

Response to Formal Complaint filed on October 31, 2014

Over twenty years ago, I told committee members of the Board of Ordained Ministry in two different conferences that I disagreed with language in the United Methodist Discipline that declared “homosexuality is incompatible with christian teaching,” and that I would be active in efforts to change it. Both committees approved me and I was ordained a Deacon (1993), then an Elder (1996). So, my stance on homosexuality and same-sex marriage is a surprise to no one in the church.

Serving as the Pastor of Green Street UMC has been one of the great privileges of my life. The congregation has grown in number and diversity, with an increasing commitment to ministries of compassion and justice. Five year ago, the congregation became a Reconciling Congregation making a public statement of welcome to the LGBTQ community. As a congregation we struggled against Amendment One, and celebrated its demise as couples throughout our congregation had their long term, committed relationships recognized by the state.

Kenny Barner and Scott Chappell are two of the finest disciples of Jesus that I know. They model love and commitment in both their professional and personal lives. They are devout church members, who lead and serve with joyful obedience. I am humbled and honored to be their pastor. Like so many of the LGBTQ couples in our church, they have taught me the importance of marriage equality.

At this time, I will not violate the prohibition of the church and preside at same sex weddings. It is more than my own personal and professional well-being that would be at risk. Anyone who spends time at Green Street knows that our commitment is not simply to our own members, but to the many community people in need with whom we are in ministry. There is a lot at stake for all of us with such an action.

But as Bishop Melvin Talbert made clear to our church in a sermon last month, Biblical Obedience calls us beyond the discriminatory language of our denomination. In fact, language within the UM Discipline itself calls us to “*be in ministry with all people.*” If pastors can be charged with violating the Discipline by presiding at ceremonies that celebrate commitment and love, then we should also be charged with discrimination and failing to be in ministry with all people.

In the UM Book of Discipline we read: “*Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world. Thus, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. The mark of an inclusive society is one in which all persons are open, welcoming, fully accepting, and supporting of all other persons, enabling them to participate fully in the life of the church, the community, and the world.*” ¶140

These strong words of inclusion have been inspirational for the work at Green Street Church. We have valued the diversity of the human family and seek to practice radical

hospitality and welcome. This must include the LGBTQ community. The Formal Complaint from Kenny Barner and Scott Chappell make the discrimination of the United Methodist Church's prohibition of same-sex marriage explicitly clear. It is just as wrong for the church to deny pastoral ministry to people as it is for the state to deny legal rights and recognition for committed couples, gay/straight.

Civil marriage and marriage in the faith community are different. All couples deserve the ministry of pastoral care and the sacred rites of worship to consecrate their commitment and love. To have a supportive company of faith We straight people have taken for granted the meaning and honor of marriage in the church. Like other privileges, they become apparent only when others have to struggle to receive them.

While Green Street may have a greater percentage of LGBTQ people in their pews on Sunday morning, we are not alone in the Church. This could be the first of many complaints from United Methodist LGBTQ members who are prevented from "*participating fully in the life of the church.*" I am grateful to Scott and Kenny, and the Green Street congregation, for helping us see the blatant discrimination that still exists in our denomination and to confront our failure to live up to our call in Jesus.

--Rev. Kelly P. Carpenter, November 12, 2014