

A LOVE LETTER TO OUR CHURCH FROM YOUR LGBTQI RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Dear United Methodist Church,

As we gather in Portland to begin the 10 day discernment of God's leading for The United Methodist Church known as General Conference, we, your Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, and Intersex (LGBTQI) religious leaders—local pastors, deacons, elders, and candidates for ministry—want to remind you of our covenant with you.

We share with you the covenant of baptism which has knit us together as one family. You cradled us into the body of Christ, helped us know the grace that invites us to move more deeply into relationship with God, and invited us to listen for God's call on our lives. We responded, finding that we were most faithful when we gave our lives over to full time Christian service. You embraced us, affirmed us, ordained us, and sent us to serve throughout the connection.

However, while we have sought to remain faithful to our call and covenant, you have not always remained faithful to us. While you have welcomed us as pastors, youth leaders, district superintendents, bishops, professors, missionaries and other forms of religious service, you have required that we not bring our full selves to ministry, that we hide from view our sexual orientations and gender identities. As long as we did this, you gladly affirmed our gifts and graces and used us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in the varied places you sent us.

While some of us have been lucky to serve in places where we could serve honestly and openly, there are others in places far more hostile, who continue to serve faithfully even at tremendous cost to themselves, their families, and yes, even the communities they serve, who do not receive the fullness of their pastor's gifts because a core part must remain hidden. There are many voices within The United Methodist Church who want us to break up with them. From bishops, Boards of Ordained Ministries, and other leaders, we are told to simply leave. Is leaving home ever that simple? We are United Methodists because there is no other denomination with our unique connectional polity and distinctive Wesleyan spirituality. We are here because God has called us to serve in this denomination, and our souls are fed by the theology in which we've been raised.

We are coming out as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, and Intersex persons at this moment for several reasons. Foremost, we want you to know we still love you and seek to remain in relationship with you. Even if we should leave and you seek more restrictive language against LGBTQI persons, know that God will continue to move mysteriously in the hearts of LGBTQI young people and adults and will call them to serve within this denomination. You cannot legislate against God's call. The "LGBTQI issue" is not one that can be resolved through restrictive legislation but instead by seeing that all persons are made in the image of God and welcomed into the community of faith.

We come out, too, to provide hope for LGBTQI young people in hostile UMC churches. These young people are more at risk for suicide than their peers, in part, because of the condemnation they hear from the pulpits and pews of their churches. We come out to remind them that God's love for them is immeasurable, and offers them a love that will never let them go, even when it feels like the church is willing to let them go.

We come out to invite them to listen for God's still, small voice that will speak in the quiet places of their hearts, who will call them into leadership positions. We seek to create a pathway of hope into ministry for them, even when the church has tried to shut its doors on them, or overtly or indirectly condoned the persecution of LGBTQI persons.

We love you, dear church. Through you, we have stood on sacred ground and seen the face of God more clearly. Our prayer, as the church begins its time of discernment, is that you will remember that there are nameless ones around the world, hungry for a word of hope and healing. LGBTQI people and their families exist in every church in every continent of this denomination. They are seeking to remain in faithful relationship with you, even when you refuse, because they know God's tender mercies and great faithfulness.

Dear church, our prayers are with you, with all of us, in the coming days. May we all be surprised by the Spirit who continues to breathe new life in unexpected ways. May we find the body of Christ stronger at the end of our time together, not weaker or more deeply harmed. May we provide a powerful witness of finding unity even in our differences to a world fractured by fear and mistrust.

Signed,

Rev. Jeanelle Ablola

Rev. Brian Adkins

Rev. Austin Adkinson

Rev. Dr. Israel Alvaran

Pastor Elyse Ambrose

Rev. Douglas A. Asbury

Rev. Jeanne Audrey Powers

M Barclay

Rev. Dr Bonnie Beckonchrist

Rev. Ann Berney

Rev. Anna Blaedel

Rev. Daryl Blanksma

Rev Jan Bolerjack

Rev. Dr. Joanne Carlson Brown

Rev. Kristan M. Burkert

Rev. John Cahall

Rev. James C. Carter

Rev. Dr. Nancy A. Carter
Rev. Randa Jean D'Aoust
Rev. Alex da Silva-Souto
Rev. Karen Damman
Rev. Diana Jani Darak-Druck
Sean P. Delmore
Rev. Greg Eaton
Rev. Dr. Karen Engelman
Rev. Dr. Janet Everhart
Rev. Anthony M. Fatta
Rev. Robert Gamble
Micah Gary-Fryer
Rev. Ruth Ann Charlotte Geiger Rev.
John Girard
Rev. Rebecca J. Girrell
Taylor Gould
Rev. Nancy Jean Goyings
Rev. John Edwin Griffin
Rev. Gregory D. Gross
Rev. Dr. Emily B. Hall
Rev. Trey Hall
Rev. Dr. Edward J. Hansen
Rev. Marcia Hauer
Rev. Michael A. House
Rev. Brittany Isaac
Rev. Monica Isaac
Rev. Marguerite Jhonson
Tyler R. Joyner
Rev. Elizabeth Jones
Rev. Lindsey Kerr
Rev. Dr. Jeanne G. Knepper
Ms. Ellen Knight
Rev. Katie M. Ladd
Pastor Bruce Lamb
Rev. Cathlynn Law
Rev. Ardis Letey
Rev. J. Daniel Lewis
Rev. Dr. Pamela R. Lightsey
Pastor Christine Lindeberg
Pastor Rolland Loomis
Rev. Kelly Love
Rev. Dr. Joretta Marshall
Pastor Lea Matthews
Rev. Courtney McHill
Rev. Ralph A. Merante
Rev. David W. Meredith
Rev. Cynthia Meyer
Rev. Jerry Miller
Rev. Sharon L. Moe
Rev. Richard W. Moman
Rev. Deborah Morgan
Rachel Neer
Rev. Joshua M. Noblitt
Rev. Catherine Noellert
Rev. Gregory Norton
Rev. Dr. Karen P. Oliveto
Rev. Dr. Rebecca A. Parker
Rev. Lois McCullen Parr
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Rev. Drew Phoenix
Emily Pickens-Jones
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Rev. Siobhan A. Sargent
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Rev. Laura Young
Rev. Nancy Kay Yount

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