

The North Declaration

Epiphany 2020

Introduction

North United Methodist Church is an inclusive congregation with a heritage and a hope of welcoming all people and honoring the diversity in our congregation for the mission of Christ and to the glory of God. We are a church where spiritual journeys meet, and throughout our history we have engaged complex and controversial issues with study and honest conversation that has enriched our journey.

Our denomination is currently in a moment of crisis that creates an opportunity for us to reexamine and clarify who we are as Methodists.

This statement is the result of a congregational process of theological reflection and conversation. It expresses the Wesleyan foundation of our congregation's life and mission. Its purpose is to be educational and informative for this moment in the life of our congregation and denomination.

This declaration is not a comprehensive summary of church doctrine. We acknowledge that there are other ways to express one's beliefs in our congregation and the denomination. This declaration only addresses how the issues of sexuality relate to our core Methodist beliefs. We realize that there are additional issues, such as racism and neo-colonialism, which have complex relationships with issues of sexuality. We see this declaration as one small part of a larger vision of liberation.

Our prayer is that God will use this declaration to inform and inspire the reader as they grow in grace.

The Declaration

Image of God

We believe all persons are created in the image of God. We see God in the uniqueness of each person and we experience God through loving one another and being loved by one another.

We reject any interpretation of God's image that limits it to one sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sin

We believe sin is any human action, attitude, policy, or system that violates the image of God in humanity. All persons are drawn to sin and participate in sinful behavior and systems.

We reject the naming of any sexual orientation; gender identification, and loving, same-sex intimate relationships as sinful and reject the shaming of people for being the persons God created them to be.

Prevenient Grace

We believe God's prevenient grace protects all persons from the full effects of sin through relationships, spaces, and social movements that are safe, affirming, and draw us away from life-threatening shame and show us that we are loved by God.

We reject that God's prevenient grace is experienced only through the church. We refuse to believe that God cannot work through that which the church has ignored or rejected.

Repentance

We believe that repentance is a conscious decision to turn to God and away from harming others and ourselves, and to accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression.

We reject harmful acts of repentance such as emotional manipulation, shaming, and conversion therapy that lead a person to reject who God created them to be.

Justifying Grace

We believe that justifying grace is God's unconditional acceptance and forgiveness. It is uniquely expressed to each person who receives it by faith in Christ.

We reject that one must be cisgender, be straight, act straight, or be celibate to receive justifying grace.

Sanctifying Grace

We believe that sanctifying grace (holiness) is the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit restoring our lives and renewing the world with the love and liberation of God.

We reject any idea of holiness that requires a person to deny or attempt to change their sexual orientation or gender identity to be a whole person in Christ.

The Church and Ordination

We believe the church is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing together all who seek to love and serve Christ through our diversity. We believe the church is called to be a means of grace to the world. We believe that the Spirit calls LGBTQIA believers into ordained ministry for the sake of the church's mission, and the church must open its practices to the work of the Spirit.

We reject any definition or practice of the church that grieves the Holy Spirit by delaying reforms, by placing institutional preservation over the calling of our siblings in Christ, or by allowing some parts of the church to discriminate.

Marriage

We believe marriage is a covenant of mutual love and service between two persons whom God has brought together to deepen and express their faith.

We reject any definition of marriage that limits it to only a man and a woman.

Scripture

We believe the purpose of scripture is to be a means of grace through which the Holy Spirit breathes life into our relationship with God, ourselves, and others. We believe the Spirit accomplishes this when we study the Bible with prayer, scholarly inquiry, and communal reflection.

We reject any theology that uses the Bible to exclude, shame, or perpetuate violence against LGBTQIA persons.

CONCLUSION

As Wesleyans, our best theology is sung. A deeper and fuller understanding of this declaration comes by singing together:

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down:
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast;
let us all in thee inherit,
let us find that second rest:
take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be:
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Adopted by the Board of Directors of North United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA on 22 January 2020.

TERMINOLOGY

Cisgender-denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex
Gender Identity- a person's perception of having a particular gender, which may or may not correspond with their birth sex
LGBTQIA- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Allies
Sexual Orientation- a person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are attracted
Straight- a heterosexual person

REFERENCES

	Articles of Religion (AR) & Confession of Faith (CF)	John Wesley's Sermons & Writings	Charles Wesley's Hymns & Other Sources
Image of God		The One Thing Needful. II.2] The Image of God. I.1-4 Original Sin. III.5	United Methodist Hymnal (UMH) 346 v.5
Sin	AR. Article VII CF. Article VII	The One Thing Needful. I.2 The Mystery of Iniquity. § 2 The End of Christ's Coming. I.10] The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God. II.2 Sermon on the Mount. VI. III.13 God's Love to Fallen Man. §1	Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (COH) 106
Prevenient Grace	AR. Article VIII	The Scripture Way of Salvation. I.2 The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption. II.1 Thoughts Upon Slavery. III.8, IV.8, V.7	COH 114 UMH 339, 386
Repentance		The Way to the Kingdom. II.1	UMH 34, 355
Justifying Grace	AR. Article IX CF. Article IX	Justification by Faith. II.5; IV.2	COH 127 UMH 363, 385
Sanctifying Grace	CF. Article XI	Justification by Faith. II.1 The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God. § 2 On God's Vineyard. I.5 On Zeal. II.5 The First-Fruits of the Spirit. I.3, 6 The Witness of the Spirit, Part Two. V.1,3 The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God. III.2 A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. ¶ 27 Christian Perfection. I.1-8; II.1; III.8	UMH 384, 388, 422
Church and Ordination	AR. Article XIII CF. Article V	On Baptism. II.3 On Zeal. II.5 The Catholic Spirit. § 4 The Character of a Methodist. § 18	UMH 550, 553, 566, 606, 616
Scripture	AR. Article V & VI CF. Article IV	Notes on NT, Romans 12:6 Preface to <i>Sermons on Several Occasions</i> . ¶ 5	UMH 595, 603