



**North Church
And the LGBTQ+
Believer**



North United Methodist Church
3808 N. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208
2025 Edition

Introduction

This booklet examines the biblical and theological rationale for our practice of radical hospitality of LGBTQ+ persons. This should not be an issue, because all people are loved equally by God. However, many other churches purport to speak for God in their condemnation of LGBTQ+ persons, leaving one with the impression that being a Christian demands adherence to prejudice. Until recently our denomination, The United Methodist Church, espoused this policy.

For many years North United Methodist Church has stood in opposition to these policies and practices, and we will continue to bear witness to God's inclusive, embracing love. We seek to live by our **welcome statement**:

"North Church is an open, inclusive, and welcoming church. We affirm that through God's redeeming love, all are one in Christ. YOU are welcome at North.

"North United Methodist Church is an inclusive community. It is part of the Reconciling Ministries Network, which is an organization seeking the inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in both policy and practices. We welcome all regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, domestic or marital status, physical or mental ability, economic status, political affiliation, faith history, education, and all other ways in which we are human.

“We believe that all have received God’s love and grace. We seek to transform our church and world into the full expression of Christ’s inclusive love. We celebrate the diversity of North Church.

“We respect the inherent worth and valuable contributions that each member makes to the body of Christ. As we journey toward reconciliation, we proclaim this statement of welcome to all who have known the pain of exclusion and discrimination within the church. We welcome all persons to full participation in the life and ministries of North United Methodist Church.”

It is our prayer and pledge that every person who comes to our church will experience this welcome.

A note about terminology: As our culture has been going through rapid changes in its understanding of gender and sexuality, so too has our language. Human sexuality is far too complex to be reduced to simple categories of gay and straight. I am using “LGBTQ+” and “queer” interchangeably, and the latter as a positive reference. Both words are used to convey a broad spectrum that encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, questioning, queer, two-spirit, intersex, asexual, aromantic, agender, non-binary, genderqueer, and pansexual. Even though many include straight allies when referring to queer, for the purposes of this pamphlet I am referring to all non-queer persons as straight.

I have designed this booklet to give clarity to persons who are considering membership at North,

and so it attempts to offer a comprehensive answer to a variety of questions. Major portions of the book originally appeared in a sermon in 2012 and in a presentation to the Affirming Group Sunday school class.

Finally, a special word of thanks to Dr. Perry Kea and the Westar Institute for their scholarship which was used in the section “What the Bible Says — And Does Not Say.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Darren" with a long, sweeping underline.

Rev. Darren Cushman Wood, Senior Pastor
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NORTH CHURCH AND THE LGBTQ+ BELIEVER

A New Era in The United Methodist Church

In the spring of 2024 the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the governing body of the denomination, made sweeping changes to our policies and practices that ended over 50 years of official discrimination against LGBTQ+ persons and their allies. Bans on the ordination of queer pastors, the performance of same-sex marriages, and funding for LGBTQ+ rights was lifted. The definition of marriage was expanded: “marriage [is] a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age) into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.”

North’s witness of inclusivity for LGBTQ+ persons began decades earlier, and for many years we were at odds with the official teachings of our denomination. Our study of the issue, our sharing of fellowship with queer believers, our empowerment of LGBTQ+ church leaders, and our practice of same-sex weddings have been a vital means of grace that have renewed our congregation.

We offer our insights to others, within the denomination and beyond, who are wrestling with the same questions of faith. Our stance is grounded in scripture, shaped by our tradition, and informed by

our experience of the Holy Spirit. We believe that one can be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ and be queer. But being a faithful follower includes understanding how the Holy Spirit is at work through scripture, tradition, reason, and experience to deeper and support our faith.

What the Bible Says — And Does Not Say

We begin with scripture in forming a faith seeking understanding. Opponents of full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons often cite scripture to support their position. Passages such as Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26-7, and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah are often quoted to prove that biblical authority is clear on this issue. On closer inspection, however, what the Bible says is very limited.

Every translation is an interpretation of the original words. The word “homosexual” never appears in scripture because it is terminology of modern psychology. The ancient writers of the Bible would not have understood sexuality as an orientation but only as a behavior. Also, same-gender sexual activity is a very minor issue in the Bible. There are only six passages which refer directly to the issue, and each one can be interpreted in ways that do not support a blank condemnation of same-gender romantic relationships and erotic practices:

Genesis 2:24 — Genesis 1 and 2 describe the origins of many things, including marriage. Even though monogamous heterosexual marriage is affirmed in this passage, it is not an exclusive norm,

especially given the diversity of other marital and non-marital relations that are tolerated in the Bible, such as King Solomon’s polygamy. Often the case is made for heterosexuality because of procreation. But when this argument is pushed to its logical conclusion this implies that sex is only for procreation, and that singleness and celibacy are substandard lifestyles.

Genesis 19:1-29 — The main offense in the story of Sodom is gang rape, not same-gender loving in general. The mistreatment of foreigners violated the principle of hospitality, which is a major theme in scripture. Ezekiel elaborated on this without referencing homosexual acts when he defined the sin of Sodom as “pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy” (19:49).

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 — The holiness code of Leviticus reflects an ancient worldview that categorized creatures as “clean” and “unclean,” with rituals and moral regulations based on this worldview. Both chapters offer a list of prohibited sexual relations reflecting this worldview and designed to preserve social order in an ancient context. The two passages have a different legal orientation. Leviticus 18 is formulated as a command or principle without a specific penalty, whereas Leviticus 20 stipulates (severe) penalties.

The wording is odd in both. While the New Revised Standard Version translates it as, “You shall not lie with a man as with a woman,” it adds a word, “as” (similar to “after the manner of”). The literal construction of the Hebrew phrase *mishkeve isha* is:

“You shall not lie the *lying downs of a woman* with a man.” This is an idiom — a turn of a phrase whose meaning is implied by the context and assumptions of the listeners. It is related to another phrase found in Numbers 31 and Judges 21, *mishkav zachar*, “lying down of a male,” in which the issue is whether a woman has lost her virginity because she has experienced *mishkav zachar*. In summary, *mishkeve isha* in Leviticus 18 and 20 is about anal penetration by a man on a man.

The social context and worldview also provide further understanding. Leviticus expresses simple, either-or boundaries for all sorts of things and activities which today we would never see as “unclean” or “unholy.” Anal penetration by a man of another man crosses the boundary of gender identities in ancient Israel. It may also be related to religious purity and whether a person was ritually clean before engaging in religious rituals. The word “abomination” in Leviticus 20 (*to’evah*) usually refers to rituals rather than morality in Leviticus.

Leviticus 18 gives five seemingly unrelated prohibitions. They are loosely connected to the topic of semen (“seed”). The general principle is that men should not waste their semen, and by extension their real or potential offspring. Procreation cannot take place during menstruation, through bestiality, or same-gender anal penetration. The reference to child sacrifice to the god Moloch is also a “wasting of seed” for an Israelite male.

Leviticus does not address other forms of erotic behavior between two men (e.g. oral sex, kis-

sing, etc.). Nor does it address lesbian sexual behavior or transgender erotic encounters.

The cultural context of Leviticus was vastly different from today and thus cannot be applied directly to our contemporary context. For this reason we are inconsistent in how we apply them to today. We do not follow the prohibition of husbands having sex with their menstruating wives even though this is condemned in Leviticus 18:19. In the same way, we can set aside 18:22 and 20:13.

I Corinthians 6:9-10; I Timothy 1:9-10 — Relationships between older men and younger men were common in Greco-Roman culture. They ranged from non-sexual mentoring to highly sexual and exploitative relationships. Unlike our culture, these relationships were seen as expressions of masculinity, not deviations from it, and were justified as part of a culture that devalued women. However, sexual relationships between two men of equal standing and consent were not the norm. In the ancient world, these relationships between males were unequal, and usually exploitative, often involving slavery or prostitution.

There are key words in the list of vices in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy: *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Both of them appear in 1 Corinthians, but only the latter is in the list of vices in 1 Timothy. Translating these words requires an understanding of the root words, their relationship to other words in the verses, their usage in other biblical passages and other literature, and their cultural use and setting.

In 1 Corinthians, *malakoi* is translated as

“male prostitutes” in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and “effeminate” in the King James Version. The Greek word means “soft” and had a wide range of meanings: someone who is morally “soft” lacking self-control and who has excessive desires. This may have included sexual behavior both with men and women. (Later in church tradition it was understood to be a reference to masturbation.) However, it may have been used to describe and criticize males who did not demonstrate masculine qualities or apparel. Such appearances may have been linked with prostitution, sexual exploitation, or pedophilia.

Arsenokoitai appears in both 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. This is the word that the Revised Standard Version translated in 1946 as “homosexual,” using modern psychological terminology. Today the New International Version translates *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* together as “men who have sex with men;” the New Revised Standard Version translates it as “men who engage in illicit sex,” and the King James Version renders it “abusers of themselves with mankind.”

The word is very rare and complicated to translate. The term puts two words together: “male” (*arsen*) and “bed” (*koite*), which roughly means “bedders of males.” It is probably a Greek translation of the Hebrew phrase in Leviticus 18 and 20. In the few places it appears in other ancient writings, the term is always used to describe relationships of unequal power or money, and in some usages does not refer specifically to sexual sins but to economic exploita-

tion or violence. In summary, the best understanding of *arsenokoitai* is that it refers to economic exploitation involving sex acts.

In addition to the meaning of each term is the relationship between them in the list of vices in 1 Corinthians 9-10: “The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, *malakoi*, *arsenokoitai*, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers” (NRSV). If the two words are meant to be linked, then it refers to male prostitutes and the men who have sex with them or boys and the men who sexually abuse them. But if they are not linked but rather in a series of vices, then *malakoi* could have a generic meaning of someone who is morally lax, and *arsenokoitai* refers to economic exploitation using sex.

It is important to read these verses in the context of the entire letter to the Corinthians. Paul addresses a variety of social abuses, from the abuse of the Lord’s Supper to sex with prostitutes. The common thread is that Paul is concerned with church members who have a higher social standing exploiting members of a lower class in the church and violating the values of equality and love.

Since 1 Timothy does not have *malakoi* in its list — “the sexually immoral, *arsenokoitai*, slave traders, liars, perjurers” (NRSV) — the emphasis may be on sexual exploitation of male slaves, with *arsenokoitai* as a term that bridges the list from fornication to slave trading. There are two words additional at play, *pronois* and *andrapodistais*: “Fornicators” or “sexually immoral” is “*pronois*” (as in pornography) and refers to all types of sexual immorality. *Andrapo-*

distais is a slave dealer or kidnapper. What is being condemned is sex trafficking. Again, there is no reference to sexual relations between two consenting adults within a covenantal relationship of mutual love.

In summary, there is a (limited) range of meanings of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. They can be linked to mean male prostitutes and the “Johns” who frequent them, or they can refer to other forms of male-on-male sexual abuse for economic gain, or they can have a broader meaning of immorality. Regardless, these two words do not refer to voluntary, loving relationships between two equal and consenting adult males. And they certainly have nothing to do with same-sex marriages.

Romans 1:26-27 — Romans appears to offer the strongest argument against same-gender erotic relationships because it appears to be timeless and it applies to both women and men. When combined with Genesis 2:24, it makes this argument based on the order of creation.

On closer examination, however, its scope is limited and culturally conditioned just like 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. In chapter one, Paul states that God’s existence and moral standards are revealed through the created order. Idolatry is the rejection of this natural revelation. Verses 24-32 spell out the ethical consequences of idolatry. Paul’s argument is that all people need the grace of Jesus Christ for salvation. This includes Gentiles, but how can they be held accountable for their behavior if they do not have access to the Law which God had only given to

the Jews? Thus, Paul must establish that Gentiles could have known God's standards through natural revelation, which they violated.

In Greek "degrading passions" in verse 26 (NIV "shameful lusts") is *atimia* (dishonorable) *pathos* (anything that befalls one; misfortune; accident). This "dishonorable misfortune" is the inevitable consequences of idolatry that dishonors the Creator and sets one on a trajectory of self-destructive passion (verse 27, *orexis*=appetite). Romans 1, like Leviticus, reflects a culturally conditioned worldview and ancient assumptions about nature and biology. Specifically, it condemns idolatry and sexual practices related to idolatry.

Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12 — Jesus said nothing about same-gender romantic and erotic relationships, but this story about his view of divorce and marriage has been used to bolster condemnation of same-sex relationships. In response to the Pharisees questioning his interpretation of the Mosaic law, Jesus quotes Genesis in defense of his hard line on divorce (Matthew 19:5-6, Mark 10:6-8). Traditionalists combine this with Romans 1 to reject all forms of non-straight romantic and sexual relationships. The logic of their argument leads to the assumption that the purpose of marriage is procreation. This implies that infertile couples and celibate individuals are in a lesser status. It dishonors straight marriages in which there are no sexual relations. Even though Genesis describes other-sex marriage as a norm, it does not preclude God blessing other forms of relationships. (God seemed to have

no problems with Solomon’s polygamy.) Marriage is a calling and a vocation, and as such the purpose of a marriage covenant is to aid those who are called to it to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. God calls LGBTQ+ believers into same-sex marriages for the purpose of aiding them in living out their faith just as God calls straight believers into marriages.

The sparse references to “homosexuality” in the Bible are culturally conditioned, and they presuppose that the only expressions of same-sex erotic behavior are to be found in relationships of exploitation and promiscuity. All forms of exploitation and promiscuity — homosexual, heterosexual, and everything in between — are sinful because they destroy the image of God. However, the Bible says nothing about same-sex relations within the context of a covenant relationship between two mutually consenting adults because this was not conceivable given the cultural setting and ancient worldview of its Jewish writers. Thus, the Bible cannot be used to make blanket condemnations of LGBTQ+ persons.

How to Interpret the Bible for Today

If we cannot apply the Bible literally or directly to today, then what are we to do with scripture? Someone once told me, “I do not take the Bible literally; I take it seriously.” The only way that we can take the Bible seriously and discover its importance for us is to abandon the overly simplistic approach of literalism. This does not mean that we are abandoning the authority of scripture, but rather we are dis-

covering its real purpose in helping us become more faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

A literalist interpretation of scripture is fraught with problems. It is always inconsistent and full of contradictions. Even the most conservative Christian does not take every part of the Bible literally. A fundamentalist will quote chapter and verse to condemn LGBTQ+ persons but conveniently ignore other biblical teachings, such as the commands to do justice for the poor. No fundamentalist would recommend giving a beer to someone who is in trouble, but that is exactly what Proverbs 31:6-7 says (in the New International Version).

Throughout history literalism has been used to perpetuate injustice. Slaveholders in the 19th century claimed moral justification for slavery based on a literalist interpretation of the Bible. Women have been subject to domestic violence because key scripture passages have been used to shame them into staying in abusive relationships.

Traditional United Methodists affirm the ordination of women and are tolerant of divorce. They are committed to human rights and condemn domestic violence. They accept scientific insights on a host of other topics and believe that this knowledge is compatible with scripture. Most abolitionists and early feminists were devout evangelical Christians, but they were not literalist in their application of biblical teachings on women and slavery. Today, evangelicals are willing to be flexible on those issues of interpretation, but when it comes to issues regarding LGBTQ+ persons they are not. There is an inconsis-

tency in the way they interpret scripture.

Just because one does not take it literally does not mean they are unfaithful. All recognize that some ethical teachings in scripture are so culturally conditioned that they should not be applied directly to today. All Christians, whether implicitly or explicitly, make judgments about which biblical teachings can have only an indirect significance for our times.

Indeed, it is only when we move beyond literalism that we understand the true nature and function of scripture for our discipleship. This is hard for many of us to comprehend because of the overwhelming influence the Religious Right has in this country. It has given people the false impression that there is only one way to faithfully interpret scripture. Regardless, you can be a “true believer” and not agree with the Religious Right’s interpretation of the Bible.

The purpose of the Bible is to be a channel for deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ. United Methodists believe that the study of scripture is a means of grace. The Bible does this by being a reliable witness of God’s work in the world, which culminated with Jesus Christ and continues through the presence of the Holy Spirit today. In other words, the Bible is a relational book whose purpose is to connect us with God. Our faith is not in scripture but in God, and scripture is a means to that end.

The authority of the Bible resides in how the Holy Spirit uses scripture to form our faith. 1 Timothy 3:16 says that “all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and

for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” Fundamentalists point to this verse as a description of the origins of the Bible. However, they overlook the real significance of inspiration to guide our interpretations.

“Inspired” means “God breathed:” all scripture is God breathed. Throughout the Bible the breath of God is the life-giving force of the Holy Spirit. God breathed life into the first human, breathed new life into Israel’s dry bones, and gives us new life (Genesis 2: 6; Ezekiel 37; John 3).

To say that scripture is “inspired” or “God-breathed” means that the purpose of scripture is to give us life. It is a channel of the Spirit to breathe life into our faith. This is what makes scripture useful for all who belong to God. Therefore, an accurate interpretation of scripture must affirm life.

Any interpretation of scripture which justifies violence and discrimination is a false interpretation — no matter how “literal” it may be. Such interpretations suffocate the lives of queer folks. When scripture is used to justify the exclusion and discrimination of LGBTQ+ persons, then it is a misuse of scripture because it does not allow the Holy Spirit to breathe life into us.

United Methodists believe that scripture is the primary authority for our faith. However, our interpretation of scriptures is informed by scientific research, because we do not believe that scripture was meant to be a science textbook. Our interpretation of scripture is guided by tradition, which means that

we listen to the teachings of the church throughout the centuries because we can learn from their wisdom. And our interpretation of scripture is enriched by our experiences because we believe that the Holy Spirit is active and speaking to us. Reason, tradition, and experience enable our interpretation of scripture to become an effective means by which the Holy Spirit breathes life into our faith.

Not every verse or story in the Bible has to be applied directly to today in order to be an effective means of grace. Some passages are timeless and direct in their application, such as the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). But other passages are so culturally specific that they cannot and should not apply to today, such as the above-mentioned verses related to same-sex relationships. Yet this does not mean that the Bible gives no guidance for the acceptance of same-gender relationships. There are other biblical principles and paradigms which support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons.

The biblical principle of love clearly supports our practice of radical hospitality. The common thread that runs throughout the Bible is God's saving love of humanity. Other minor themes in the Bible, like same-gender erotic practices, are secondary to the theme of grace, and must be interpreted in light of this core message.

For example, the Old Testament is interpreted in light of the New Testament, and all passages are interpreted in light of the words and actions of Jesus because he is the embodiment of God's love. Just as Jesus accepted the outcast and the

rejected, the church is called to welcome those who have been rejected by their families and treated like second-class citizens by society.

The biblical principle that all persons are created in the image of God is also a basis for our practice of acceptance. Research has shown that our gender identity and sexual orientation have complex origins and development and are not simply a matter of choice. From a theological perspective we would say that is the way God made us. If we are created in the image of God, then that which we have no control over is a part of God's good creation. This includes our sexuality when expressed in relationships of covenantal love that is modeled for us by Jesus Christ in his relationships.

The Acts 10 Paradigm

The most compelling paradigm is the story of the early church's inclusion of Gentiles. This story models how the church today should embrace LGBTQ+ believers. Acts 10-15 describes the early church's struggle over the question of requirements for Gentile converts. Should Gentiles be required to observe Jewish law in order to receive salvation from the Jewish Messiah? The crux of this question was the requirement of circumcision.

The apostle Peter had a strange dream in Acts 10 in which he saw a blanket full of animals that the Law of Moses had deemed ritually unclean for human consumption. He heard God tell him, "Kill and eat." His vision from God was contradicting the law

of God. When he woke up servants of a Roman (Gentile) Centurion named Cornelius informed him that an angel had told Cornelius to contact him. For a faithful Jew such interactions were forbidden because it would make you unclean.

However, Peter went and preached to Cornelius's people. He saw their faith and said, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality." Then "the Holy Spirit fell upon" his Gentile listeners and they began speaking in tongues just as the Jewish Christians had done at Pentecost (Acts 2). He baptized Cornelius's people in the name of Jesus Christ as a sign of their full inclusion into the church.

From that moment on the church would never be the same. Before this encounter, the church was a sect within Judaism. It was assumed that in order for someone to be saved by Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, he would have to become Jewish by being circumcised. After this encounter with Cornelius's people the church held a council in Jerusalem and lifted the requirement of circumcision. No longer would a person have to become Jewish in order to become a Christian. Gentiles were included as equal members in the church because God had equally given them the Holy Spirit (Acts 15).

I believe that what God did in the first century with the Gentiles, God is now doing with my queer kin. "I truly understand that God shows no partiality" is a timeless truth that applies to the contemporary issue of homosexuality facing the church. Just as Peter offered baptism to those first Gentile believers, I believe that full inclusion —from membership to or-

dination and all the rites of the church — should be offered to those who are not straight. Acts 10 is the paradigm, an authoritative example, that supports full inclusion.

A thoughtful reading of scripture reveals that the Bible is limited in what it says directly about LGBTQ+ issues. It condemns idolatrous and exploitative sexual activity. It says nothing about committed relationships of mutual love between persons of the same gender. The acceptance of our queen kin in Christ is based on the major biblical themes of grace and the image of God, and we find support for the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ believers in the example of the early church's acceptance of Gentile believers. It is not a sin to be a homosexual, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. Like heterosexuality, it only becomes sinful when it is practiced outside of a relationship of love and respect. The biblical principles of love, justice, and peace that Jesus taught should govern all our relationships.

The Grace of God and the LGBTQ+ Believer

In keeping with the biblical witness, our tradition emphasizes the grace of God we have through Jesus Christ. The Methodist tradition was founded by 18th century Anglican priests John and Charles Wesley (which is why it is also called the Wesleyan tradition). Grace was the heart of their theology. The following describes how our practice of inclusion is grounded in our grace-centered tradition. For a summary, see below “The North Declaration,” which we

adopted in response to the denomination's former policies which violated the centrality of grace.

God's love in Jesus Christ — grace — saves us from sin. And yet this simple truth has been used to hurt queer individuals. They have been told that Jesus can save them from being gay and make them straight. The net effect is not life and peace, but anxiety and shame.

Being queer is not a sin. Same-sex romantic and erotic relationships are not sinful. And so, we need a new understanding of salvation. The core beliefs of Methodism provide a helpful solution.

We Methodists believe that all persons are created in the image of God. Sin, then, is anything that violates or distorts the divine image. Salvation is a restoration or renewing of God's image in us.

LGBTQ+ persons are created in God's image, and God's image includes their sexuality and gender identity. The diversity of our genders and sexual orientations is part of the wideness of creation that is nurtured in the life of the Triune God. The nuances and mysteries of humanity are a part of the goodness of creation.

In the case of our sexuality and gender, all of us — queer and straight — live in a sinful context of repression and exploitation. On the social level, sin is manifested in and perpetuated by complex cultural and legal systems. For queer folks this sinful context ranges from social stereotypes to legal discrimination to physical assault. On the personal level, we react to this sinful context in ways that further destroy God's image in ourselves and others. This often takes

the form of self-hatred, self-destructive behavior, and relationships that are harmful to oneself and others.

Salvation is a restoration of the image of God. Christ Jesus, who is the pure image and likeness of God, became human to renew every dimension of our humanity. Salvation is God's lifelong process of reconciliation, recovery, and renewal that culminates in the gift of eternal life. The Spirit of Christ in our hearts is what animates this process.

Salvation is not an escape from being human, but rather our fulfillment as human beings. For queer and straight believers alike, salvation is not a denial or escape from how God made us, but rather the fulfillment and the wholeness which comes from finding our life in the Spirit of Christ.

At the heart of John and Charles Wesley's teaching is their "order of salvation," which describes the dynamic process of the grace of Jesus Christ working to renew the image of God. We move through stages in our faith, each stage being shaped in a different way by grace.

In the first stage our faith is unformed. We are not fully aware of our need for God, and may not even believe that God exists. Regardless of our perceptions, God has a relationship with us. God chooses us before we choose God. God loves us before we are aware of it. God gives us a sense of right and wrong (a conscience), and cultivates a desire to find our fulfillment in God. The Holy Spirit prevents the full effects of sin and evil from destroying us. This is the **prevenient grace** of God. "Prevenient" means "to go before," referring to our experience of grace

before we put our trust in Christ (you can also call it “preparing” grace). Everyone experiences prevenient grace because the Spirit of Christ is actively working in all persons.

If having same-sex relationships is not a sin but is part and parcel of being created in God’s image, then the LGBTQ+ person experiences prevenient grace through those persons and experiences which affirm them in the face of discrimination and exclusion. It is the Spirit keeping alive one’s desire for God in spite of the condemnation received from other Christians. Through its practice of radical hospitality, the church seeks to be an agent of God’s prevenient grace to all people.

When a person becomes aware of prevenient grace and accepts God’s love, this is the second stage. During this phase we experience **justifying grace**. Justifying grace (also called “justification”) is God’s forgiveness and acceptance of us. As the old hymn says, “Just as I am, without one plea.” God forgives us for all our sins and frees us from the power of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is nothing we must do to earn this; there is no work we can perform to deserve this gift.

Our response is to accept God’s forgiving and affirming embrace. This acceptance demands a change of attitude and behavior which we call repentance. We renounce our participation in sin to affirm our obedience to Christ. Queer folks do not repent of their gender or sexuality for those dimensions of their lives are embraced and renewed, not rejected by God.

Justifying grace invites the LGBTQ+ believer to accept one's self as created and loved by God and to leave behind self-hatred. With justifying grace God often gives us the assurance of salvation, which is the inner peace of the Spirit confirming that God embraces us. The Spirit enables us to be at peace with the mysteries and nuances of our sexuality and gender identity because we know that our ultimate identity is in Jesus Christ.

Like all believers, the LGBTQ+ person must also repent. But it is not a repentance of one's sexual orientation. Rather, one must leave behind all self-destructive behavior and unloving relationships. This includes sexual relationships which are not grounded in mutual love and respect. On this note, there is no difference between queer and straight believers.

Repentance opens us up to the third stage, which is **sanctifying grace** (also called "sanctification" or "holiness"). For the rest of our lives we continue to grow in faith through the ongoing direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The initial experience of sanctifying grace is sometimes called a "new birth," because we are given new life by the Spirit working within us. We are not "born again" into a different gender or sexual orientation. Rather, the Spirit affirms and fulfills how God made us to be. We are no longer identified by those things that tried to destroy God's image in us. We are the children of God because Christ lives in us.

Sanctification is a lifelong maturing process in which our actions and attitudes are reshaped to reflect our life and identity in Christ. Little by little,

our actions and attitudes are saturated and controlled by love just as Jesus was the embodiment of God's love. The goal is that our lives will be completely taken up in this love, and all our relationships will be marked by this love.

Again, like all believers, the LGBTQ+ person experiences sanctifying grace. One's sexual orientation is not an impediment to this maturing process. A LGBTQ+ believer can experience the fullness of grace just like a straight believer, because what is most important is our identity in Christ.

Citing an ancient baptismal formula, Paul declared that "there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28). Ultimately our genders and sexuality are secondary to the primary identity we have been given through the grace of God. What defines us is God's love. This is what Peter discovered when he met Cornelius's people, and it is what we have discovered at North.

North Church and the LGBTQ+ Believer

Just as the church in Acts opened its doors to the Gentile, so today we should imitate the early church's inclusion and equality in the Spirit. If the heart of Christianity is the Spirit of Christ in your heart, then the heart of the church is the unity of believers in the Spirit of Christ. We are united by the living presence of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of the risen Christ is in each believer and is among us, connecting us to one another: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God," and "it is that very Spirit

bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:14, 16). The presence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ animating the life of each believer and empowering our shared life is what unites the church.

Just as Cornelius and his people were baptized in the name of Jesus, all of us are invited to put our trust in Christ, receive the Holy Spirit, and seek to follow Jesus. This is the heart and soul of church membership. Do you love Jesus and want to have the Spirit of Christ in your heart? And are you seeking to bear the fruit of the Spirit in your life?

Each of us needs the support and accountability of active membership to grow in our faith. When the Holy Spirit gives new life to an individual, the Spirit also connects the individual with other believers. The Spirit uses these relationships as the means by which we receive the grace that calls, forgives, and matures us. This communal dynamic of the Spirit is at the heart of what it means to be the church. The ritual of membership is a public celebration in which we affirm that we will participate in this communal work of the Spirit.

Because the Holy Spirit creates a fellowship of grace among all believers, there should be a radical equality in the church. Paul summarized this vision when he described the effects of baptism: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28). Gender identity is

secondary to our core identity in Christ. Therefore, all the rites and responsibilities should be offered to all members. At North, this applies to:

- **Marriage** — We offer the ritual of marriage to LGBTQ+ persons for the nurturing of their growth in faith, which is fostered in such covenant relationships.
- **Church Leadership** — Any member, queer or straight, who is bearing the fruit and exhibiting the gifts of the Spirit will be called into lay leadership at North.
- **Ordination** — As a United Methodist congregation, we do not ordain our own leadership. Ordinations are approved by our annual conference (which is all the United Methodist congregations in Indiana) and performed by the bishop. However, we advocate for the ordination of queer believers whom God has called and equipped for ministry. We welcome queer clergy from other denominations in our church.

In short, if you love Jesus and accept him as your Lord and Savior and seek to bear the fruit of the Spirit, join us on the journey of faith.

THE NORTH DECLARATION

Adopted by the Board of Directors of North United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA on 22 January 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 have 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 relationship 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 rela-

tionships, 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 LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ 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.

HISTORY OF NORTH UMC'S RESOLUTIONS

Resolution Supporting Full, Equal Status and Participation of All Persons in The United Methodist Church

Adopted this 28th day of September 2011.

The Board of Directors of North United Methodist Church hereby adopts the following resolution on behalf of the congregation of North UMC:

1. Based on prayerful consideration of Holy Scripture, reflection upon our Wesleyan heritage, the faithful witness of numerous persons within our congregation, and our belief that God intends that the world shall be transformed into the full expression of Christ's inclusive love, the people of North United Methodist Church declare their conviction that all persons, including those persons who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning, are children of God and as such are entitled to full and equal status and participation within the United Methodist Church.

2. Consistent with this conviction, the people of North United Methodist Church call upon the 2012 General Conference of The United Methodist Church to remove all language from the Book of Discipline that classifies and discriminates against persons based on homosexuality, including, among others, the following specific statements from The

Book of Discipline (2008): *“The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”* (§161.F) *“The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”* (§304.3)

3. Consistent with our connectional tradition, the people of North UMC resolve to work with other United Methodist congregations in our annual conference to promote all necessary changes to the Book of Discipline to ensure the full, equal status and participation of all persons within the United Methodist Church.

4. In addition to our efforts within our annual conference, the people of North UMC will join with other United Methodist congregations across the United States through an affiliation with the Reconciling Ministries Network to work together to promote all necessary changes to the Book of Discipline to ensure the full, equal status and participation of all persons within the United Methodist Church.

5. While we work to change the official positions of the United Methodist Church concerning homosexuality, we reiterate our continued recognition of the authority of the Book of Discipline and our obligation to abide by the Book of Discipline’s directives, including those that declare that a local church may not host or conduct ceremonies that result in the establishment of a same-sex marriage or union.

6. As a public witness of our conviction concerning the full, equal status and participation of all persons in the United Methodist Church, North UMC may refer to itself as a “Reconciling Congregation” or as “Affiliated with the Reconciling Ministries Network” on the North UMC website and in other written and electronic communications as appropriate.

7. We acknowledge that this effort to ensure the full, equal status and participation of all persons within the United Methodist Church is one of many social justice ministries that are and will continue to be supported by North UMC. The pursuit of the goals set forth in this resolution will be a vital addition to those ongoing and future ministries, but will not be the singular focus of our ministry together.

**Resolution Reaffirming Statement of Inclusion
Supporting Full, Equal Status of All Persons in The
United Methodist Church**

Adopted this 23rd day of January 2019.

The Board of Directors of North United Methodist Church hereby adopts the following resolution on behalf of the congregation of North UMC:

1. On September 28, 2011, the Board adopted the attached “Resolution Supporting Full, Equal Status and Participation of All Persons in the United Methodist Church.”

2. That resolution states, in part: “the people of North United Methodist Church declare their con-

viction that all persons, including those persons who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, are children of God and as such are entitled to full and equal status and participation within the United Methodist Church. Consistent with this conviction, the people of North United Methodist Church call upon the 2012 General Conference of The United Methodist Church to remove all language from the Book of Discipline that classifies and discriminates against persons based on homosexuality[.]”

3. The 2019 Special Session of the General Conference will convene in St. Louis on February 23, 2019 to receive and act on a report from the Commission on a Way Forward concerning the Church’s position on the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the church.¹

4. In anticipation of that Special Session, the Board hereby reaffirms in the strongest terms the September 2011 resolution, and calls upon the members of the Special Session (1) to remove all lan-

¹The General Conference is the highest governing body of The United Methodist Church, which has authority to set policy for the denomination. It normally meets once every four years. On February 23-26, 2019 a special session of General Conference convened to address LGBTQ+ policies. The General Conference adopted “The Traditional Plan,” which reaffirmed the denomination’s bans on the ordination of LGBTQ+ pastors who were not celibate and funding for human rights groups supporting LGBTQ+ rights. In addition, the Conference established mandatory minimum sentencing for any clergy person who performs a same-sex wedding: first offense was a one-year suspension without pay and the second offense would result in the loss of credentials.

guage from the Book of Discipline that classifies and discriminates against persons based on sexual orientation and gender preference, and (2) to include all necessary language in the Book of Discipline to ensure the full, equal status and participation of all persons within the United Methodist Church.

Statement on Suspension of Payment of Church Tithe and Related Matters²

This resolution is adopted this 27 day of March 2019, and is effective immediately upon adoption.

The Board of Directors of North United Methodist Church has released the following statement regarding its decisions on March 27, 2019 to suspend payment of the church tithe (apportionments) to the Indiana Annual Conference and to approve related matters.

1. The Traditional Plan adopted by the General Conference in St. Louis, which perpetuates language in the Book of Discipline that classifies and discriminates against persons based on sexual orientation and gender identity, is wholly incompatible with the convictions of North Church and its congregation. We reiterate without question our belief that

²Every United Methodist congregation is obligated to contribute a portion of its income to the denomination for the support of its shared ministries and administration. This congregational contribution is called “an apportionment” because it is a portion of its total income. In the Indiana Annual Conference, the apportionment is called a “church tithe” because it is 10 percent (a tithe) of the local church’s income.

all persons, including LGBTQ+ persons, are wholly the children of God and as such are entitled to full and equal status and participation in the United Methodist Church.

2. The adoption of the Traditional Plan, and the continued inclusion of these discriminatory provisions in the Book of Discipline, call into serious question whether North Church, and other like-minded Methodist churches, can continue to be affiliated with a denomination that embraces policies that denigrate and harm members of our congregation.

3. There is much uncertainty over what will or should happen now to the United Methodist Church as a denomination. It now appears that we will not have clarity about critical issues regarding the future of the denomination until after the next General Conference is held in May 2020. This includes the question of the so-called “gracious exit;” that is, the ability of a local church to leave the denomination.

4. This much is clear today, however: there is currently no process by which North or any other local church can simply disaffiliate from the broader denomination and continue in ministry in this location as a congregation independent of the United Methodist Church. Under our connexional system, all property of the local church is actually held in trust by the Annual Conference, meaning that legally we do not own our building or our property. If this congregation were to leave the denomination today, we would have no legal right to remain in our building

or on this property.

5. While the resolution of these broader denominational issues is uncertain and lies in the future, we know that the harm and the pain that the 2019 General Conference has caused for many of our members is current and very real. We acknowledge that pain and hurt and seek ways to help heal those wounds.

6. The Board of Directors of North Church is committed to maintaining our congregation's public witness for full inclusion of all persons within the church. We are committed to distancing North in every way possible from the denomination's policies of exclusion and discrimination. We are committed to having North continue its leadership role in promoting full inclusion of all persons in the church.

7. As such, we unanimously approved the following actions at our Board meeting on March 27, 2019:

a. Effectively immediately, we are suspending payment of the church tithe (also known as apportionments) to the Indiana Annual Conference. This suspension will remain in effect until further action by the Board.

b. This fall North will host a day-long conference/workshop for the laity and clergy of other United Methodist churches who wish to learn from our history of embracing inclusion and its public witness in order to become more inclusive in their own churches.

c. Pastor Darren Cushman Wood will convene a task force of North members to craft a

theological statement on inclusion based on the theology of John Wesley. This statement will serve as an additional public witness of our beliefs.

d. We appointed Amy Sell to serve as one of our delegates to the Indiana Annual Conference.

8. In the coming weeks and months we will continue to seek guidance on these issues through prayerful deliberation and open dialogue. We appreciate the many thoughtful conversations that we have had with many in the congregation, and encourage all persons in the congregation to continue sharing their thoughts and concerns with the Board and others in church leadership.

Resolution Concerning Use of Church Facilities for Weddings

This resolution is adopted this 26th day of June 2019, and is effective immediately upon adoption.

The congregation of North United Methodist Church has declared its belief that all persons, including those persons who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, are wholly the children of God and as such are entitled to full and equal status and participation within the United Methodist Church.

Policies and practices of the United Methodist Church that classify and/or discriminate against persons based on sexual orientation and gender identity are incompatible with those beliefs and our understanding of the role of the church in expressing

God's love for all persons.

In particular, the Book of Discipline states: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." Par. 341.6. We find this policy to be inconsistent with our understanding of Scripture and our beliefs as rooted in our Wesleyan tradition.

North's wedding policy (regarding the use of the church for wedding ceremonies) states that weddings are "worship services to celebrate God's gift of love and to affirm a covenant between two people and God." We believe that the use of North's worship space should be available to all persons who are prepared to make such a covenant and whose request has been approved by North Church clergy pursuant to our wedding policy.

THEREFORE, the Board of Directors of North United Methodist Church hereby adopts the following resolution:

1. We affirm and support the prayerful discernment and decisions of North Church clergy in officiating wedding ceremonies for any prepared couple who comes to them.

2. With the approval of the Senior Pastor and in compliance with North Church policies, any prepared couple may hold their wedding at North Church.

3. The Board reaffirms our policy that weddings are "worship services" and must be conducted as such, with appropriate guidance and approvals by North Church clergy. The use of North Church's wor-

ship spaces by any person is a privilege, not a right.

4. The Board directs the staff to update the wedding policy in light of this resolution, in particular by the following: (1) replace gender-specific references in the policy with inclusive language concerning the persons to be married; and (2) add a policy prohibiting any press or media organization from broadcasting or recording for later broadcast any part of a wedding ceremony unless prior written approval has been granted by the senior pastor.

A SERVICE OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE FOR A SAME-GENDER COUPLE³

GREETING

Friends, we are gathered together in the sight of God to witness and to bless the joining together of XXX and XXX in Christian marriage, for how very good and pleasant it is when we live together in unity.

The covenant of marriage between two persons is a gift from God of lifelong mutual fidelity and steadfast love, enabling them to grow in faithfulness and to bear witness to God's love in the world. XXX and XXX come to give themselves to one another in this holy covenant.

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

I ask you now,
in the presence of God and these people,
to declare your intention
to enter into union with each other

³This service is an adaption of the Service of Christian Marriage in "The United Methodist Book of Worship" (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 116-127. It was written in 2016 by Darren Cushman Wood, in consultation with other elders in the Indiana Annual Conference.

through the grace of Jesus Christ,
who calls you into union with himself
as acknowledged in your baptism.

XXX, will you have XXX to be your
spouse/partner/husband/wife,
to live together in holy marriage?
Will you love him/her/them, comfort him/her/them,
honor and keep him/her/them,
in sickness and in health,
and forsaking all others, be faithful to him/her/them
as long as you both shall live?

I will.

RESPONSE OF THE FAMILIES AND PEOPLE

XXX and XXX
have been given God's love for each other
and they ask for your blessing.

To parents or family members:
Do you who represent their families
rejoice in their union
and pray God's blessing upon them?

Family: **We do.**

Or

Family: **We love both of you.
We bless your marriage.**

Together we will be a family.

To the people:

Will all of you by God's grace
do everything in your power
to uphold and care for these persons
in their marriage?

People: **We will.**

PRAYER

God of all peoples,
you are the true light illumining everyone.
You show us the way, the truth, and the life.
You love us even when we are disobedient.
You sustain us with your Holy Spirit.
We rejoice in your life in the midst of our lives.
We praise you for your presence with us,
and especially in this act of solemn covenant;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE(S)

SERMON

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS

One of the following prayers may be offered:

O Lord our God,
who is the author of love,

the master of peace, and the savior of all;
who was wise to unite your servants David and Jo-
nathan,
not with the ties of blood but with fidelity;
who was pleased to unite your apostles Philip and
Bartholomew,
not with the law but with the Spirit;
who was faithful in uniting your martyrs Serge and
Bacchus,
not with the bond of birth but with spiritual love —
Bless now the union of XXX and XXX
in perfect love and inseparable life.
Grant them so to love selflessly and live humbly,
that they may be to one another and to the world
a witness and a sign of your never-failing care;
nurture them and fill them with joy in their life to-
gether,
continuing the good work you have begun in them;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.⁴

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life,
author of salvation, and giver of all grace:
Look with favor upon the world you have made,

⁴Based on the following liturgy: “Sinai Euchologion” III, 11th-12th c. Old Church Slavonic; ‘Vaticanus Graecus 1811’, 1147 [Italo-Greek]. Serge and Bacchus were 4th century partnered Roman soldiers whose faith led them to refuse to sacrifice to a Roman god, resulting in their martyrdom. See John Boswell, “The Marriage of Likeness: Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe” (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 146-155.

and for which your Son gave his life,
and especially upon XXX and XXX united in marriage.
Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of
their common life,
that each may be to the other a strength in need,
a counselor in perplexity,
a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.
Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection
that they may reach out in love and concern for
others;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.⁵

EXCHANGE OF VOWS

XXX, in the name of God,
I take you to be my spouse/partner/husband/wife
from this time onward,
to join with you and to share all that is to come,
to give and to receive,
to speak and to listen,
to inspire and to respond,
and in all our life together
to be loyal to you with my whole being,
as long as we both shall live.

BLESSING AND EXCHANGE OF RINGS

These rings are the outward and visible sign

⁵Taken from "The Book of Common Prayer" (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 429.

of an inward and spiritual grace, signifying to all the uniting of XXX and XXX in holy marriage.

Bless, O Lord, the giving to these rings,
that they who wear them may live in your peace
and continue in your favor
all the days of their life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

XXX, I give you this ring
as a sign of my vow,
and with all that I am,
and all that I have,
I honor you;
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

(OTHER SIGNS OF UNITY)

DECLARATION OF MARRIAGE

You have declared your consent and vows
before God and this congregation.
May God confirm your covenant
and fill you both with grace.

Now that XXX and XXX
have given themselves to each other
by solemn vows,
with the joining of hands
and the giving and receiving of rings,

I announce to you
that they are bound to one another in a holy cov-
enant as spouse/partner/husbands/wives,
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Those whom God has joined together,
let no one put asunder. Amen.

(KISS)

BLESSING OF THE MARRIAGE

Most gracious God,
we praise you for the tender mercy and unfailing care
revealed to us in Jesus the Christ
and for the great joy and comfort bestowed upon us
in the gift of human love.
Send therefore your blessing upon XXX and XXX,
that they may surely keep their marriage covenant,
and so grow in love and godliness together that
their home may be a haven of blessing and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

God the Eternal keep you in love with each other,
so that the peace of Christ may abide in your home.
Go to serve God and your neighbor in all that you do.

Pastor to people:

Bear witness to the love of God in this world,

so that those to whom love is a stranger
will find in you generous friends.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all. Amen.

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