

September 17, 2019

We, the congregation of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Ithaca, NY, reject and rebuke the "Traditional" Plan approved at the 2019 Special Session of our denomination's General Conference and scheduled to go into effect January 1, 2020. The Plan hardens rules excluding LGBTQ+ members from full participation in the life of the church, and imposes new punitive measures on violators. We reject the Plan as inconsistent with our 20-year stance as a Reconciling Congregation, our 200-year history as a Methodist congregation, and our calling and future as a compassionate, Spirit-led community.

As a Reconciling Congregation, we at St. Paul's have a strong tradition of refusing to perpetuate exclusion, hate and discrimination. We embrace the glorious diversity of God's beloved creation. We affirm that ALL people are of sacred worth. We affirm all genders, gender expressions and gender non-conforming people and relationships. We affirm and celebrate all of our LGBTQ+ siblings.

We also affirm the loving relationships and pastoral needs of our LGBTQ+ members. We believe marriage is a gift from God. We support our pastors in choosing to join loving and devoted couples, whether opposite sex or same sex, in marriage, and we support the use of our sanctuary for the celebration of marriages, whether opposite sex or same sex. As in Mark 10:9 we believe, "what God has joined together no one should separate."

And we affirm that God calls and equips people within the LGBTQ+ community for service and leadership, including ordained ministry. We believe that the sin of denying the gifts and blocking ordination of persons gifted and called by God is a sign pointing to the demise of our denomination, and we continue to call on our denomination to disavow the hateful and hurtful exclusionary language of our Discipline.

As a 200-year outpost of the Methodist movement, we choose to live, in the future as in the past, as Wesleyans, people of freedom and inclusion. We strive to abide in John Wesley's three simple rules: do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. We believe that the "Traditional" Plan, like the exclusionary rules first introduced in the 1972 Book of Discipline, violates all three of these rules.

For nearly 50 years, the exclusionary rules have caused irreconcilable damage to the LGBTQ+ members and their families, and the adoption of the "Traditional" Plan has already driven members and potential members from our church. We, as a congregation and as a denomination, cannot do good as long as our denomination's organizing principles deny the sacred worth, relationships, and calling of our LGBTQ+ members and colleagues. And we simply cannot profess to stay in love with God when our community and connectional life is marked by disrespect, discrimination, exclusion and hate.

Finally, we strive to live as a compassionate community led and transformed by the Spirit, called by the Spirit to welcome and care for all people. Our commitment is to God's work, compassionately extending God's love, and ours, to all who seek Love's embrace. We cannot do this work under the "Traditional" Plan, and we hereby declare our determination to reject and rebuke it.

Act Justly; Love Mercy; Walk Humbly! Micah 6:8

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action! 1 John 3:18

"St. Paul's is a compassionate community led and transformed by the Spirit"

Teresa Sivers, Senior Pastor **Debbie Allen**, Loving Care Coordinator

Anne Horst, Hospitality & Connections Ministries Coordinator **Delvin Collier** Children's Ministries Coordinator

Alexa Allmann, Youth Ministries & Communications Coordinator **Emily Preston**, Choral & Ensembles Director **Caleb Bates**, Organist/Pianist

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