

Ruling of Law – 2009

Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference

Request for a Ruling

The following request for a ruling of law was received during the June 6, 2009 morning session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Request for a Ruling of Law: *I rise to request a ruling of law, whether the resolution on pp. 69-70 [of the pre-conference booklet] is in order and properly before us, in that the language of lines 29-32 on p. 69 lacks the qualifying language of Disciplinary ¶161F on Human Sexuality, and thereby establishes a new and different standard on sexuality from the Discipline.*

— Rev. Charles Harrell, an elder within the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

[The paragraph in question on pp. 69-70 of the pre conference booklet states: *We recognize that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We believe persons may be fully human only when that gift is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church, and society. We call all persons to the disciplined, responsible fulfillment of themselves, others, and society in the stewardship of this gift.*]

Bishop’s Ruling

The resolution is not out of order based on the paragraph questioned in the request for a decision of law.

Rationale

This ruling is based on four factors:

1. The request for a ruling does not state specifically the clarifying language to be included and therefore it cannot be determined what other language may have been included.
2. There is nothing in this paragraph that contradicts the Discipline or *establishes a new and different standard on sexuality from the Discipline* or the teachings and beliefs of the Social Principles.
3. The paragraph in question is a statement of belief:

*We recognize that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We **believe** persons may be fully human only when that gift is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church, and society. We call all persons to the disciplined, responsible fulfillment of themselves, others, and society in the stewardship of this gift.*

An annual conference may without contradicting the Book of Discipline state what it believes.

4. The Social Principles are not church law and encourages prayerful, studied dialogue. This paragraph was a part of the prayerful studied dialogue of the Church (opening paragraph of 161 G of the 2004 Book of Discipline) and the Baltimore-Washington Conference may continue to use the paragraph in question in their prayerful studied dialogue in keeping with the intent and spirit of the Social Principles.

The preamble of the Social Principles states:

The Social Principles, while **not to be considered church law**, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. **The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.**