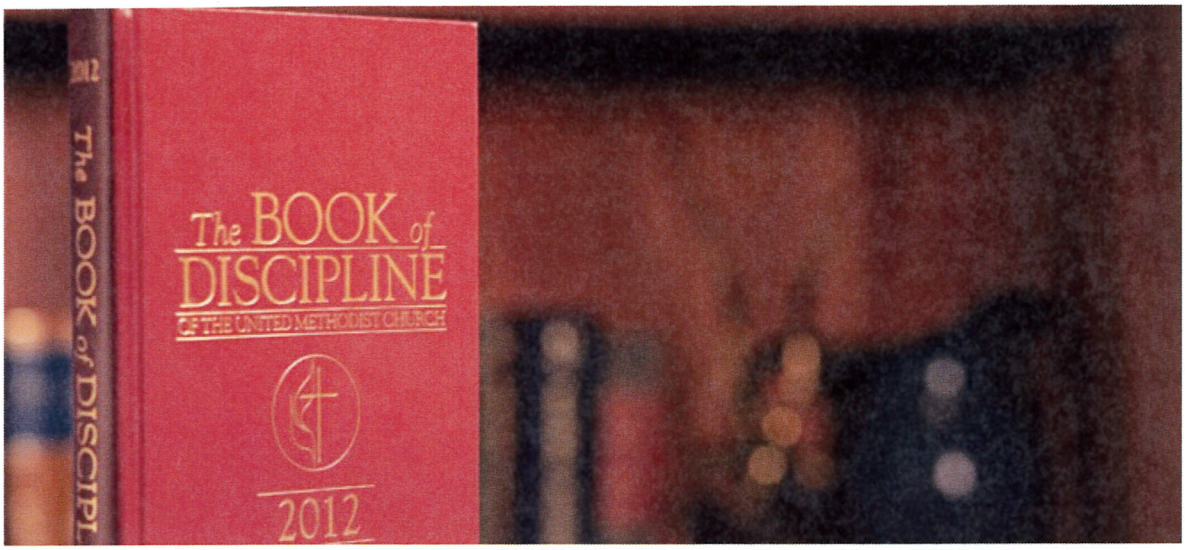
UMs react to resolution proposing change to Discipline's homosexuality language



(http://www.advocatesc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Resolution-on-withdrawal-from-RCRC.jpg)

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS

By Jessica Brodie

As news spread about a resolution (http://www.advocatesc.org/2015/03/discipline-homosexuality-language/) at Annual Conference on whether the church should remove language from the United Methodist Book of Discipline about homosexuality being incompatible with Christian teaching, *Advocate* readers began to react strongly—both for and against the change.

Comments on the *Advocate's* website poured in, along with a number of emails—including a statement from pastors of several of the denomination's largest UMCs in South Carolina (see below).

The resolution, which goes before lay and clergy members of Annual Conference for a vote in June, calls on the South Carolina Conference to petition the 2016 General Conference to remove the sentence found in Para. 161F of the 2012 Book of Discipline that states, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."

The resolution was signed by more than 100 United Methodist clergy and laity, many of whom are part of Reconciling Ministries of South Carolina, a group that works to help the UMC become more open and inclusive to all people, including all sexual orientations and gender identities. The resolution maintains that Para. 161F has been argued by biblical scholars and theologians to be inaccurate and in conflict with what many Christian educators indeed teach, and that it contradicts Para. 162, which affirms all people as equally valuable in the sight of God.

Much of the reaction received to-date has been in strong opposition to a language change.

In the statement from the large-church pastors (see below), they note, "As we move forward as a denomination, we must continue to value, have compassion for, and be sensitive to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation. However, in doing so, we must not ignore scriptural authority or the Christian tradition that has guided us for 2,000 years. Our United Methodist Church has historically held true to this Scripture and tradition, both of which are clear that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. At this crucial point in our history, we must not abandon the Bible's teachings simply because a minority believes that doing so would promote unity in our denomination."

On the Advocate's website, AdvocateSC.org, many engaged in heated debate (http://www.advocatesc.org/2015/03/discipline-homosexuality-language/) about the resolution and homosexuality in general on both sides of the spectrum.

On the "vote against changing the Discipline's homosexuality language," Eddie Myers asked that if language on homosexuality is changed, then what's next: gambling and drugs?

"God loves us all, but our church and myself does not condone homosexuality," Myers wrote.

Likewise, Robbie Hall wrote, "Where will it end? If prostitution becomes legal and popular in our society, are we going to say that's OK, too? We as a church are supposed to be a voice to stand up for the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What happened to teaching, 'Be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind'" If we are going to conform to this world's desires, we are no better than any other cult out there in society."

As well, Kisa Braselton wrote, "God loves all of his created people and he knows that we are sinners, but the Bible says he detests homosexuality. When you start to pick and choose what you want to believe in the Bible, then you lose the truth. The enemy likes to distort the truth to cause division and to destroy. We have to hold onto Love for everyone because we all fall short and are sinners. Love covers a multitude of sins, but also hold firm to truth and call sin a sin. Do not be deceived! Jesus healed, but he also said, 'Go and sin no more.'"

On the other side, Janet Isaac wrote that it is "so sad to read these comments. The *Book of Discipline* contradicts itself just as the Bible does. Homosexuality is not a 'choice' or a 'lifestyle.' It is the way people were created by God, and I hope that soon Methodists will educate themselves into the 21st century."

Similarly, Warren Ashmore questioned why "we continue to point to Jewish beliefs (in Leviticus) that are more than 3,000 years old. Yes, they say homosexuality is a sin (according to their world view) BUT they also say that unruly children should be taken out and stoned. Are we ready to go there? Others point to Paul's letters. Paul approved of slavery and of 'not allowing women to speak in church.' How long has it taken us to realize and escape those 'rules of being a Christian'?"

The Advocate welcomes official letters to the editor on this and other matters going before Annual Conference this June. Letters must be fewer than 350 words and must include a name, church name and city, as well as meet other requirements (see policy, Page Four). The deadline is May 10 for the June paper. Email letters to advocate@umcsc.org (mailto:advocate@umcsc.org).

Statement from several UMCSC large-church pastors on homosexuality:

At the 2015 South Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, a group of clergy and laity will present a resolution for General Conference to remove from our *Book of Discipline* the statement in ¶161(F) that, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." We, the undersigned, oppose this resolution, which we believe is inconsistent with the Holy Scriptures and the Christian tradition that has guided us for 2,000 years.

The United Methodist Church, throughout its history, has been compassionate to, and inclusionary of, all people. We have adhered to the gospel understanding, recognized in our *Book of Discipline*, that all persons are important because they are human beings created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ. We have implored our members to be sensitive to everyone, as doing otherwise contradicts the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we move forward as a denomination, we must continue to value, have compassion for, and be sensitive to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation.

However, in doing so, we must not ignore Scriptural authority or the Christian tradition that has guided us for 2,000 years. Our United Methodist Church has historically held true to this Scripture and tradition, both of which are clear that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. At this crucial point in our history, we must not abandon the Bible's teachings simply because a minority believes that doing so would promote unity in our denomination.

Furthermore, it is our sincere belief that the resolution, if passed, would not lead to unity, but would instead further divide our denomination. The resolution would require millions of United Methodists around the world to endorse a practice that is inconsistent with the Scripture and teachings of Jesus Christ. We believe the resolution would harm the vast majority of churches that adhere to the United Methodist Church's longstanding position on the matter of homosexuality, and would result in many members leaving the denomination, because they would feel that the denomination left them.

For 2,000 years, our mission as Christians has been to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We must not allow the world to transform our Church. In opposing the resolution, we stand behind and affirm the current stance of the United Methodist Church. The current statements in our *Book of Discipline* concerning homosexual practices are faithful to the Scripture and consistent with the tradition of the Christian Church. Furthermore, our position is not exclusionary. Rather it is compassionate, inviting everyone to a Church believing in the intrinsic worth of all people and accepting each other as sinners who, according to the grace given them, resist sin and seek to live God's best for their lives.

Signed:

- Rev. Darren Hook, senior pastor at Covenant UMC, Greer
- Rev. Linda Guthrie, associate pastor at Covenant UMC, Greer
- Rev. Jeff Kersey, senior pastor at Mount Horeb UMC
- Dr. Brian Rainwater, executive pastor at Mount Horeb UMC
- Dr. Ed McDowell Jr., associate pastor at Mount Horeb UMC
- Rev. Jody Flowers, lead minister at Chapin UMC, Chapin
- Dr. George Ashford, pastor at Journey Church, Columbia
- Dr. Phil Thrailkill, senior pastor, Main Street UMC, Greenwood
- Rev. Jeff Dunn, senior pastor, Christ UMC, Myrtle Beach