

# 2016 The BOOK of DISCIPLINE of the United Methodist Church

Scribe's Note: **Highlighted** or **bold** text is my emphasis. Please, dear reader, take that bias into account when reading.

## PART V

### SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

#### ¶¶ 160-166

#### ¶ 161. II. THE NURTURING COMMUNITY

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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 blessings 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 of one man and one woman.<sup>2</sup> (See Judicial Council Decision 694.)

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G) *Human Sexuality*---We affirm that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift.

Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed **only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage**.

We deplore all forms of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused children. All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults.

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. **The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching**. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. **We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons**.<sup>3</sup>(See Judicial Council Decision 702)

## PART VI

### ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

#### ¶¶ 201-2719

#### Chapter Two

#### THE MINISTRY OF THE ORDAINED

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¶ 304. *Qualifications for Ordination*—3. 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 homosexuals<sup>1</sup> are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve The United Methodist Church.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “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. See Judicial Council Decisions 702, 708, 722, 725, 764, 844, 984, 1020.

<sup>2</sup> See Judicial Council Decisions 984, 985, 1027, 1028.

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#### **Section III. Candidacy for Licensed and Ordained Ministry**

¶ 310. *Candidacy and Certification for Licensed and Ordained Ministry*--

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2.d agree for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world and the most effective witness of the gospel, and in consideration of their influence as clergy, to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life as set forth in ¶¶103-105; 160-166. To this end they shall agree to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social responsibility, and growth in grace and the knowledge and love of God.<sup>3</sup>(ppg 232-234) The local church is encourage to assist candidates with the expenses of candidacy;

<sup>3</sup> (pg 232) In adopting the statements in ¶¶ 304.2 and 310.2d on the moral and social responsibility of ordained ministers, the General Conference seeks to elevate the standards by calling for a more thoroughgoing moral commitment by the candidate and for a more careful and thorough examination of candidates by district committees and boards of the ministry. The legislation in no way implies that the use of tobacco is a morally indifferent question. In the light of

the developing evidence against the use of tobacco, the burden of proof would be upon all users to show that their use of it is consistent with the highest ideals of the Christian life. Similarly, regarding beverage alcohol, the burden of proof would be upon users to show that their action is consistent with the ideals of excellence of mind, purity of body, and responsible social behavior.

(3 cont.) Therefore, the changes here do not relax the traditional view concerning the use of tobacco and beverage alcohol by ordained ministers in The United Methodist Church. Rather they call for higher standards of self-discipline and habit formation in all personal and social relationships. They call for dimensions of moral commitment that go far beyond any specific practices which might be listed. (See Judicial Council Decision 318.)

(3 cont.) The General Conference, in response to expressions throughout the Church regarding homosexuality and ordination, reaffirms the present language of the *Discipline* regarding the character and commitment of persons seeking ordination and affirms its high standard.

(3 cont.) For more than 200 years candidates for ordination have been asked Wesley's Questions, including "... Have they a clear, sound understanding; a right judgement in the things of God; a just conception of salvation by faith? ... (§ 310). All candidates agree to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life and to this end agree "to exercise responsible self-control, by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, integrity in all relationships, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social responsibility, and growth in grace and the knowledge and love of God" (§ 304.2).

(3 cont.) The character and commitment of candidates for the ordained ministry is described or examined in six places in the *Book of Discipline* (§§ 304, 310.2, 324, 330, 333, and 335). These say in part: "Only those shall be elected to full membership who are of unquestionable moral character and genuine piety, sound in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and faithful in the discharge of their duties" (§ 333).

(3 cont., pg 233) The statement of ordination (§ 304.2) states: "*The Church expects those who seek ordination to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life ...[and to] agree to exercise self-control by personal habits...*"

(3 cont.) There are eight crucial steps in the examination of candidates. They are:

- (1) The self-examination of the individual seeking ordination as he or she responds to God's call in personal commitment to Christ and his church.
- (2) The decision of the committee on pastor-parish relations, which makes the first recommendation to the charge conference when a member seeks to become a candidate for ordained ministry.
- (3) The decision of the charge conference, which must recommend the candidate.
- (4) The decision of the district committee on ordained ministry, which must recommend the candidate to the conference Board of Ordained Ministry and, where applicable, the decision of the district conference.

- (5) The decision of the Board of Ordained Ministry, which must recommend deacon's ordination and provisional membership. See Judicial Council Decisions 513, 536, 542.
- (6) The decision of the clergy members of the annual conference, who must elect candidates to provisional membership.
- (7) The recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry for deacon's or elder's ordination and full membership.
- (8) The election to deacon's or elder's ordination and full membership by the clergy members of the annual conference.

(3 cont.) All clergy members of the annual conference are accountable as to character and effectiveness to annual conference throughout their entire ministry.

(3 cont.) The General Conference has made it clear in the "Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task" III of the *Discipline*) that Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason are our guidelines. "United Methodist share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine."

(3 cont.) In the Social Principles, the General Conference has said that we "do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." Furthermore, the Principles state that "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 rests 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." Also, "we affirm the integrity of single persons, and we reject all social practices that discriminate or social attitudes that are prejudicial against persons because they are single."

(3 cont., pg 234) The General Conference affirms the wisdom of our heritage expressed in the disciplinary provisions relating to the character and commitment of ordained ministers. The United Methodist Church has moved away from prohibitions of specific acts, for such prohibitions can be endless. We affirm our trust in the covenant community and the process by which we ordain ministers.

(3 cont.) In our covenant we are called to trust one another as we recommend, examine, and elect candidates for the ordained ministry and conference membership. See Judicial Council Decision 480.

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#### ¶ 341. *Unauthorized Conduct*—

6. Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.<sup>35</sup>(See Judicial Council Decision 1115)