectful ways of living. . .” This phrase embodies our congregation’s approach to living in the four communities where we are located. And the reason that it embodies our approach is that it is woven into our very DNA. It is not something we do; it is who we are. This way of living in ministry, however, causes extreme conflict in several ways within United Methodism, and this poses a problem in answering the question of how we can live in a mutually respectful way.

The first point of conflict surrounds the degree of importance attached to same-gender relationships and related church practices. For many churches and pastors this is a Gospel issue, but for many others this is the Gospel itself. The Gospel by its claims drives us to the issue of all the dimensions of human sexuality, but this issue is not the Gospel itself or even the central kernel of it. For our church this is an important matter, but it is not the ultimate matter that many on both sides of the issue have made it. The mission of the Church, given in the Scriptures, is to preach the Gospel and make disciples, but that has gotten lost in our making sexuality matters the litmus test of whether someone actually believes and practices our version of the Gospel. This is not to say that because this is not the ultimate matter that it is not an important matter. The problem in our church is that it has become the dominating matter to the point of distraction. My position and The Orchard’s position is that Scripture has settled this and that *The Book of Discipline* in its current form agrees that Scripture has settled this, and for that reason we should set aside the distraction and get on with the work of ministry. But we can’t because both sides feel the stakes are too high. This says nothing of the root issue in our disagreement about human sexuality—the role and authority of Scripture. So not only can we not agree on the issue; we cannot agree on what will be the authority and final word on the issue.

From *Shameless Spirituality* by Audrey Warren

First United Methodist Church of Miami’s ability to do the work of incarnation, which requires shameless spirituality, spiritual intelligence, and an openness to the creative work of the Holy Spirit will determine its future in downtown Miami. The same might be true of The United Methodist Church. Incarnational work does not happen at a macro level but rather at a micro level. Oddly enough, globalization and the technological revolution of the millennium have made the world not more generic but more diverse. As The United

Methodist Church continues to find a way forward, I am drawn to the story of a small church in a big city—a church that defines itself not only by what it believes, but also by what it does and who it is within a community.

First Church Miami's story is simply one of countless stories that could be told about local churches throughout our connection, many of which have found ways to be shamelessly spiritually and to be available to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their context. The work for our denomination going forward must look to examples like these to understand that the work of the local church—which is the end to which our general conferences and annual conferences work—is best determined locally and contextually.

The issue is this: the tools of shameless spirituality that allow a local church to live fruitfully amid its diversity are best held in the space of a local incarnational context. The debate floors of General Conference and Annual Conferences have not demonstrated the ability to faithfully produce healthy and shameless spiritual tools that allow for fruitful focus on the mission field. Instead they have created division, distraction, and chaos. One might argue that the agenda of our governing conference is to provide governance for the church and not provide ministry strategies for the church. Wherever you stand, the sad reality is that our governing bodies are not providing either. The idea that we can have a one-size-fits-all understanding of something as complex as LGBTQ identity is idealistic at best.

From *The Ethics of Love* by Magrey deVega

The argument by some in this debate is that those who have more accepting views of homosexuality have acquiesced to the culture, that we have allowed the ways of the world to shape our belief and practice, rather than the other way around. But to be warm-hearted and open-minded, two of the core values of the local church that I serve, is less about shaping or being shaped by the culture around us. It is about tending to the culture within the church. It should be no surprise that many of Paul's letters to the early churches, particularly I and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Galatians, dealt with the way Christians treated one another. And the way we treat one another can itself be a witness to the rest of the world.

So, those like myself who would affirm support for marriage equality and the ordination of gay and lesbian persons, and who would wish to work within our system to make those changes, need to fully embrace and love those who are on the opposite side of the debate. Those with whom we might disagree need to know they are loved, welcomed, and accepted in the church.

Why? Because I recognize that I did not always believe as I do now. Thirty years ago, when I had a very different view of homosexuality, if the United Methodist local church of my youth was condescending of people with a more conservative view, then I would not have felt welcomed there. I likely would have left that church, which means I would not have been called to ministry in that church. I would therefore not be United Methodist today, and I would not be a United Methodist pastor. That is difficult for me to even think about. This is not to say that I expect others to change their views to be like mine. And it does not mean that if there are those in my local church who agree with me, then I think they are a

better Christian. Having a church of multiple voices joined together by common mission does not make us weaker or culturally acquiescent.

It makes us multilingual in our mission. And I'm pretty sure that Pentecost would say that's a good thing.

From Before All Else by Kimberly D. Reisman

The Wesleyan Methodist canopy is varied for many reasons, one of which is the assortment of expressions of church. Some, like the United Methodist branch, have an episcopacy (including, in some places archbishops!), but others do not. Some, like the United Methodist branch, have itinerant clergy, yet others do not. Some, like the United Methodist branch, are tightly connected, while others hold the connectional reigns more loosely. Nevertheless, though our canopy may be varied, our roots in the universal church enable us, amidst this varied structure, to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Messiah, Son of the Triune God, the One who transcends, heals, and redeems the entire world. And it is our roots, not our canopy, that empower us to join God's healing, transforming mission of salvation for all the world.

Recognizing that as Christians in the Wesleyan tradition, it is not our canopy but our roots that connect us to one another in Christ leads us to an even deeper realization about which I have spoken on more than one occasion: God has blessed the church with more spiritual gifts, greater wisdom, mightier courage, deeper spiritual insight, stronger commitment to prayer, more profound holiness, more absolute trust, more expansive joy, than any one language or culture can contain on its own. It is this truth that guides us as we navigate the inevitable disagreements that arise within a global family. It is this truth that calls us to the humility necessary for any follower of Jesus – a humility grounded in the knowledge that our understanding will always be limited by our own culture and experience.

This humility is crucial to living with grace and respect in our Wesleyan tradition, even amidst disagreement, and it is especially important when it comes to evangelism. That is because evangelism must precede all internal disagreements, whatever they might be. Humility empowers us to recognize that.

From Holy Contradictions by M. Garlinda Burton

God declared from the beginning of time that all people are of sacred worth—period. No if, ands or buts. So that ordination, licensing, the right to marry and raise children are not limited by God to one gender identity or one sexual orientation. That's what is written on God's agenda! Our baptism has marked us for life as belonging to God. . . .

So those of us who are engaged in the work of freeing the church from homophobia, heterosexism, and gender-identity myopia only have to live out and act out our baptism. We are all created in God's image, we are all sacred, and while—yes, annual conferences have the right to set standards for ministry—"standards" and "unjust biases" are not the same thing. All means all. . . .

No matter what we say, or put in a resolution, or say in our weekly rituals, justice is

not just a badge you can put on and take off. Those of us who have been at this work for a while know that mere statements and attitudes and even wearing a rainbow stole alone do not point to authenticity and sincerity of the church and our message. No matter how many times some church folks claim that they “Love the sinner; hate the sin,” or that a holy love between same-sex couples is “incompatible with Christian teaching,” or say, “You have sacred worth, but”—what is heard by those on the margins is, “God’s love and justice and righteousness don’t roll down for you—you have to settle for the trickle-down leftovers.”

From *Holy Contradictions* by Rob Fuquay

Many years ago I served a congregation with two interesting members. One was a founder of the Good News movement. The other a retired district superintendent who identified himself as a “yellow dog democrat,” which was a description of his theology as much as his politics. These two men shared little in common except for a devotion to Jesus Christ. A year or so after moving from that church I got a letter from the conservative member. He sent me a copy of his funeral service. He had planned it out and wanted me to be available in case his current pastor was not. He had many people participating in the service. One of them was the old yellow dog! Why? Because these two men had a friendship and deep respect for each other that superseded their differences. They chose to focus on what united them rather than what divided them.

If the local church is big enough for such diversity, then certainly our denomination is.

Where the Spirit is Moving
in a Wounded Church



The
MARKS
of
HOPE

Matt Rawle Juan Huertas
Katie McKay Simpson

THE MARKS OF HOPE

Where the Spirit Is Moving in a Wounded Church

How many times do you think that “Hope” is mentioned in the Gospels? You might be surprised that Jesus mentions hope only once (Luke 6:34). Of course, Jesus’ ministry was very much about hope—the hope of everlasting life (John 14), the hope of forgiveness (Matthew 6:9-15), the hope that the blind will see, the hungry will be filled, and the mournful comforted (Matthew 5). We light the candle of hope during Advent, we put hope in our church mission statements, we read at weddings that “faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). So why does the church proclaim a word that Jesus rarely ever said?

Sometimes when we think about hope we think of an emotion, like a feeling of peace when things aren’t going well, or a painting of a sunrise with “It’s always darkest before the dawn,” written underneath. Hopeful words can sound empty. At worst, offering a hopeful word when someone isn’t ready to hear them is like pouring salt on a wound rather than a healing touch. Paul writes in Romans that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us” (Romans 5:3b-5a). Hope goes beyond a feeling or a helpful saying. Hope is a destination that sometimes takes a lifetime to find.

Hope alone isn’t enough, which is why Paul talks about hope, faith, and love all abiding together. Hope needs help because in and of itself, it has no moral value. I can hope that my friend finds healing, or I can hope that my friend never gets well. I can hope that we will find peace, or I can hope that my enemy burns in a blaze of fire and fury. Hope is where you’re going, and faith is trusting that where you’re going is where you need to be. We can weigh and measure the pros and cons of a mission trip location, but at the end of the day, we have to trust that where we are going is where God is calling us to be.

If hope is where you’re going, and faith is trusting that the destination is where you need to be, love is how you get there.

It’s true that Jesus rarely mentions the word, “hope,” but he spoke about where we need to be all the time. Our hope is the Kingdom of God, something the size of a mustard seed, which means it’s a destination easy to miss. How are we called to offer a hopeful word in a world hungry for a new story?

Hopeful Mission

Mission as a mark of hope begins with surrender. Each of us giving of ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit who then calls us and sends us to give of ourselves. This means letting go of anything that might keep us from living fully into God’s way of life. Like the rich young ruler in the Gospel according to Mark, selling all that we have (all that keeps us bound) and following Jesus. It is easier to paint, build stuff, and collect supplies, all good things that I believe strengthen our distraction. It is harder to allow God to make us “one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.”

Once we surrender there is no telling what we might hear God asking of us. The gifts and graces given to us by the Holy Spirit becoming activated for service in God's restorative mission in and for the world. We together as the community of the baptized, we diverse, we multifaceted, we abundantly gifted to make the kingdom of God known.

As we answer our unique call together we become a potent force for wholeness, healing, and reconciliation in the world. Now instead of doing to help, we do to be, instead of doing good things we do transformative things, instead of feeling good about ourselves, we feel good about the other. Little by little, being by being, we become active participants, we become God-doers, salvation facilitators for the life of the world. With each movement we make our mission making becoming another mark of hope in a hopeless world.

Hopeful Justice

Communities of faith must root their lives in the story of our faith. This story calls us to a way of life that restores the "shalom" of God in the world. From the very beginning God has called a people to be a "light to the nations." The church continues this call today. We reminding each other as the baptized people of our duty and anointing to model what is like to make things right in the world. This is what Justice is about!

Unfortunately we have tended to see justice as a type of specific call related, yet separate from our call of discipleship. When we look at scripture this could not be farther from the truth. It turns out that justice is an essential posture, the fruit of the growth of love in our souls. I believe part of the reason why this misunderstanding has emerged is because of the english language translation of the word dikaiosyne (justice) as righteousness a stiff and easily misunderstood way of rendering "making things right."

Discipleship as righteousness in english tends to support a faith expression that is limited to personal piety. To be "righteous" in english might easily be construed as being good, doing all things right, not getting into trouble, being visibly pious. All of a sudden the radical understanding of dikaiosyne as making all things whole, complete, just, healed, is not even in the picture. Now left to the side as something that some Christians might take on.

God from the very beginning has called us to justice. From the very beginning freeing, release, and healing have been part of our story. This has not been something that only some do (e.g. social justice Christians) it is certainly not something that only secular people worry about but if we follow the biblical witness from Israel's history to wisdom literature, from prophetic texts to the story of Jesus, we are again and again called to the practice of justice as the result of our encounter with God.

Justice as a mark of hope becomes the fruit of our growth in love. This fruit opens our eyes to the world around us and to the ways that our communities, institutions, and way of life miss the mark, are broken, sick, and are in need of being made right. Preaching and discipleship with an eye towards justice means that we remind the community of our shared story. Along the way we pay attention to those places around us, our families, our neighborhoods, and cities where life needs to be made right.

The eucharist is the medicine that allows us to develop a justice imagination. As we rehearse the story of salvation and are then given the presence of Christ we are empowered by the Spirit to become participants on behalf of God in shalom making, right making, justice practicing. Taking the bread and cup becoming our re-commitment to our growth in love so that we can rehearse God's call to make things right, so that we claim that now we can indeed see like Jesus. Seeing, the growth of kingdom imagination, allows us to behave, just behavior begins to make things right again, the kingdom of God coming near, the seeds of hope being born where they are needed most.

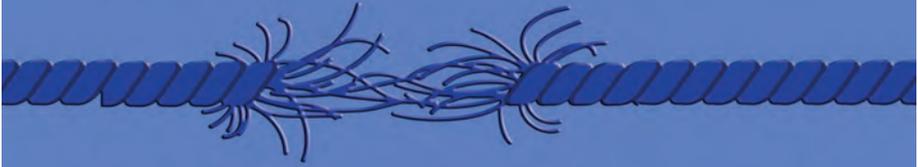
Together We Rise

I have been an elder since 2007, and in eight years of associate and Executive Pastor roles, I had six male Senior Pastors. That experience of having many different models of mentoring, or choosing not to take the opportunity to develop and mentor in a male-female partnership was invaluable to my awareness of how women in second chair roles have the potential to be prepared by their Senior leaders to take on formidable senior and solo roles of leading churches themselves. Sheryl Sandberg, founder of the "Lean In" movement among women in leadership, reminds us that men say they want to fight sexism at work must proactively seek to mentor women in the workplace and involve them, even make space for them, in key projects for learning, development, and increased success.

I am mindful, however, that my particular experience has not been the norm everywhere, as is evidenced by talking to many female colleagues of all ages and years of experience that continue to struggle with a lack of opportunity and support. In the places and times where women don't receive the mentorship that they need to rise into places of formidable leadership in the church, they seem to be creating these spaces themselves. In my Annual Conference, for instance, we have begun what is called a Young Clergywomen's Cohort—a grassroots effort of clergywomen under 40 who gather twice a year for mutual learning, coaching, accountability. These women are identifying the agency they have to fill in the gaps in their learning and experience, and invite others to share what they know for everyone's benefit so that all move forward in personal sanctification and deeper leadership effectiveness together.

This brings me to the final place of hope identified in recent years—one where women even at the highest levels of leadership in our church are finally supporting other women, mainly because we finally trust that there is enough opportunity to go around. God is healing our wounds, paving a way forward, and changing the frame of our sight to hold a more abundant view for what is possible through the leadership of our churches. This God-empowered abundance in our systems is beginning to set women (and all people) free to be less isolated, less fearful about the prospects of their life-long ministries, and more willing to help each other succeed. Our church is beginning to grasp the Gospel call we all are encouraged to adopt through the witness of holy scripture—that we will not reach our God-given potential until ALL of us reach our God-given potential together.

An Evangelical Perspective
on the Division in the UMC



Are We
REALLY
BETTER
TOGETHER?

Rob Renfroe
and Walter Fenton

ARE WE REALLY BETTER TOGETHER? *An Evangelical Perspective on the Division in The UMC*

Excerpt from the Introduction

The United Methodist Church is at a crossroads. We are a divided church and the truth is we are a hurting church.

Some of us believe that our differences are so great and the ongoing battle so destructive that it's time to part ways. For over four decades conservative and progressive United Methodists have expended enormous emotional, financial and spiritual resources to gain the upper hand in a denomination that has declined every year since its founding in 1968. Surely our efforts and our finances would be better devoted to evangelism, discipleship and missions. For the sake of the lost and the poor, shouldn't we set each other free to pursue what we believe to be God's calling upon our lives and our ministries.

Others of us believe that we must do all we can to remain united. Those who champion this view do so because of the unity that Christ prayed for in John 17 and because, they often say, "we are better together." But, of course, that begs the question, "Are we really together?"

It is our contention that we are not – and not simply because we have different views regarding sexuality and marriage. Our differences go much deeper – all the way to some of the foundational questions of what it means to be the church. Is Jesus Christ the only way to God? Is his death on the cross the only means for salvation? Are the Scriptures fully inspired and authoritative for revealing God's will and binding on how we should live? Can the Bible be divided into parts that were never true, parts that once were true but no longer are, and parts that were and still are valid? And are we free to dispose of those parts that we surmise to be mistaken or no longer true? Are reason, tradition and experience – either separately or collectively – Scripture's equal in determining the mind of God and what the Spirit is doing in our time? And are there some issues where reason, tradition and experience may override what the Bible teaches? It may come as a surprise to many United Methodist laypersons, but their pastors and their bishops are profoundly and irrevocably divided on how these questions should be answered.

These are not small matters. They strike to the core of how we determine spiritual truth and how we define what it means to be Christian. If United Methodists are not together on issues as central as who Jesus is, the way we are saved, and the authority for determining the truth about God and his will, are we really together as a church?

For over forty (40) years, we have been divided regarding human sexuality. That division has grown to the point that the United Methodist Church is now in crisis. So much so, that in 2016 the General Conference instructed the Council of Bishops to create a commission to develop a plan that would put an end to the endless debate and rancor that characterize General Conference and much of the life of the church.

Even with our differences regarding sexuality and marriage, we have been able to stay together as a church because we had a common practice. We committed ourselves to welcoming all people to the ministries of the church, regardless of how they identified sexually. We

also agreed that our pastors would not marry same-gendered couples nor would practicing homosexuals be ordained to ministry. Though evangelical United Methodists believe that the Scriptures speak clearly against same-sex practice, we could live in a church with different opinions because we had a gracious, biblical position that we were all expected to uphold.

Of course, that's where we were, not where we are. One of our jurisdictions has elected a married, lesbian bishop who has stated that she has performed fifty gay marriages. Many other pastors have performed same-sex marriages (including at least one bishop) and their failure to comply with church teaching has been "disciplined" with as little as a twenty-four-hour suspension, writing a paper on how we should strive to live together as one church, or with a letter being put in their file. In other instances bishops have chosen to dismiss the complaint against the pastor performing the service with no repercussions at all.

One bishop recently told his annual conference, "Twelve of our annual conferences are in schism right now. They are unwilling to live by our covenant and that places them in schism." Twelve annual conferences. That's nearly one-fourth of the conferences in the United States and there are many others who do not live by the Discipline; they just haven't stated so publicly.

Before we can answer the question, "Are we better together?" we must ask, "Are we together?"

Many of our churches do not use official United Methodist curriculum in our classes because they do not trust it. Many of our congregations do not pay all of their apportionments because they find that several of our boards and agencies are unaccountable to the local church and promote progressive causes that are contrary to the Scriptures. Many of our largest churches no longer include "United Methodist" in their names because they feel that our "brand" has been tainted and will hurt their ministry. And many of our pastors roll their eyes when the Council of Bishops speaks about unity because we know that it is as dysfunctional as the church and for nearly fifty (50) year has failed to provide the leadership required to create unity or stop our decline.

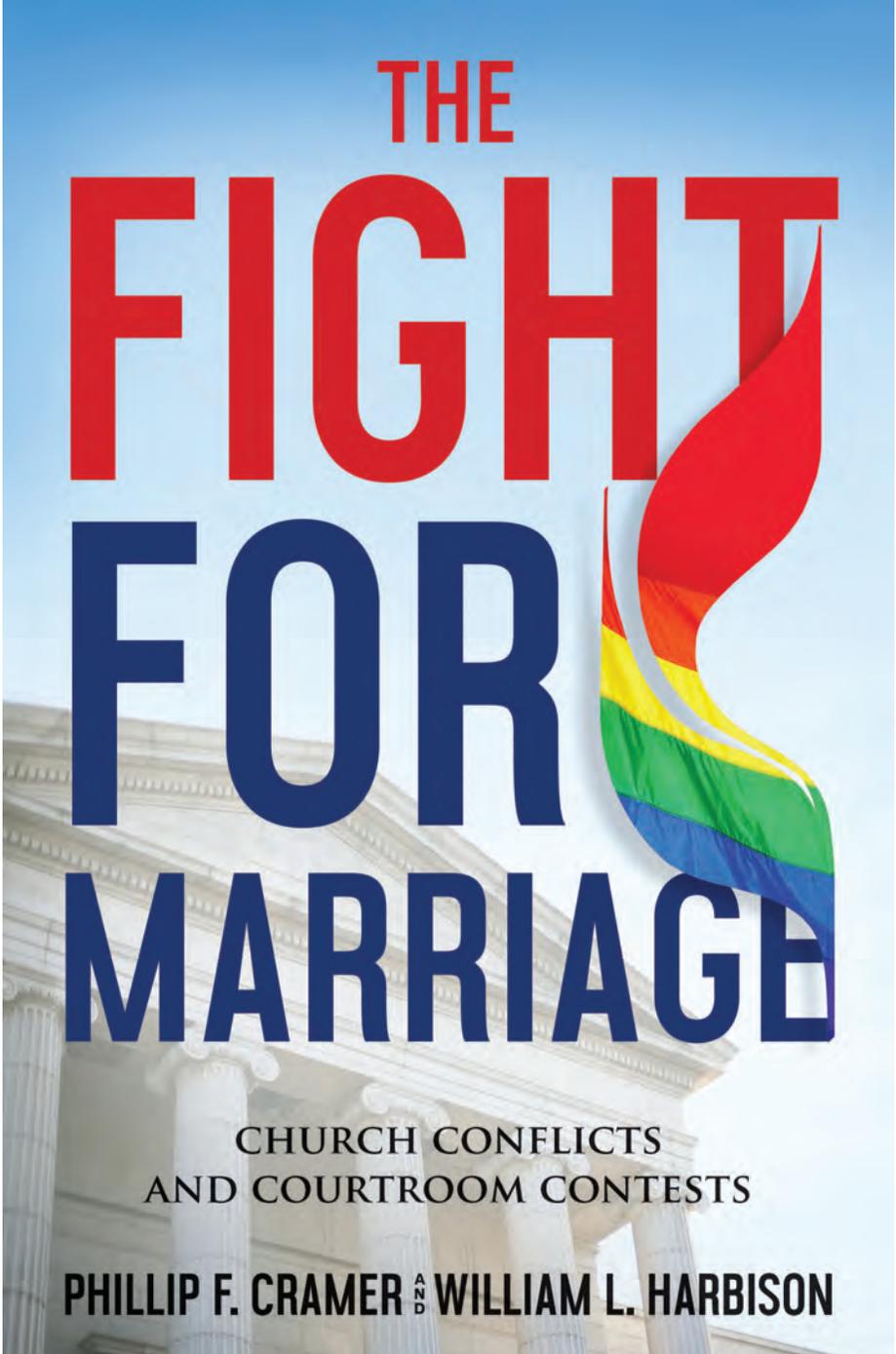
Are we a united church? Are we together? If so, if we are still one church, then we cannot act as if we are two. If we are two churches, then we should no longer pretend to be one.

Every pastor who has been ordained in the UM Church and every layperson who has joined since 1972 knew or should have known the church's position regarding sexuality and marriage. Of course, they have every right to try to change our views. But what they do not have the right to do is to disobey church teachings and at the same time condemn and shame those of us who believe our covenant should remain intact until it is changed. And they should certainly have more integrity than to try to tell us that we're better together when "together" means they can ignore the parts of our covenant that offend them.

In the course of this book, we will argue that our positions regarding the Scriptures, sexuality and a way forward are correct. But we are past the point of thinking that one side will make a sufficient case to persuade the other to change its position. We don't need a solution where some of us are winners and others are losers. People on all sides of these issues are sincere in their beliefs and committed to them. Progressives are bound by their conscience

and their understanding of the Gospel to change the church's traditional teachings regarding same-sex relations and marriage. We evangelicals cannot change our position without, in our own minds, compromising the inspiration and the authority of the Bible. That's something we will never do.

What's the solution? More fighting and debate? Stricter rules and stronger punishment? Another forty years of delusional thinking that if we just stay at the table we will be able to reconcile irreconcilable positions? No. The solution is an honest admission that we are not together and the creation of a plan that allows for a fair and amicable freeing of both sides to pursue what they believe God is calling them to do.



THE
FIGHT
FOR
MARRIAGE

**CHURCH CONFLICTS
AND COURTROOM CONTESTS**

PHILLIP F. CRAMER ^A_{ND} WILLIAM L. HARBISON

THE FIGHT FOR MARRIAGE

Church Conflicts and Courtroom Contests

The Power of the Narrative

When a child is baptized in the United Methodist Church, the parents or sponsors of the child are asked to affirm whether they “accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.” What does it mean to accept the freedom and power given by God? What happens when injustice or oppression take shape within the state? Or within the Church itself? And how does one “live according to the example of Christ” and serve Jesus Christ “in union with the Church” when the Church itself is not unified?

This book is told from the perspective of two United Methodists—lay leaders and lawyers—who live in two co-existing and overlapping worlds—the church and the state. In those overlapping worlds we simultaneously represented same gender couples seeking recognition of their marriages by the state while working within our congregation as it sought acceptance of LGBTQ persons in the eyes of the United Methodist Church. While the perspective is ours, the stories are not.

In our professional lives, we are charged to give voice to those who need to be heard within our legal system. While we do so within the technical and specialized environment that constitutes the American legal system, we are actually packaging the underlying narratives. And these narratives are the essence of what conveys truth.

In many ways, our professional lives are modeled after our faith tradition, in which laws and principles are often more effectively conveyed by stories or parables than by edicts or pronouncements. While some principles can be expressed through simple commandments, such as thou shall not kill, other principles require narratives to explain and understand. Jesus frequently used parables to express deep and compelling truths. For example, one does not place a lamp under a bowl or build on ground without a foundation. And it is the smallest of all seeds, the mustard seed, that when planted becomes the largest of all garden plants. Or it is the one lost sheep that is found that creates more happiness than the ninety-nine sheep that did not wander off.

Our journey as storytellers is deeply rooted in our faith. This faith, which compelled us to action, is grounded in the kingdom of God, experienced right here and right now. This faith has confidence in both the church and the law. This faith is exercised in the power of the narrative.

Lessons from Our Church and the Supreme Court

Our story about the fight for marriage in the courts and in the church ends where it began: baptism. We each have three children who were baptized before witnesses in a particular faith community. When they were baptized we took the following oath:

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,
reject the evil powers of this world,
and repent of your sin?

I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves?

I do.

Our whole congregation then took this oath in support of our families:

Do you, as Christ's body, the Church,
reaffirm both your rejection of sin
and your commitment to Christ?

We do.

Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life
and include these persons now before you in your care?

**With God's help we will proclaim the good news
and live according to the example of Christ.**

**We will surround these persons
with a community of love and forgiveness,
that they may grow in their trust of God,
and be found faithful in their service to others.**

**We will pray for them,
that they may be true disciples
who walk in the way that leads to life.**

Our journeys to the United States Supreme Court and within our church were grounded in these oaths. Not only the oaths that we took to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves, but the covenant embraced by the entire congregation to surround us with a community of love and forgiveness to walk in the way that leads to life.

Likewise, when we each joined our church as members, we took a vow “to be loyal to Christ.” This pledge of loyalty is not an oath to any human institution, law, or book. That would be idolatry. Instead, we are loyal Christ. This instilled upon us the obligation and the responsibility to question laws and customs, whether they be civil or church, that deprive equality and dignity from the voiceless and powerless.

Our journeys to the United States Supreme Court and within our congregation revealed two basic truths. First, narratives are important. As attorneys for gay and lesbian couples, our job was to provide a platform for their voices to be heard. We were storytellers for people who are often silenced. And while we told these stories against a legal backdrop and within the context of the law, at the end of the day the stories of our plaintiffs and countless others like them were what ultimately swayed five US Supreme Court justices, especially Justice Anthony Kennedy. It was no coincidence that our Supreme Court counsel used his precious rebuttal time during oral argument to refocus the Court on the human narratives instead of the legal dogma.

We experienced the same thing at Belmont United Methodist Church. Over the countless years of discussion and discernment, the stories of individual members in a particular congregation served to change more hearts and minds than any deep dive into scripture, church doctrine, or the law. The expression of stories brought both understanding and empathy. It also allowed individual church members to connect on a deeper and more meaningful manner to form a stronger faith community.

The second and related lesson learned from both experiences was the importance of focusing on human dignity. Justice Kennedy's ultimate decision did not rest on a recitation of history or a legalistic articulation of the proper standard of review. It rested on the basic and universal principle of human dignity. According to Justice Kennedy, the same gender couples had asked only "for equal dignity in the eyes of law." Justice Kennedy explained that "[t]here is dignity in the bond between two men or two women who seek to marry" and that marriage itself "always has promised nobility and dignity to all persons, without regard to their station in life."

So too within Belmont, as even though there would be and still is disagreement over scripture and church law, there emerged universal agreement over the sacred worth and dignity of all of God's children. Such recognition brought the church together to welcome all persons and to celebrate all persons, regardless of sexual orientation. By focusing on the sacred worth of individuals as opposed to singling out certain persons, the church was able to move together as a single body committed to hospitality to all. And once that threshold was crossed, the narrative changed from us vs. them to all of us together.

We do not profess to have all the answers to conflicts within our society and our churches. However, we have witnessed firsthand the power of storytelling and the universal bond of human dignity. We have watched how persons of differing backgrounds and perspectives came to understand and appreciate each other on a deep and personal level by simply listening to each other's stories. Stories cannot be debated and they cannot be disputed. They are true merely because they exist. Taking time to hear someone's story does two powerful things. First, it provides the person telling the story with an opportunity to be heard. Second, every story has an effect on the listener, especially when the story is one that is different from the listener's own experience. As attorneys and church leaders we found ourselves in the position of providing a platform and voice to those whose stories were being drowned out or never told at all.

The mere act of listening to a story can be transformative for both the listener and the teller of the story. By listening to one's story, the listener recognizes the inherent dignity of the storyteller. And the storyteller receives this recognition of his or her dignity while also acknowledging the dignity of the listener to whom the story is told. Too often in our profession and even our church life, we get caught up in debates without pausing to listen to the narratives of those with whom we disagree. In so doing, we turn our focus away from the human dignity of those around us. In fact, we justify our conduct whether it be toward an opposing party, attorney, or fellow church member by attacking their position instead of taking a step back to listen to their narratives and recognize their basic human dignity.

In both the courtroom and the church, we have learned that common ground is almost never possible until adversaries truly listen to each other and mutually focus on human dignity as a guiding principle.

OUR STRANGELY WARMED HEARTS



COMING OUT INTO GOD'S CALL

KAREN P. OLIVETO

OUR STRANGELY WARMED HEARTS

Coming Out into God's Call

Chapter One: A Brief History of Homosexuality in the United States

Introduction
Homosexuality Defined
Pre-World War II
Post World War II
Stonewall and Aftermath
The AIDS Epidemic
Queer Politics
Marriage Equality
Homosexuality and the Gay Christian Movement
The Role of Religion in Society
The Orientation that Dare Not Say Its Name
1970's: The Emergence of the "Gay Issue"
Civil Rights vs Rites Restrictions
A Debate with No End in Sight

Chapter Two: The United Methodist Church and Homosexuality

An Introduction to The United Methodist Church
Methodist Student Magazine, *motive*, Comes Out
1972 General Conference
The Birth of Affirmation
Silencing Voices Through Legislation
1984: The Door is Locked
The Church Studies Homosexuality
1996 General Conference
Holy Unions
General Conference 2000
A Global Church
Refusing the Clergy Closet
A Way Forward?

The following chapters include first-person faith narratives of LGBTQ United Methodist clergy and laity. These stories are rarely included when the UMC debates homosexuality, causing LGBTQ persons to be objectified and dismissed as an “issue” to be dealt with rather than people in UMC pulpits and pews whose lives have been formed by UMC theology.

Chapter Three: Coming Out as an Experience of God’s Grace

How is coming out a spiritual experience? How does Wesleyan theology inform coming out?

An evangelical lesbian lay woman on the West Coast

A trans deacon in the Northeast

Chapter Four: Coming Out While Going In

While coming out brings wholeness, the UMC forces many to choose the closet in order to be faithful to God’s call

A local licensed lesbian pastor in rural parish setting

A gay elder in the Northwest

Chapter Five: Living at the Intersections

How do LGBTQ clergy and laity of color live at the intersections of several oppressions within the UMC?

A gay elder from a Central Conference

A lesbian provisional elder in the Northeast

Chapter Six: How Long, O Lord?

Stories of long-time LGBTQ members of the UMC

Elderly lesbian couple from the Southeast

Lesbian clergy and widow of a prominent UM theologian from the Southeast

Chapter Seven: Closets No More

Young queer clergy and laity have no concept of the closet—how do they navigate a denomination that expects it of them?

A Texas gay lay man in seminary in Northcentral

A gay elder in the Northeast

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

We Shall Be Made Perfect in Love in this Life

Excerpt from Chapter 1

The contemporary movement for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) civil rights was born into the American mainstream, non-gay world in 1969, when a routine police raid of Stonewall, a New York City drag bar, was met with resistance and violence. Since that time, lesbian and gay men have inched their way into the arena of public discourse. From

gays in the military, to Hollywood and the homosexual, every institution and aspect of culture within American Society has experienced the emergence of “The Gay Issue.”¹

While LGBTQ persons have been a part of American society since the country’s beginnings—on March 10, 1778, George Washington’s general orders record the court martial of Lieutenant Frederick Gotthold Enslin for attempted sodomy²—LGBTQ persons did not emerge as a political or social power until the late 20th century. What forces created an identifiable LGBTQ community and culture? What were the social conditions that enabled this community to become a social movement? How did this community come to sponsor a variety of LGBTQ cultures? How was this social movement affected by American religion, and how did it begin to have impact in American churches? In what ways did churches react and respond to this growing movement and its many cultural forms?

This book begins by chronicling the development of the LGBTQ social movement within American culture as well as a LGBTQ social movement that cuts across denominational lines. The United Methodist Church, like other denominations in the United States, is a power holder that has wrestled with the issue of homosexuality since the early 1970s.

The United Methodist Church is considered one of the mainstream churches in America. “Mainstream churches” are defined sociologically as “formally organized religious bodies that are recognized as legitimate and that support the dominant culture and social structures.”³ The United Methodist Church recognizes that as a denomination it “exists in the secular world,”⁴ yet through its “connectional polity based on mutual responsiveness and accountability”⁵ seeks to enable faith “to become active in love and intensifying our desire for peace and justice in the world.”⁶

The Constitution of The United Methodist Church includes a section on the inclusive nature of the Church: “all persons, without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, to participate in its programs, and, when they take the appropriate vows, to be admitted into its membership in any local church in the connection.”⁷ Each organizational part of the denomination, including local churches, denominational boards and agencies, and conferences, shall ensure that it is not structured in such a way “so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the

1. “The Gay Issue” is a phrase employed by journalists and others when referring to issues raised by the increased visibility of gay men and lesbians. For example: “The Gay Issue Embroils the Boy Scouts,” *New York Times*, vol. 116, December 19, 1996, A21 and “Elite Schools Face the Gay Issue: Same-Sex Academies Grapple with Parents’ Concerns,” *New York Times*, vol. 116, June 13, 1997, B1.

2. Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1976), 24.

3. Beth B. Hess, Peter J. Stein, and Susan Farrell, *The Essential Sociologist: An Introduction* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2001), p. 289.

4. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2000* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), paragraph 139.

5. *Ibid.*, paragraph 101.

6. *ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.

Church because of race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition.”⁸ The church has struggled mightily with what it means to be inclusive when it comes to its LGBTQ members.

Before looking explicitly at The United Methodist Church (in chapter 2) and LGBTQ issues, it is important to understand the emergence of the lesbian and gay movement⁹ in American society and the forces that shaped it. However, before studying this social history and its manifestations in The United Methodist Church, it is critical to explore the evolving concept and definition of homosexuality.

The words *homosexual* and *heterosexual* are contemporary concepts, having been introduced into euro-centric culture in the late 19th century. Prior to this time, there were no sexual orientation categories of *homosexual* or *heterosexual*. David Greenberg, in his comprehensive book *The Construction of Homosexuality* (1988), explored how the concept of homosexuality is perceived in various cultural settings. As Greenberg shows, homosexual activity is “trans-temporal and trans-spatial. The very essence of the social constructivist case is that people engage in homosexual acts in all societies. What the constructivist argues (truly) is that different people tend to put different interpretations on the acts.”¹⁰

While homosexual behavior has been noted in virtually every culture, each culture has interpreted and valued this behavior differently. For instance,

many American Indian tribes had institutionalized homosexuality, at least the male variety, into the role of *berdache* (the male woman), while other primitive groups have chosen their shamans from them. Some societies in the past idealized homosexual love, as the ancient Greeks, while others have partially condemned it, as did the ancient Jews.¹¹

There are many interpretations of the biblical references to same-sex relations. The dominant biblical interpretation pointed to the condemnation of same-sex relations as found in the certain passages of Hebrew and Christian scriptures. This in turn gave rise to the understanding of homosexuality as a sin against nature: “Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another” (Romans 1:26-27, RSV). This view of homosexual acts as unnatural and thus sinful would prevail until the 19th century, when the birth of psychiatry would move the social understandings of homosexuality from the religious realm to the medical realm.

In 1869, K.M. Kertbeny first coined the word *homosexual*. Kertbeny sought to oppose German sodomy laws. However, it was not until the 1880s when the term gained currency in usage, “adapted by people who wanted to make sense of their own experiences, which were not adequately explained by labeling them unnatural or immoral.”¹² Several men would come to play significant roles in establishing the Victorian understanding of homosexuality. Five significant voices that would, along with centuries-old religious understandings, provide

8. Ibid.

9. The gay/lesbian social movement is actually a mosaic of many social movements that have, as a focal point, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer liberation.

10. As quoted in Michael Ruse, *Homosexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988), 17.

11. Vern L. Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History* (New York: Garland STPM Press, 1979), 2.

12. Margaret Cruikshank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5.

a foundation for contemporary attitudes towards homosexuality were Carl Westphal, Richard von Kraft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, and Sigmund Freud.

Carl Westphal was a professor of psychiatry in Berlin and the first physician to utilize scientific methods in the study of homosexuality. “In 1869 Westphal published the case history of a young woman who, from her earliest years, liked to dress as a boy, cared more for boys’ games than girls’, and found herself attracted only to females.”¹³ Westphal grew increasingly interested in this phenomenon and “came to the conclusion that the abnormality he found in his patient was congenital and could not be termed a vice.... He called the phenomenon ‘contrary sexual feeling’ (*kontrare Sexualempfindung*) and in the process led the way to more open discussion of the phenomenon in the medical community.”¹⁴

Social theorist Michel Foucault considers this to be a major turning point in the history of homosexuality:

The psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal’s famous article on ‘contrary sexual relations’ can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one form of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite was a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.¹⁵

Kraft-Ebing expanded on Westphal’s work on sexual inversion. For Kraft-Ebing, “the purpose of sex was procreation; sexual activities not undertaken with this ultimate purpose in mind were ‘unnatural practices,’ a perversion of the sexual instinct.”¹⁶ However, although he considered homosexuality “unnatural,” because he felt it was also hereditary he did not believe that it should be subject to the laws of the state.

Havelock Ellis, an English sexologist, published the book *Sexual Inversion* in 1897. It was the first book written in English that did not depict homosexuality as a disease or a crime. Instead, Ellis considered homosexuality hereditary and therefore unchangeable. Ellis’ work was “a plea for tolerance and for acceptance that deviations from the norm were harmless and occasionally invaluable.”¹⁷

Edward Carpenter, an English socialist who lived openly as a homosexual offered a positive image for homosexual men. He believed “that homosexuals would be on the vanguard of a

13. Bullough, 8.

14. Ibid.

15. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43.

16. Bullough, 11.

17. Ibid., 12.

movement to transform society 'by substituting the bond of personal affection and compassion for the monetary, legal and other external ties which now control and confine society.'¹⁸

Sigmund Freud believed that homoerotic behavior was a natural stage of human sexual development. He believed that adolescents passed through this phase into adult heterosexuality. The adult homosexual had failed to progress through this stage and therefore was stunted in his/her growth.

These five developments moved homosexual behavior out of the realm of religious control, where it was largely regarded as sinful, and into the realm of medicine, where it was regarded as "a set of symptoms or as a pathological illness. Religious discourse about the 'sin against nature' was replaced by scientific discourse about the unnatural, the abnormal. The perverted was transformed into the pathological."¹⁹ Once sinful, homosexuals themselves (rather than just their behavior) were now viewed as sick, and "were subject to more scrutiny and social control, and they were still viewed as lesser beings."²⁰ As a result of this medicalization, homosexuality became both a disease and a crime. As Robert Goss notes, "until the 1960s, homosexuals who were arrested were given the choice of prison or medical treatment."²¹

During the 1950s, simply gathering with other gays and lesbians was considered criminal behavior. Even dancing with a member of the same sex was an illegal activity, and gay bars were routinely raided by police. Police raids were particularly feared, because "if you were arrested, your name turned up in the newspaper...they'd have this raid on some gay bar, and the *Examiner*, the 'family' newspaper, published the names, occupations and addresses of everybody who was arrested."²²

Some chapters of the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis accepted and espoused the idea of homosexuality as an illness in order to decriminalize homosexual behavior. The reasoning was that if homosexuality was an illness, then homosexuals were not morally responsible for their sexual orientations, thus seeking public sympathy for their plight.

At the same time, gay rights advocates began to work with psychiatrists and other mental health professionals to remove homosexuality as a medical pathology. Evelyn Hooker was the first physician to study whether or not there was a connection between homosexuality and mental illness. In 1956, she delivered her findings to the American Psychological Association (APA): "In my paper I presented the evidence that gay men can be as well adjusted as straight men and that some are even better adjusted than straight men. In other words, as far as the evidence was concerned, there is no difference between the two groups of men in the study. There's just as much pathology in one group as in the other."²³ It would be more than a decade after Hooker's presentation that the APA would remove the definition of homosexuality as a mental illness.

18. Cruikshank, 6.

19. Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 3.

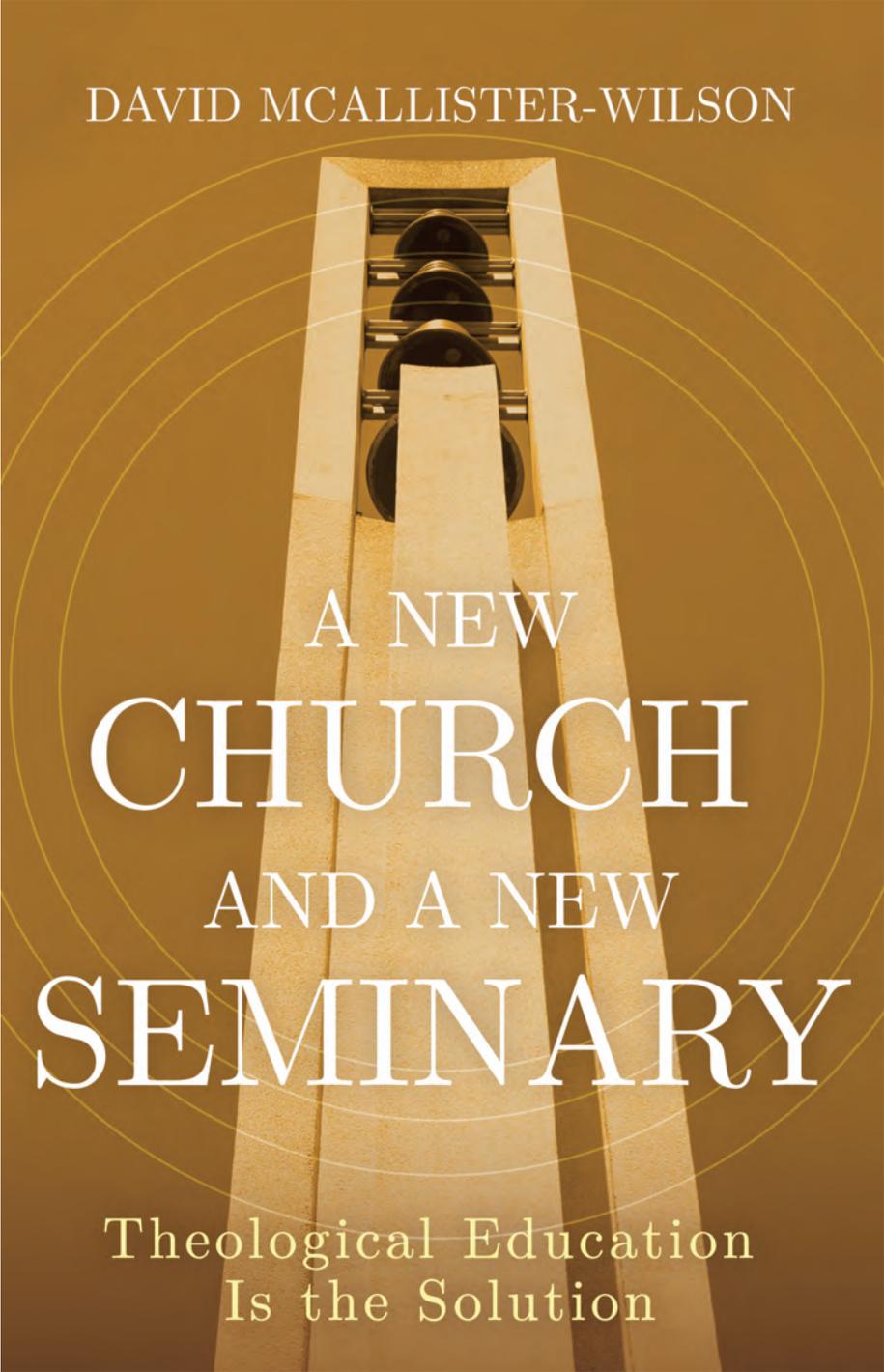
20. Cruikshank, 7.

21. Goss, 7.

22. *Ibid.*, 147-148.

23. *Ibid.*, 24.

DAVID MCALLISTER-WILSON



A NEW
CHURCH
AND A NEW
SEMINARY

Theological Education
Is the Solution

A New Church and a New Seminary

Theological Education Is the Solution

It's Just Not Working Anymore

Tom Berlin is the chair of Wesley Theological Seminary's Board of Governors. When he's frustrated, he says: "It's just not working anymore." Tom is pastor of Floris UMC located in a Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C. Floris is one of the 100 largest United Methodist churches in the United States. Tom is always among the first clergy elected to represent the Virginia Annual Conference at General Conference and he serves on the Commission on the Way Forward. Everyone experiences Tom as an optimistic, articulate, thoughtful pastor who calls out the best in others and very much wants to fix the church. Think of him as our Tom Hanks. He even looks like the guy who plays the part of the sun on the Jimmy Dean Breakfast Sandwich commercial. So, when Tom says, "It's just not working anymore," his discouragement is discouraging.

Tom is not alone. Leaders in all quarters of our denomination are reaching the same conclusion: It's just not working anymore. I get it in the form of questions from students and prospective students who ask: "What am I getting into?" "Will I be able to stay in ministry if I pay for this degree?"

Can we restart our movement?

Most people in our congregations became Christians and came to the church without thinking much about it. They joined because other people did -- their tribal chief or monarch, their parents, their neighbors, their spouse, or even their children. For decades, this momentum fueled the growth of our churches. But when it stops working, it's like running out of gas at the bottom of the hill.

In the history of Christianity, there is a cycle between the phases of movement and institution. Movements beget institutions. But institutions also beget movements. In a movement, most people believe in the cause. In an institution, most people believe in the institution. In China today, Christianity is a fast-moving movement. Seminaries like Wesley and Claremont and others are working to develop institutional structures, including basic theological education. Nearby in Korea, which has the largest Methodist congregations in the world, churches have reached an amazing degree of institutional development and are now thinking about how to foster new movements. I believe The United Methodist Church in the United States is in "late-stage institutionalism," and the question is whether we can restart the movement again.

Two groups have the biggest influence on whether we can become a movement again -- appointed and elected denominational leaders and the leaders of our theological schools. These two groups must come to a consensus about the gravity of our condition and the importance of reviving the movement. This is a "shepherding moment" in the history of our denomina-

tion. It is a time when those with the rods and staffs have to start the climb back toward green pastures.

Indicators of systemic failure

I could spend every Sunday for a year attending worship in a thriving United Methodist congregation in the mid-Atlantic area. I could return to my campus and have dinner with some of the most exciting students we've had in 30 years and hear excellent faculty talk about their love of teaching and the useful research they are doing. Otherwise, I wouldn't have the heart to write this chapter or this book or, for that matter, to lead a seminary. But these churches and students and faculty are like finding pools of water in a drying riverbed.

Our denomination is experiencing the psychological and social equivalent of an economic recession, even a depression. And, as with an economic recession, the problem is system-wide. What are the signs? Let me begin with some of the more objectively verifiable trends indicating systemic failure:

1. A steady decline in church membership and worship attendance despite an increase in the overall population. We have been shrinking as a percentage of the U.S. population since the 1870s. Membership has been declining since 1967 and weekly worship attendance has dropped steadily since six weeks after September 11, 2001.¹
2. A continual increase in the average age of our congregations, compared to the general population.
3. Our inability to plant many truly successful new churches, or close enough old, unsuccessful churches.
4. Our failure to attract enough young, diverse, and high-quality new clergy and our inability to remediate or remove poorly-performing clergy.

Additionally, there are some more subjective, indirect indicators of systemic failure:

5. Reluctant leadership. Increasingly, some of our best pastors are reluctant about being nominated to the episcopacy. Bishops find it harder and harder to recruit these pastors to serve as district superintendents. And, year after year, the same individuals seem to be re-elected lay delegates to annual conferences.
6. The shrinking pool of young recruits. Fewer and fewer of the best college students from strong church backgrounds express an interest in ministry as a profession, and many of those who do enter seminary say they want something other than the local church ministry.
7. Fewer people giving larger annual gifts to their church. For some time, in many churches, the average amount given by individual members has been on the rise. This is the heroic efforts of the most loyal, often older members, to counteract a shrinking donor base.
8. The specialization of our language. I plow through three layers of jargon — the academy, the professional terminology of United Methodism, and the obscure nomenclature of the theological educator. We have a hard time talking with each other and making sense to laity.

9. Political gridlock. Our general conference has been transfixed for more than 20 years by the continued disagreement over homosexuality. Regardless of one's view on the right resolution, this is a symptom of something broken in the body politic. As a long-time resident of Washington, D.C., I recognize the pattern.

All these signs indicate a system turning in on itself. And there is one more: We have earnestly tried to reverse many of the trends. We have spent considerable time and money with little or no result, even though we are full of good, smart, well-meaning people. A team that's working really well is said to be "more than the sum of its parts." Conversely, a team that is not working well is "less than the sum of its parts." Isn't that the case with us?

The challenge facing theological education—price point

What about our theological schools? A well-known business school came to me several years ago exploring the possibility of a joint degree. They had developed a "product," as they call it. It was an MBA for the social sector and they had forged a partnership with a medical school to prepare hospital administrators. Now, they thought clergy might be a vast untapped market. After a few rounds of conversation, they broke it off saying, "There's no money in educating clergy." This was an epiphany for a business school dean, but a reality I deal with daily.

The precise problem seminaries face is what they would call the "price point." The salary churches are willing to pay pastors, and the amount they are willing to contribute through the church for their education, is not commensurate with the level of education they require of clergy. In fields such as medicine, law, or architecture, the level of professional salaries supports the cost of professional education. But the starting salaries of pastors are significantly lower than the starting salaries in these other professions. And clergy never catch up.

Almost all seminaries of all denominations have made significant cuts since the beginning of the Great Recession in 2008. Some of the wealthiest schools, Princeton and Yale, for instance, and more recently, Fuller, have announced significant reductions in faculty and programs in the long wake of the recession. Many have had to draw down reserves and take even more drastic action in search of financial stability.

The return on investment for United Methodist seminaries

What about the 13 United Methodist seminaries? We are a good investment for the denomination. We are consistently considered among the highest quality schools in the ATS, and seven United Methodist seminaries, (Candler, Duke, Perkins, Boston, Garrett-Evangelical, Drew, and Wesley) are among the 40 wealthiest ATS schools, as measured by long-term investments. The United Methodist seminaries with Ph.D. programs supply a large portion of the faculty and texts for other schools. We prepare the majority of United Methodist elders, and that share is increasing. Moreover, we return substantially more to the denomination than we receive in preferential scholarships for United Methodist students, in preferential hiring of United Methodist faculty, and through support of the Course of Study and Central Conference theological education, for which we are under-reimbursed by the denomination.

The way seminaries have made it work thus far is to try to keep costs down, relative to the rest of higher education. Student housing at Wesley Seminary, for instance, costs only half of much as it does at the United Methodist-related American University next door. Senior administrator salary levels are significantly lower than counterparts in higher education. All of our seminaries discount already low tuition rates with scholarship funds drawn from endowments or current gifts. And we supplement tuition revenue with other sources of income.

Since 1968, The United Methodist Church's Ministerial Education Fund (MEF) has been one of the most important sources of revenue for seminaries. The MEF is one of seven "general Church funds" that are funded by collections from congregations and annual conference reserve funds and are annually distributed by denominational offices for various church-wide causes. Of the amount collected for the Ministerial Education Fund, 56 percent makes its way to the 13 seminaries. It is divided among us according to a formula that is weighted based on the number of certified candidates for ministry enrolled, and the success record of each seminary's graduates in completing ordination. There is also a preferential portion given to schools with Ph.D. programs. Faculties in MEF-supported schools must include a substantial portion of tenured professors from the denominations in the World Methodist Council. When the MEF was established, it helped our schools develop to be among the best theological schools in North America. MEF funds are still a critical part of our budgets, but it is a shrinking percentage of our total budgets because general Church apportionments have not kept pace with inflation.

So, the heads of our theological schools have become relentless fundraisers. Because the majority of our alumni are clergy with low salaries and the obligations to raise money for their own congregations, most of our gifts come from individuals who have never taken a class at our schools.

In some cases, seminaries raise significant grant income for projects in research and development. Wesley is unusual in this regard, with over seven percent of our total revenue coming from foundation grants.

And we have become marketers, especially in our efforts to recruit non-United Methodist students and students in new kinds of degree and non-degree programs. The tuition from these programs helps subsidize the United Methodist students enrolled in the Master of Divinity degree. However, the return on investment for our marketing dollars is poor because of the low price point. And our non-degree programs are constrained because the economics of continuing education are different for clergy than for other professionals with employers who foot the bill or who know their education will increase earnings down the road.

Similarly, the price congregations are willing to pay for high-quality adult education materials does not cover the cost of production. Nevertheless, every one of our seminaries donates faculty time for a myriad of lay education opportunities. For example, Wesley produced, through our Wesley Ministry Network, a set of video-based courses for adult education in congregations. Over 200,000 people have taken these courses, but we lost money with each sale. Faculty received no royalties for their work. It was possible only because capital gifts were

raised for the up-front production costs. This kind of uncompensated work for the church is typical for seminary faculty.

Through our fundraising, grant-writing, and marketing efforts, the 13 United Methodist seminaries bring in large amounts of financial resources from beyond the denomination to pay for the preparation of United Methodist clergy and lay leaders in the United States. And we provide the second largest source of funds for the preparation of United Methodist clergy outside the U.S. What other United Methodist organization is producing such a large net return on investment?

The other way we have been making it work is through debt financing, and it is the students who have borne that debt. I'm not nearly as worried about my one son's \$400,000 university and medical school debt, or another son's \$250,000 mortgage, as I am about the many United Methodist seminary students incurring over \$40,000 in student loans, which currently bear interest rates of six percent and higher. This can't continue.

Is a voucher system the answer?

Every four years, a populist sentiment raises the possibility of turning the MEF into a voucher system, distributing it directly to United Methodist students. There are three reasons this is a bad idea.

1. A voucher program could only be offered to certified candidates for ordained ministry. But many students don't decide to become United Methodist clergy until they are well into their seminary education. They would not receive these funds.
2. A voucher program would be administered through annual conferences, which already administer 25 percent of the apportioned MEF funds. But some annual conferences do not have good records of accountability in administering MEF funds. The conferences would also have to add professional staff to administer the vouchers, creating more overhead.
3. Vouchers would drive up the cost to students in the same way government-guaranteed student loans have driven up costs in the overall educational market. A number of United Methodist students would use their vouchers to go to the lower-quality convenient non-United Methodist seminary. This would save some of the weakest and most financially distressed seminaries in the industry. They would raise their tuition rates without offering preferential financial assistance to United Methodist students, as our own seminaries do. Simultaneously, the United Methodist seminaries would have to raise tuition rates and cut financial aid.

Turning MEF funds into scholarship vouchers is the same as MEF funds to non-United Methodist seminaries, often of lower quality. Why would we rent space in seminaries not interested in the future of our movement when we own space in our own schools?

Theological schools have reached a tipping point

Theological schools have worked hard to remain competitive. When these economic incentives work in the same direction as our mission, they can produce powerful results. Competitive pressure has produced creative new programs and effective administrators. We have become more in touch with the issues of the church than have seminaries not affiliated with the denomination. However, it just isn't working anymore.

Some of our seminaries are teetering on the brink of viability. All of us are raising funds from the same shrinking base of mainline Protestant lay people and a small pool of foundations interested in religion. But perhaps the most toxic trend is the heavy competition between sister schools for young applicants with high G.P.A.s.

So, how are our seminaries doing? Recall the business school dean's revelation: "There is just no money in educating clergy." While we aren't in it for the money, we can only continue to serve within a viable economic framework. The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan often said, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts." And the facts clearly suggest that it just isn't working anymore.

If we were a sports team, it would be time for a coaching change. But there is no coach and no headquarters - as I sometimes finding myself explaining to incredulous CEOs from other fields - and, unless or until we face a bankruptcy judge, there won't be. There is no single steering wheel so we have to find ways to act with the assistance of a coordinating grace.

Now is the time to choose whether we want to work together or split. We agree there is a problem, but there is not a unity that our unity matters, that The United Methodist Church is worth saving because our bonds are precious, our shared vision is righteous, and we accomplish more together than we could do apart.

The search for unity is producing diminishing returns as positions become more entrenched. Paradoxically, the effort has become counterproductive as we have spiritualized our politics. Calling something "Holy Conferencing" when it is really just lobbying or a negotiating strategy deafens us to the actual voice of God.

Instead, we must seek a consensus rather than unity to move forward. We must then make some very tough decisions and uninspiring compromises which will not feel very "holy" until long after they are made. And, as we do, let's picture Jesus is on no side; he stands equidistant and weeping, beckoning us to a different future.

Are seminaries part of the problem?

I've shared some brutal facts and blunt criticism. In that same vein, it is fair to ask: Are the United Methodist Theological Schools part of the problem? Are we part of the reason "it just isn't working anymore?" When I entered seminary in 1982 it was common for people in the church to say that its theological schools were elitist. And back then, there was some truth in that.

This is the kind of criticism we heard as we began to reinvent Wesley Theological Seminary. Rightly or wrongly, we were seen as part of the problem. Now, with the efforts we

undertook to be a “church-based seminary,” Wesley is seen as part of the solution. And similar changes have been made at each of our United Methodist schools of theology. We differ because we reflect the different nature of the churches in our various regions; yet each of us is now providing creative and adaptive leadership, though some are struggling to maintain financial viability.

Still, many ask if advanced, professional theological education is worth the investment. This question has been asked throughout the history of theological education since the Reformation. But it is fair to observe that the Master of Divinity has only become the norm for full-time pastoral ministry in the last 80 years and that membership in mainline Protestant churches has declined seemingly in lockstep. Is there a connection?

Many bishops and Boards of Ordained Ministry complain about the quality of some of the candidates they are seeing. In return, the seminaries point out these candidates came from their churches, often with their enthusiastic recommendations. Yet, in the end, there is an extraordinarily high rate of ultimate approval of these candidates by the boards of ordained ministry, and a low rate of removal later by the Bishops. We are practicing co-dependency.

Some historical perspective is important. First, studies of theological education going back to the 1920s report concern both about the quality of candidates coming to seminary and complaints from the church about those entering the ministry. However, at every period of challenge in the 2,000 year history of the church, it has elected to increase the level of education required of its clergy. This is especially true when the ministry is seen to be lagging behind the increasing education of the laity and the complexity of the society.

This same pattern is at work today. Within Methodism, for instance, just as The United Methodist Church in the United States seems to be questioning the Master of Divinity degree as standard preparation for pastoral ministry, the Central Conferences and the African Methodist Episcopal churches are increasing their pressure for this level of preparation, as are the Korean Methodists and the Central Conferences in the developing world. Outside the denomination, the greatest demand for seminary-trained pastors is in the fastest growing church in the world, China.

Are seminaries too liberal?

I spent a few days in William Gladstone’s library in Wales, United Kingdom. Gladstone was one of the most influential British prime ministers, who led four governments under Queen Victoria. He was an extremely religious and conservative man by nature, first a Tory (Conservative), then head of the Liberal Party, which is not the point of the story, except to point out the meaning of the words “liberal” and “conservative” shift with circumstance. I was nestled in the most comfortable chair I could find, deep in Gladstone’s book stacks trying to answer this question about whether seminary faculty are too liberal. Don’t be impressed with my scholarship - I was there for the chair - but I happened to glance up at the books at eye level on the shelf and there was a title: *Liberalism in Religion*, by William Page Roberts, prominent Anglican clergyman at the turn of the last century. I grabbed it, opened to a random page,

and the first and only sentence I read puts best what I want to say: “Liberalism *in* religion is Conservatism *of* religion. If it were not, I would not be its apologist.”⁴

Are seminary faculty too liberal? I imagine a majority of them voted for the Democrat in the last several presidential elections. On average, they tend to be on the liberal side of a range of issues, although less so than academics in secular schools. They are also liberal in the sense of believing in free speech and intellectual inquiry. They know the Old and New Testaments have a developmental history and contain inconsistencies which are meant to be explored, unafraid.

On the other hand, as scholars, they are inherently conservative of the texts and traditions of the faith. They know the Bible better than anyone and read it in the original languages. They are men and women of principled character. They experience their work in a seminary as a call of God. Why else would someone spend so much time and money on an otherwise useless degree? They are committed to the church by vocation and are critics by profession. They put their students first. Most go to their churches every Sunday, except for the many times they are preaching or teaching elsewhere. The most meaningful time for our faculty at Wesley Seminary is the worship service before Commencement when they lay hands on and pray for the graduating seniors.

If you define “liberal” as open and believing in the importance and possibility of progress toward a peaceful and just society, then yes, seminary faculties are liberal. They are liberal just as John Wesley was more liberal than his contemporaries, just as the Salvation Army was more liberal than the rest of Methodism in its day, and just as Korean Methodism and West African Methodism are more liberal than the other faiths in their contexts.

But what people often really mean when they ask if seminary faculty are liberal is, “Are they out of touch with the church?” In short, the answer is, “No.” In addition to the churches they regularly attend and the ones they visit, they hear students and alumni speak about the reality of their churches. They are in touch with a greater number and greater variety of churches than most pastors who know only the few churches they serve.

Seminary faculty are, however, often idealistic, unrealistic and impractical, as any seminary CEO will attest. But don't we need them to be? To borrow a term from British politics, seminary faculty should be the loyal opposition to the established church because they have a passion for what the church is meant to be. They do not think about whether what they teach is marketable, or even whether it preaches next Sunday. They are concerned with what is true in the sense of being accurate and true like a compass, pointing toward the more excellent way.

I will have more to say about how seminaries must change. But the problem is not that our faculties are not too liberal. They are not the cause of the decline of the church. They are part of the solution.

Our focus should be on the future

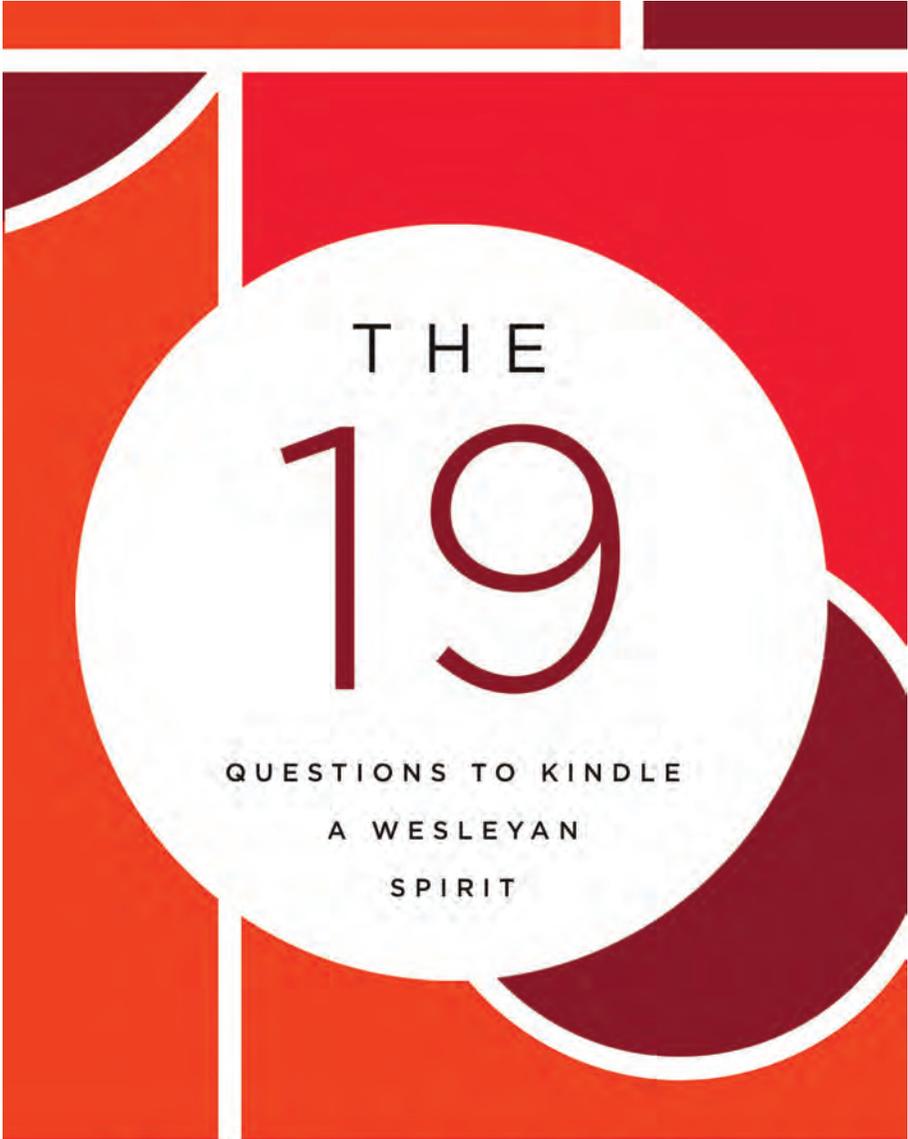
Let's look at what has happened from a different perspective. Consider the extraordinary changes happening in the United States over the last generation. In 1955, the year I was born, 50 percent of households were married couples with children in the home. Today, that

demographic is 20 percent. During that same period, the ethnic and religious diversity of the country has increased substantially. United Methodist churches have been struggling to adapt to these dramatic changes to their traditional base. Also, we have watched the culture become secularized. The evidence is trivial but telling. On Sunday mornings, kids are in soccer at 11:00; the only thing not open are dry cleaners; and pastors no longer receive free membership in country clubs. We should have dealt with these fast and profound changes better. But that calculation is in the past.

Have you ever been in a traffic jam that goes for miles and finally opens up but you never see what caused it? Those who study traffic and other moving systems say this lag time is a common feature. What we are experiencing now is not the fault of anyone currently caught up in our system. Whatever went wrong, went wrong some years ago. Now we must set our sight back on Jerusalem.

(Endnotes)

1. **Lovett H. Weems, Jr.**, *No Shows: The Decline in Worship Attendance, The Christian Century*, September 22, 2010
4. **William Page Roberts**, *Liberalism in Religion* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1886), vii



CAROLYN MOORE

The 19

Questions to Kindle a Wesleyan Spirit

Introduction

Questions have a way of exposing us. A good question can enter in and churn up latent feelings or beliefs we didn't even know were in there. A great question can stop us in our tracks and change our worldview. Good answers fix problems in the short-term; good questions create lasting change. Great questions create clarity and inspire ownership.

I believe John Wesley's nineteen questions asked of potential preachers were great questions.

One must wonder if John Wesley's choice of questions -- as opposed to creeds or statements or oaths -- was an act of practicality or a stroke of brilliance. Because he chose to ask questions of those seeking to lead in the early Methodist movement, pastors for nearly two hundred fifty years have had their worldview shaped, their calling clarified, and their potential unearthed by nineteen potent ideas presented to them as theological affirmations with a question mark.

Since 1773, pastors in the Wesleyan tradition have answered nineteen historic questions as a way of agreeing to how we will live into this ministry life. Candidates for ordination examine these questions and prepare to answer them at the Annual Conference during which they are ordained. Likely, we've come to view these questions as a matter of formality. By the time an ordinand stands to answer them publicly they have already been approved for ministry. An appointment has already been chosen for them. Their family has arrived from out of town to celebrate the milestone. No one reasonably expects the pastor to answer in a way that would preclude ordination. Much like a wedding, while the public profession is authentic, the commitment seems to have been made long before the big day.

And much like a wedding, one might well answer these important questions faithfully on the "big day" but then quickly forget the substance of them in the years that follow.

Do these historic questions stand the test of time? Are they relevant a quarter of a millennium later? Or a quarter of a century later? I read these questions for the first time when I was preparing for ordination. After that, I can't say that I so much as thought about most of them again until about twenty years after I first answered them publicly. Examining them in the light of two decades of ministry, I discovered something unexpected and special. I found that rather than becoming distant and lifeless, these questions were only enriched by time. I now had experience to support the importance for them. I understood freshly that knowing what you believe matters. I recognized the importance of publicly committing to the hard practices of fasting and not spending money foolishly. These were more than questions, I realized. They were -- and are -- accountability. They are meant to live in us, to be lived out much as Paul advised us to work our salvation daily with fear and trembling.

Keep in mind that these were questions originally designed to test potential preachers. Yet, even with leaders in the movement Wesley began with the most fundamental question of salvation: Have you faith in Christ?

Isn't that bold? And insightful. It was the wisdom of an elder in the faith who knew too well that even the best among us can fake it in ministry and do a lot of damage in the process. As much as we'd like to trust that every person who expresses a call to ministry is full of faith and passion for Jesus, experience tells us there are far too many stories of burned out pastors drowning in crises of their own making years into their ministry. Faith in Christ is not a "gimme" for men and women who preach it; without it, a ministry is little more than clanging cymbals or a noisy gong.

From that foundational question, Wesley jumped immediately into the deep end, asking, "Are you going on to perfection?" Again, this is a radical thing to ask. Long before I became a pastor, I had a conversation with a woman who had just been ordained into The United Methodist Church after initially being ordained as a Baptist pastor. The conversion was for her a great gift on almost every level. She told me with some surprise, however, that she hadn't been expected to answer this question. "Did you realize," she asked me incredulously, "that they want to know if you're going on to perfection?" When I asked how she responded to that question, she answered quietly, "Well, I crossed my fingers behind my back and said 'yes.'"

Betraying, of course, any hint of an idea she might actually be going on to perfection. I don't think Wesley was looking for leaders who were comfortable crossing their fingers ... ever. Wesley not only wanted to know that those preaching the good news about Jesus were heeding the words of Jesus himself ("Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." - Matthew 5:48), he wanted to know they were earnestly seeking after the kind of holy love that comes from a holy God.

This gets at the essence of each of Wesley's "nineteen." When he asks his candidates to be resolved, to be earnest, to study and to be diligent in instructing others, Wesley wasn't after company men or career women. Wesley hungered after a movement led by faithful, fruitful followers of Jesus who were willing to give their all.

True to Wesley's own style, he was looking for spiritual leaders who were spiritually disciplined. Question nineteen asks the ordinand to be diligent, productive, punctual. All very practical requests. But the meat of this question is in its final line: "And do not mend our rules, but keep them; not for wrath, but for conscience' sake."

That final line reveals the heart of these profound and weighty questions. They are designed not to stamp out doctrinal robots but to shape pastors and people who live, work and minister with integrity — from a right heart, with authority and without fear or under compulsion. This final line raises the bar. Those who take these questions seriously should not have to be corralled into line behind them. Rather, they ought to be those who so thoroughly walk in the way of Jesus and in the spirit of a United Methodist that these concepts become more of a comfort and an inspiration to follow hard after our great redeemer, friend and teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the request that these questions be rehearsed year after year, century after century, Wesley's motive was surely to produce men and women of God who were honestly, earnestly attempting to grow up in every way into him who is our head. If indeed that is the heart behind these questions (and of course, I can only surmise), then they are worth asking of every United Methodist everywhere who seeks to live in covenanted connection with others around the globe who claim this theology as they seek to follow Jesus.

Wondering if you're up for that challenge? Spend time with these questions. Hear them as if spoken from the mouth of a man who sacrificed rather significantly for the cause of Christ and who has helped generations of Christians live out a practical theology of grace and truth. And if you come to the end of these nineteen and find yourself energized, then perhaps your heart is as my heart. If so, give me your hand.

Our Purpose Is Love



our purpose is
love

the Wesleyan way to be the church

David N. Field

OUR PURPOSE IS LOVE *The Wesleyan Way to Be the Church*

Tension, polarization, and conflict are part of our daily experience. TV news shows bring reports and images of international and national conflicts into our living rooms. Political debates quickly degenerate into name-calling, disparagement, and verbal abuse. Differences of political opinion between friends, neighbors, and colleagues quickly intensify into personal conflicts. Social media has become a means of trading insults, denigrating others, reinforcing stereotypes, and intensifying conflicts. Even in the churches it seems that there is no longer a place for sincere disagreement. People with differing political, social, or theological viewpoints are quickly demonized. As Christians, we know we are supposed to love another, but even that mandate has come to mean different things to different people. Some interpret love as being in agreement with one's neighbor rather than acting toward one's neighbor in a way that mirrors the compassionate, grace-giving heart of God. The question we are confronted with is: "What does it mean to love God and neighbor today—in both the world and the church—and why is this the answer to the conflict that divides and polarizes us?" This book is a response to this question. It is a response that examines John Wesley's understanding of God's love and asks how are we to embody such love in the church and the world today. . . .

From the Bible and Wesleyan theology, we see that God is love, and God's love is passionate concern for the comprehensive well-being of human beings—for each of us. There are four perspectives or emphases from which we can view God's love as passionate concern:

- *God's love is relational.* God has a passionate desire to draw us into a relationship with God's very self and to remove all obstacles between us. It is through this relationship that we can achieve the personal fulfillment God intends for us.
- *God's love is expressed in mercy, justice, and truth.* Justice is God's commitment to treating us according to who we are and what we do. *Mercy* is God's compassion for us as suffering and sinful human beings, and mercy goes beyond *justice* in seeking to heal and transform us despite our rejection of God. *Truth* is God's reliability in being and action, so that we can always depend on God to act according to the divine character and purpose revealed through the Bible.
- *God's love is most profoundly revealed on the cross.* It is this deep, costly, self-sacrificial dedication to humanity that enters into the pain and suffering of the world in order to bring healing, reconciliation, and transformation.
- *God's love is not opposed to God's anger, because God's anger protects.* God's anger is directed at all that would destroy whatever prevents us from achieving the well-being that God intends for us.

These four perspectives are important in a society where the idea of divine love is often transformed into a vague concept of being nice that turns God into an indulgent Father Christmas figure; a figure who is unconcerned about sin and evil, whose name can be invoked to support our own self-interest, and whose primary role is our superficial happiness. The love of God revealed through the Bible is the very opposite of this, and it is only when this is understood that we can affirm with John Wesley that “love is the very image of God; it is the brightness of his glory.”¹

1. Sermon 146, “The One Thing Needful.” *Works of Wesley*, (Bicentennial) 4:355

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