

**A just resolution  
in the matter of a formal complaint  
filed against Rev. Dr. Larry Sonner.**

**Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church  
January 28, 2015**

As Conference Superintendents, we are an extension of the Office of the Bishop. With humility, we affirm the General Rules of Order and the Discipline of The United Methodist Church, and our responsibility to faithfully work with Dr. Sonner and Bishop Trimble for a just resolution in this matter.

The Appointive Cabinet willingly entered into a process of discernment that is an adaption of the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center's Mediation Process.

This document is a product of our collective effort (Bishop Trimble, Conference Superintendents, and Larry W. Sonner) to come to a just resolution that is not perfect but one that we can live with while recognizing that there are challenges and disagreements which are to be expected as the document attempts to meet the needs of all parties involved.

Together we, the Appointive Cabinet and the Rev. Dr. Larry W. Sonner commit ourselves to processes where persons can feel safe, valued, and heard. The following thoughts on a just resolution come from this discernment and are offered prayerfully and hopefully. To this end, we begin with three clarifications:

1) *The Book of Discipline* defines a just resolution in a specific manner:

A just resolution is one that focuses on repairing any harm to people and communities, achieving real accountability by making things right in so far as possible and bringing healing to all the parties.

¶363.1(c)

We read this to mean that any just resolution must address concerns which Dr. Sonner may have caused to the church by officiating at the wedding ceremony of a same-gender couple. In addition, and by the *Discipline's* own definition, a just resolution must also address any harm that may have been caused by the church's stance on this matter.

2) We also affirm the reality that we are not of the same mind on the matter of human sexuality. Even so, we also hold the truth expressed about our shared understanding of the definition and nature of the church:

The church is a community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. It is the redeeming fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by persons divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the church seeks to provide for

the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers, and the redemption of the world. *The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world, and its very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission in that world.*

*Preamble, Part 1 Constitution of the United Methodist Church, Italics Added*

3) We also affirm what we have accepted as our shared *Theological Task*. This we share with all persons of the United Methodist Church as well as the church universal:

While we acknowledge the primacy of Scripture in theological reflection, our attempts to grasp its meaning always involve tradition, experience, and reason. Like Scripture, these may become creative vehicles of the Holy Spirit as they function within the Church. They quicken our faith, open our eyes to the wonder of God's love, and clarify our understanding.

The Wesleyan heritage, reflecting its origins in the catholic and reformed ethos of Christianity, directs us to a self-conscious use of these three sources in interpreting Scripture and in formulating faith statements based on the biblical witness. These sources are, along with Scripture, indispensable to our theological task.

*¶105. Section 4—Our Theological Task (page 82)*

We affirm this task in light of our diversity and that we are not of the same mind on the matter of human sexuality:

United Methodists as a diverse people continue to strive for consensus in understanding the gospel. In our diversity, we are held together by a shared inheritance and a common desire to participate in the creative and redemptive activity of God.

*¶105. Section 4—Our Theological Task (page 87)*

Our task is to articulate our vision in a way that will draw us together as a people in mission.

*In the name of Jesus Christ we are called to work within our diversity while exercising patience and forbearance with one another.* [Italics added] Such patience stems neither from indifference toward truth nor from an indulgent tolerance of error but from an awareness that we know only in part and that none of us is able to search the mysteries of God except by the Spirit of God. We proceed with our theological task, trusting that the Spirit will grant us wisdom to continue our journey with the whole people of God.

*¶105. Section 4—Our Theological Task (page 87)*

Rev. Dr. Larry W. Sonner has freely admitted to Bishop Julius C. Trimble that he did officiate a wedding ceremony of a same-gender couple. The consequence of this action was the filing of a formal complaint by the Appointive Cabinet against Rev. Dr. Larry Sonner on November 11, 2014. Dr. Larry Sonner writes: "I believe the process for ordination as

United Methodist clergy instructs us to think and to act morally, ethically and theologically. I believe it is morally/ethically/theologically wrong for me to say to LGBTQ persons that their lives are incompatible with Christian teaching. I also believe that Biblical obedience and loyalty to God and to the teachings of Jesus should have a higher priority than loyalty to *The United Methodist Book of Discipline.*"

The Superintendents also affirm the vow at ordination to support and maintain the discipline and polity of the United Methodist Church.

Therefore a Just Resolution will include the following:

- 1) Rev. Dr. Larry Sonner has been blessed to be a blessing throughout his long tenure as a United Methodist pastor. The Appointive Cabinet recognizes that Rev. Sonner conducted a same-gender wedding out of his moral, ethical, and theological convictions and that he believes withholding marriage as part of the full ministry of the church is wrong. As an Appointive Cabinet we continue to affirm Dr. Sonner as a beloved child of God;
- 2) Dr. Sonner has expressed his understanding of the harm that has been inflicted by the church upon the LGBTQ community by not allowing the marriages of same-sex couples. Dr. Sonner will be available for holy conversations with persons who are not in agreement with his action of officiating at a same-gender wedding ceremony in order to understand the feelings of those who do not hold his theological position on human sexuality.
- 3) As a result of these holy conversations Dr. Sonner will articulate in written form and in a fair manner the hurt that was inflicted upon those who hold that the Book of Discipline expresses a faithful reading of scripture when he officiated at a wedding of a same-gender couple. This written form will include his own understanding of the harm that has been inflicted by the church upon LGBTQ community by not allowing the marriages of same-sex couples. The goal is the awareness that the grace of God in Jesus Christ can be faithfully held in opposing beliefs on the matter of same-gender marriage.
- 4) The Appointive Cabinet will offer their time and presence to a group, such as *Do No Harm*, who will facilitate safe ways for them to hear from out LGBTQ persons in general and clergypersons in particular as to:
  - a) what it is like being a lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, or queer person;
  - b) how being such a person feels in the United Methodist Church and in this Conference; and
  - c) how they experience harm from the Church.

The Appointive Cabinet is committed to having conversations with pastors who desire to be in ministry with LGBTQ persons. Bishop Trimble will work with the Appointive Cabinet to articulate ways to help such pastors be in ministry with LGBTQ persons without being in violation of *The Book of Discipline.*

5) The Appointive Cabinet encourages Dr. Sonner to join others who seek to change *The Book of Discipline* by the method described in *Our Theological Task*, a method of faithful and passionate patience and forbearance through our ways of amending and revising our shared covenant as expressed in *The Book of Discipline*.

As an Appointive Cabinet we will work with individuals and/or groups who desire change using methods supported by *Our Theological Task*.

6) Dr. Sonner agrees to meet on a regular basis with his Conference Superintendent concerning his progress on the requests listed above.

Together we, the Appointive Cabinet of the Iowa Annual Conference and Rev. Dr. Larry Sonner, commit ourselves to work together toward perfection in our study, leadership and engagement on the issue of human sexuality.

This signed statement of understanding by Bishop Julius Calvin Trimble, the Appointive Cabinet of the Iowa Annual Conference, and Rev. Dr. Larry Sonner acknowledges that disciplinary process was initiated due to violation of *The 2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* ¶2702.1(b) & (d): performing same-sex wedding ceremonies. Record of this complaint and the agreement to this just resolution shall be placed in Dr. Sonner's personnel record of the Iowa Conference. This is an agreed just resolution of the complaint and no further action is necessary.

Rev. Terra Amundson

Rev. Jackie Bradford

Rev. Dr. Thomas Carver

Rev. David Crow

Rev. Dr. Lilian Gallo-Seagren

Rev. Harlan Gillespie

Rev. Paul Smith

Rev. David Weesner

Rev. Dr. Larry W. Sonner

Bishop Julius C. Trimble

January 28, 2015