



John R. Schol
Bishop

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Washington, DC Area

Baltimore-Washington Conference

September 27, 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Baltimore-Washington Conference,

On Sunday, September 26, the congregation of Foundry United Methodist Church voted (377 to 8) to adopt a policy that allows the church building to be used for wedding ceremonies for gays and lesbians. The lay leadership requested that the district superintendent be present for this vote, which was taken at a church conference. To ensure the denomination was represented, I instructed the superintendent to be present and to insure that the United Methodist position was communicated during the meeting.

The policy was developed and presented by the laity of the church after months of study and discernment. It states that the congregation is committed to being United Methodist and working within the denomination to change the *Book of Discipline*. Performing same-gender marriages has become increasingly discussed by congregations in Washington, D.C. since the passage of the Marriage Equality Act in March of 2010.

We in The United Methodist Church are divided over the full inclusion of gays and lesbians in the church. Since 1972, every General Conference has debated full inclusion. There are passionate arguments using Scripture, tradition, reason and experience from those who are opposed to the church fully including gays and lesbians and from those who are calling for full inclusion. I recognize that good people of faith will disagree about the church's position on matters of faith, theology, ecclesiology, culture, and polity. I grieve when our differences divide us and set group against group and people against people. I mourn that sometimes differences are turned into anger and even hatred.

In the midst of differences, United Methodists are guided by the *Book of Discipline*. The *Discipline* is clear that we “do not condone the practice of homosexuality (*Book of Discipline* paragraph 161F) and it is a chargeable offense for a clergy person to conduct a holy union or marriage for gays and lesbians (*Book of Discipline* paragraph 2702.1.b). We also “implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons” (*Book of Discipline* paragraph 161F).

Foundry members report they based their actions on the church's constitution, which states that "in the United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the church may be structured to exclude any member because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition."

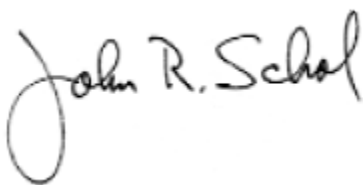
As your bishop, I serve the whole church and I commit to work with all people. In the midst of these difficult matters of the church, I will do all I can to be fair and compassionate as I work to maintain the unity and witness of the church. As a bishop of the church I am responsible for upholding our Book of Discipline and will process and follow through with any complaint or charge against a United Methodist clergyperson of the Baltimore-Washington Conference who performs a same gender wedding or holy union.

I call upon all of our clergy and laity to pray for one another in the midst of our differences. I encourage you to be bridge builders within our conference, churches and communities so that differences may be expressed and we continue to live and minister together as the body of Christ. I call upon you also to practice the discipline of holy conversation with someone you disagree with about any issue in the church. I believe holy conversation about differences strengthens the body of Christ.

I pray for you daily as we make disciples for the transformation of the world.

Thank you for being a United Methodist during some of the most challenging times within the church. Your faithfulness in the midst of the church's struggle to make disciples, serve the poor, and proclaim righteousness and justice is a testimony to the power of God at work through you.

Peace and grace be yours in the name of Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. Schol". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

John R. Schol, Bishop
The United Methodist Church
The Washington, Area
Baltimore-Washington Conference