

1. What is LGBTQ?

This acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (and sometimes questioning). LGBTQI includes an “I” which stands for “Intersex.”

2. What is The United Methodist position on homosexuality?

This is not a simple question to answer.

The official position of the UMC is found in its Book of Discipline and various resolutions that have been approved by a majority vote of the delegates selected from around the world to represent their local jurisdictions at the General Conference which meets every four years.

Since 1972, the Discipline has stated that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, the UMC will not ordain as pastors or church leaders anyone who is a self-avowed practicing homosexual. Pastors are prohibited from performing same sex weddings.

The Discipline also prohibits congregations, or the UMC generally, from making monetary contributions to groups that promote the acceptance of homosexuality, or that promote discrimination or hate against the gay community.

At the same time, there are resolutions that have also been passed at General Conference that declare the sacred worth of all people, including members of the LGBTQ community and that the church is to be in ministry to all of God's children, with particular concern to those struggling with their sexual identity. See Resolution#28 (2000).

The UMC also espouses “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors,” welcoming anyone to become a member, and offers all of the church's sacraments including communion and baptism.

Despite the prohibitions found in the Discipline, the UMC has openly gay and lesbian pastors, and now an openly lesbian bishop. Particularly in the western US, many pastors perform same sex marriages.

There are a number of national organizations that have been lobbying delegates at General Conference, bishops, and lay leaders to change the various proscriptions about homosexuality found in the Discipline. Some use mainstream tactics such as the Love Your Neighbor Coalition, Methodists in New Directions, and the Reconciling Ministries Network. Others are more radical in their approach, such as Love Prevails. There are additionally numerous regional groups pressing the issue as well.

This past year, at least 15 Annual Conferences passed resolutions expressing their disagreement or concern over the church's anti-homosexual positions in the Discipline, including the Desert Southwest Conference to which PVUMC belongs.

There are also organizations such as Good News that lobby for continued support of the Discipline as it now stands.

As a general rule, positions on these issues vary by region. Churches in the western, northeastern, and parts of the upper mid-west in the US and Europe tend to support changing the Discipline. Churches in the southern US and the central area of the mid-west, as well as Africa and some parts of Asia support making no change.

The Council of Bishops has appointed a select committee to work on a way forward for the global UMC focused on acknowledging our disagreements on LGBTQ inclusion, but taking positions that do not exclude the LGBTQ community as the current Discipline does now. This may result in the calling of an interim General Conference in 2018 or 2019 that would focus solely on a proposed way forward for the UMC that makes room for everyone, despite our differences.

3. Aren't we already welcoming? Why are we doing this?

We would like to think that PVUMC is a welcoming congregation, but are we really? As reflected in our survey results, while the vast majority of respondents said they would be comfortable inviting a same sex couple to our church, or inviting a couple with a gay or lesbian child, at the same time they expressed concern that they would need to shield these invitees from some in the congregation that would not be so welcoming.

Many Christian churches stand in opposition to the LGBTQ community. Just look at the UMC Discipline. PVUMC's recent survey indicates that many church members are concerned with the UMC's discriminatory position and see a need for a more overt invitation to reach out to those who experience such discrimination. Unless or until the Discipline is changed, it is important to have a welcoming statement that expressly includes the LGBTQ community.

4. How will these efforts at being more inclusive help our congregation?

Our congregation at present lacks diversity. By publically declaring our open and affirming acceptance of all of God's children, we hope to break down barriers that may have scared people away from our church in the past. We have heard from guests that they are looking for a congregation that is more

accepting and inclusive, including the LGBTQ community. In our PVUMC survey, the vast majority of members felt that greater inclusiveness would enrich our congregation.

5. What is the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN)?

The Reconciling Ministries Network, also known as RMN, has a website which outlines their mission, vision, guiding principles, strategic directives and more. It includes more than 700 reconciling communities and 34,000 individuals. Read more at <http://www.rmnetwork.org/newrmn/who-we-are/mission/>

6. What do they require of us?

More than 730 UMC communities have gone through the reconciling process which asks the church to include people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in a welcoming statement. This explicit welcome is necessary, says the RMN, because the United Methodist Church hold official policies that currently exclude LGBTQ people from the full life of the church. Read more at <http://www.rmnetwork.org/newrmn/take-action/become-a-reconciling-congregation-or-community/>

7. Is there an outside group with a political agenda that is driving these activities in our church?

There is no outside group with a political agenda that is driving this move to be more inclusive. We are following the teachings of Jesus as a response to a request for more inclusivity which originated in the Church and Society Worship Team. PVUMC also recognizes this issue as part of a larger debate that is going on in the UMC worldwide. As this debate moves forward, it is important to know where our congregation stands on these issues.

Keep in mind that our Desert Southwest Conference has already voted to be a fully inclusive Reconciling Conference. "Reconciling" is the term generally used in the UMC context to connote full acceptance of the LGBTQ community. Other denominations use terms like "open and affirming." All of the UMC Conferences in the western US are reconciling. There are 10 UMC churches in Arizona who have become reconciling and who affiliate with the Reconciling Ministries Network. These reconciling churches are listed on the RMN website so that members of the LGBTQ community looking for a place to worship know that they will be welcomed regardless of their sexual orientation. This is often their first stop in looking for a church. Listing our church among the others on the RMN website is yet another way of telling others that our doors are open to newcomers. It's a great marketing tool.

8. Won't some members leave if we take steps to become more inclusive?

Some members have already left because we are considering greater inclusion, and some have indicated that they will leave if we proceed. At the same time, others have left because they felt we have not moved quickly enough to become a reconciling congregation. As indicated above, we have had a number of visitors say that they came, and in some cases, joined, because we were involving our membership in open discussion of the decision and were likely to move forward. A number of PVUMC members have indicated they have friends and family who would like to come *if* we become more inclusive. Our goal should be to let our knowledge of scriptural context and our understanding of Christ's teachings guide us as we seek God's wisdom and direction in how to move forward.

9. If we become more inclusive, isn't there a danger of becoming a one-issue church?

Our overall communication, marketing, programs, and services will continue to be targeted to reach a large, diverse audience. We would, however, expect gracious welcoming and acceptance of everyone, and extend an invitation to anyone who wishes to become a part of our church. We are all God's children and should be treated as such. It is also possible that special ministries or invitations might emerge to better include the LGBTQ community, but the message of Jesus Christ is big enough to include everyone.

10. What impact would our inclusiveness have on our children's ministry and what we teach in Sunday School?

We see very little impact in this area of ministry. We teach our children that God loves all people and this would not change. We would continue to use the standard Cokesbury curriculum we have used for decades here at PVUMC and do not see a need to make any changes here. Should we choose to join the Reconciling Ministry Network, there is no children's or youth curriculum that they recommend or require we use that addresses issues of sexuality. Should children attend Sunday School from families with two moms or two dads, we would ask our teachers to say there are different kinds of families. We would let parents answer their children's questions.

11. What is the church's stance on use of public restrooms by those who may identify as a gender different from their birth, i.e. transgender?

All PVUMC restrooms are equipped with individual stalls. However, there are also smaller private restrooms available on campus. Like schools, public buildings, and most businesses, our restroom policies would not discriminate against LGBTQ individuals. Family or locking, single toilet restrooms are located in

the Parlor (A2) and in the Church Office (B Building). Those with concerns about using the bathroom with others are welcome to use these restrooms.

12. Many of us were taught throughout our life that the Bible and Christian teaching opposed homosexuality. What has changed now? Are we supposed to disregard what we were previously taught in church?

As United Methodists, we believe that the Bible was inspired by God, but written by man. We also interpret scripture through the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which considers scripture through the lenses of experience, reason and tradition. American Christians, including United Methodists, once accepted and even promoted slavery, something that was common and accepted in Biblical times. As we as a society became more civilized, we as a people realized that slavery conflicted with Christian teaching, and eventually, it was abolished. In another example, the church evolved when it allowed women to serve as clergy in The United Methodist Church, something other denominations still do not allow. As the church evolves, Christians come to realize how discrimination based on race, disabilities, gender, and other differences among us is wrong. God loves all His children equally. As Christians, we must recognize that any form of discrimination is inconsistent with our faith. Jesus taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves.