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"LGBTQI CLERGY NAME TOKENISM ON COB COMMISSION"

October 26, 2016—On Monday, [the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church announced the membership of the Special Commission on a Way Forward](#). Today, a group of out lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning, transgender and intersex (LGBTQI) clergy and clergy candidates have released a statement responding to the makeup and purpose of the commission. The group insists that the Commission is formed to determine whether or not the denomination's 44 years of discrimination against LGBTQI people will continue.

In their statement, they highlight a lack of representation in the commission. They write, "We see only two self-identified LGBTQI persons named to a Special Commission tasked to address human sexuality and a way beyond the status quo. In a body fundamentally formed to discuss the future of LGBTQI people in our Church, less than 10% of the commission identifies as LGBTQI people."

The statement also underscores how the intersections between sexism, racism, and homophobia require more diverse racial and gender representation among the LGBTQI people appointed to the commission. "Even the two openly LGBTQI people appointed to the commission are white, cisgender, gay men." They continue, "while important, their presence on the commission does not encompass the full diversity of LGBTQI United Methodist people."

The statement hearkens to the baptismal covenant wherein the church "promises to reject oppression in whatever form it takes" and to the charge, given in commissioning and ordination, to "take thou authority" as ministers of the Gospel. Rooted in these theological principles, these LGBTQI clergy and clergy candidates respond "with concern, sadness, disappointment, trepidation, and deep prayer" to the announcement of the Council of Bishops' Special Commission for "A Way Forward."

"The lack of full acknowledgment of LGBTQI Methodists in representation and wording of the Special Commission does harm," said Rev. Elyse Ambrose. "This is not because LGBTQI persons seek to selfishly center ourselves; but until we are willing to name and acknowledge our disagreement—a fundamentally differing perception of LGBTQI being and worth—we will be hard-pressed to find a way forward, and our disingenuous pursuit will do more harm than good to our beloved church."

Expressing disappointment with those named to the commission, Rev. Alex da Silva Souto said, "Let's call this what it is: perpetuation of systemic oppression! As faith leaders, we believe that all is possible in faith, but false hope is more harmful than hopelessness. How much progress can we reasonably expect when our distinct voices are still being silenced or ignored? LGBTQI oppression is not a matter of theological opinion."

Speaking of her decision to speak out, Rev. Lois McCullen Parr said, "Our lives and our ministries will be on the agenda of a body whose make-up is unfairly stacked against us. We wish we could be surprised, but we know the facts about institutional preservation and the corporate mindset that seeks to retain a false unity while damaging the witness of the Gospel."

Rev. Anthony Fatta adds, "It is as if the Council of Bishops does not even want to have this conversation, which is probably why most of their letters do not even mention LGBTQI people. For me and many of my colleagues, we feel as if we are being deleted from the process by not even being mentioned by name. In addition to the lack of LGBTQI commission members, there are no United Methodist theologians who specialize on human sexuality on the commission. Are we trying to learn from each other for the sake of transformation or are we systematically preserving the status quo?"

Rev. Kristin Stoneking offered words of encouragement, "We must continue to speak, to call the church to its higher purpose, and to refuse the indignities pushed toward us."

"Our Baptism and call to ministry are instruments of grace that bind us together, heal our broken hearts, and give us a prophetic voice for such a time as this," said Rev. Israel I. Alvaran. "When the going gets tough, remember Church, I will resist. I will not be erased."

The LGBTQI clergy and clergy candidates sent their statement to the Council of Bishops and published the statement online. The full statement can be read here: <https://www.facebook.com/UMQClergy/>