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Proposed Revisions to Language in the *Book of Discipline* Concerning Homosexuality

Submitted by: Kansas East Conference Task Force on Sexual Orientation and the *Book of Discipline*

WHEREAS, our task force was charged “to clarify the language in the *Discipline* to describe homosexuality in terms that are more unanimously considered theologically compatible with United Methodist tradition,”

WHEREAS, the United Methodist Church, in its tradition, is not a confessional, creedal or moralistic church, “moral particularism is not suited to our basic Wesleyan disposition of growth toward ‘perfection in love’”¹,

¹ This whereas is shaped from questions 72 to 76 found in the 2007 General Board of Higher Education “Study of Ministry” document; www.gbhem.org . As far as the United Methodist tradition of not subscribing to “moral particularism” is concerned, the document states, “We have always been more interested in character—in what kind of people we are, and what kind our leaders are—than in moralistic rules or gates that prevent people from joining us. We are not a confessional church that erects a creed with language to which any prospective member must subscribe; and we are not a moralistic church that erects laws by which to weigh one another’s behavior and evict wrongdoers.”

WHEREAS, the 2004 United Methodist *Book of Discipline* encourages the use of the medical, theological and social science disciplines in shaping our understanding of human sexuality²,

WHEREAS, the task force has studied the *Discipline* at length and has called upon the medical, theological, and social science disciplines to shape our understanding of homosexuality and United Methodist tradition,

WHEREAS, recent studies by medical science strongly suggest that genetic and biochemical factors play a major role in determining sexual orientation,

WHEREAS, Biblical scholars and theologians remain divided on the interpretation of Scripture in regard to acceptance of homosexual practice,

WHEREAS, social scientists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors, remain divided on their views of homosexuality³,

² Paragraph 161.G *Book of Discipline*

³ Even though all major organizations (the American Psychological Association, the American College of Psychiatry, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of Social Workers) responsible for developing guidelines for practice and licensing state that homosexuality is not a disease and the practice of homosexuality does not represent abnormal behavior.

WHEREAS, the United Methodist Church recognizes human sexuality as “God’s good gift to all persons”⁴, and it is difficult to separate our conversations about homosexuality from the larger context of human sexuality,

WHEREAS the current language in the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* concerning the nature and practice of homosexuality is confessional and moralistic, yet ambiguous, and is without definitions of terms or references to Christian traditions that support such language⁵,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that language related to the practice and nature of homosexuality be removed from the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that such language be replaced with language that is more theologically compatible with United Methodist tradition, utilizing the medical, theological and social science disciplines to reflect a deeper understanding of God’s good gift of human sexuality.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Kansas East Conference of the United Methodist Church recommends the following changes to the *Book of Discipline* to the 2008 General Conference:

⁴ 2004 *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church, paragraph 161.G.

⁵ This whereas is shaped from GBHEM “Study of Ministry,” question 73.

Amend Paragraph 161.II C Marriage

We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God's blessing rest upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. ~~We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union between one man and one woman.~~

Amend Paragraph 161.II G Human Sexuality (second paragraph)

Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are ~~only~~ **most** clearly affirmed in the marriage bond. Sex may become exploitive within as well as outside marriage. We reject all sexual expressions that damage or destroy the humanity God has given us as birthright, and we affirm only that sexual expression that enhances that same humanity. We believe that sexual relations where one or both partners are exploitive, abusive, or promiscuous are beyond the parameters of acceptable Christian behavior and are ultimately destructive to individuals, families, and the social order.

Amend Paragraph 161.II G Human Sexuality (last paragraph)

~~Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons~~ **All persons** are individuals of sacred worth, **regardless of sexual identity or sexual orientation**. ~~All persons~~ **We each** need the ministry and guidance of the church in ~~their~~ **our** struggle for human

fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. ~~The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.~~ **While Christians of good faith differ on what Christian teaching reveals regarding sexual identity and sexual orientation, we affirm that God's grace is available to all; and we will seek to live together in Christian community.** We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends **on the basis of sexual identity or sexual orientation.** We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

Amend Paragraph 162.III H Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation

Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for ~~homosexual persons~~ **all persons regardless of sexual identity or sexual orientation.** We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting their rightful claims where they have shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared protection before the law. Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence, **marginalization**, and other forms of coercion against ~~gays and lesbians~~ **persons based on sexual identity and sexual orientation.** We also commit ourselves to social witness against ~~the violence,~~ coercion and marginalization of ~~former homosexuals~~ **persons who have transformed their sexual identity and sexual orientation.**

Delete Paragraph 304.3 Qualifications for Ordination

~~While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals¹ are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.~~

~~1. "Self-avowed practicing homosexual" is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual.~~

Amend Paragraph 2702.1 Chargeable Offenses and the Statue of Limitations

A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (paragraph 368), local pastor (footnote), clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statue of limitations in paragraph 2702.4) with one or more of the following offenses: (a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not being faithful in a heterosexual marriage; (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, (footnote) including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies; (c) **(b)** crime; (d) **(c)** failure to perform the work of ministry; (e) **(d)**

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disobedience to the Order and Discipline of The United Methodist Church; ~~(f)~~ **(e)**

dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The

United Methodist Church; ~~(g)~~ **(f)** relationships and/or behavior that undermines the

ministry of another pastor; (footnote) ~~(h)~~ **(g)** child abuse; ~~(i)~~ **(h)** sexual abuse; (footnote)

~~(j)~~ **(i)** sexual misconduct or harassment; or ~~(k)~~ **(j)** ~~racial or gender~~ discrimination.

IMPLEMENTED BY: General Conference

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[SIGNATURES]

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