



Board of Justice

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

March 20, 2019,
Purim

I can't stand your religious meetings, I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions.

I want nothing to do with your religious projects, your pretentious slogans and goals.

I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making.

I've had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to me?

Do you know what I want? I want justice – oceans of it.

I want fairness – rivers of it.

That's what I want. That's all I want.

Amos 5: 21-24 (The Message)

The opposite of Justice is not injustice, it is silence and apathy.

From the Conference Board of Justice,

At the end of February, United Methodists from around the world gathered in St Louis for a special called General Conference. This gathering's sole purpose was to decide the fate of Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) individuals in our church. Four main proposals were offered up as ways in which the church could relate to LGBTQIA people and the LGBTQAI community.

The "Traditional" plan passed. This plan continues the present homophobic language and policies of our current Book of Discipline, but with stronger punishments for clergy and Bishops who choose not to follow the Discipline regarding ordination and same-sex marriages. The message from St. Louis seems to be the United Methodist Church will not be a welcoming and safe place for LGBTQIA people. Rather than following John Wesley's dictum of "Do No Harm," we have chosen to be more punitive in our rejections. I lament the hurt this action has caused to our LGBTQAI sisters and brothers, their families, and their allies. I lament the lost opportunity to repent and turn around. As chair of the Michigan Conference Board of Justice, I am heartbroken by the actions of the church I call United Methodist.

This is not who we are.

Around the world, LGBTQIA people face discrimination and are denied their human and civil rights. As United Methodists we affirm the sacred worth of all persons (Social Principles, Paragraph 161.G), regardless of their race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation (Social Principles, Paragraph 162 and 162.J). In many parts of the world, LGBTQIA people and their allies can be arrested simply for being who they are or supporting or participating in LGBTQIA events and demonstrations. LGBTQIA people face higher rates of violence, much of it state sanctioned. LGBTQIA youth attempt suicide at rates 5 times higher than their heterosexual cisgendered counterparts. The threat of discrimination, homelessness, isolation, and violence is faced daily by the majority of the transgender and gender non-conforming population. This is a matter of justice.

Your Conference Board of Justice continues to stand up for the human rights of people of color, immigrants, women, and people with disabilities. We have sought to promote policies and actions in our conference that would “do no harm” to the LGBTQIA community. I confess that we have not worked hard enough. While we say we will not reject or condemn our LGBTQIA members and friends, we seek to put limits on who they are by terming the practice of homosexuality “incompatible with Christian teaching” (Social Principles, Paragraph 161.G). Words hurt. For too long we have left it up to others or to the next General Conference to fix. General Conference 2019 put an end to all that. It’s time to stop preparing for another round of “Capture the Flag.” Homosexuality is not an issue, its people. This is about real people’s lives.

Your Board of Justice will continue to be an advocate and ally of the LGBTQIA community. We align ourselves with the United Methodist Clergy Letter of March 9th that was addressed to our bishop, Bishop David Bard. We stand with the Conference Board of Ministry’s March 13th policy statement, as well as the Michigan Statement published statewide in area newspapers on March 17th. The Board of Justice and its divisions will continue to work for open doors, open hearts, and open minds. We will continue to support and fund local congregations and pastors in their work with the LGBTQIA members and community. We will continue to tell the stories of the harm and hurt words like “incompatible” do to individuals and families and churches. We will continue to give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, of compassion, grace, and joy; that speaks for justice, inclusion, and human rights. We will continue to work for “justice – oceans of it,” for fairness, and for a church where all are truly welcomed and can fully participate in the life of the church.

The opposite of justice is not injustice, it is silence and apathy.

We will not be silent. We will continue to seek justice and walk hand in hand, and side by side with our LGBTQIA sisters and brothers, their families and their allies.

For the Board of Justice,
Michigan Area, the United Methodist Church

The Rev George Covintree,
Chairperson