

STATEMENT FROM
THE APPOINTIVE CABINET OF THE IOWA ANNUAL CONFERENCE,
REV. ANNA BLAEDEL, and BISHOP LAURIE HALLER

On April 4, 2017, the appointive cabinet of the Iowa Annual Conference filed a complaint against Rev. Anna Blaedel, charging her, in accord with ¶362.1 of The 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, with practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, ¶2702.1(b) & (d): performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.

The supervisory response was pastoral and administrative and was directed toward a just resolution. Several meetings were held with Rev. Blaedel, Anna's support person Rev. Tyler Schwaller, and the appointive cabinet.

On June 5, 2017, the appointive cabinet of the Iowa Annual Conference and Rev. Anna Blaedel achieved a just resolution and have agreed to issue this statement of invitation to the clergy and laity of the Iowa Annual Conference as well as to the broader United Methodist Church. Just as our denomination is not of one mind around issues of human sexuality, so members of the appointive cabinet and Rev. Anna Blaedel are not of one mind. However, we desire to be of one heart as we share our hopes and dreams for The United Methodist Church, strive to live lives marked by faithfulness and integrity, and seek to build a more just and loving church and world.

“A just resolution is one that focuses on repairing any harm to people and communities, achieving real accountability by making things right in so far as possible and bringing healing to all the parties” (¶2701.5). The following statement reflects an initial step toward repairing harm and achieving accountability by first allowing for more public articulations of harm done and repair needed.

Convinced that the voices of all those involved in this just resolution need to be heard, including voices from the LGBTQ community, we invite the Iowa Annual Conference and The United Methodist Church to join us in the prayerful dialogue we have had and the commitments that we have made to each other in this just resolution process:

1. The Bishop and appointive cabinet invite The United Methodist Church to deep prayer and discernment in light of the unity and oneness that Christ spoke of through the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:1–6, “I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”
2. Revs. Anna Blaedel and Tyler Schwaller recognize the urgency with which LGBTQ persons await and need a word of welcome, affirmation, celebration, belonging, and grace from the church and its leaders. Anna and Tyler invite United Methodists into deep prayer and discernment, honest study and conversation, and courageous and faithful action in response to the ongoing injustices LGBTQ people experience through the policies and practices of The United Methodist Church.

3. The Appointive Cabinet commits by our actions and words to facilitate and enhance rather than compromise the work of the Commission on a Way Forward.
4. Anna and Tyler commit by our actions and words to facilitate and enhance a way forward that affirms the sacred worth, celebrates the gifts and graces, and honors the lives and loves of LGBTQ people within and outside the UMC. We believe the work of the Commission on a Way Forward will be faithful and fruitful to whatever extent it seeks justice, repairs harm, honors difference, and promotes Jesus's deep solidarity and transformative care for the most vulnerable and marginalized among us.
5. The Appointive Cabinet urges United Methodist clergy to refrain from officiating at same-gender weddings while the Commission is doing its work, knowing that this harms our covenant with one another. We acknowledge the harm done to faithful United Methodist same-gender couples who are not permitted to be married by their United Methodist pastor in their church. We also acknowledge the harm done to United Methodist pastors and laity who are faithfully committed to upholding The 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church prohibiting United Methodist pastors from officiating same-gender weddings. United Methodist clergy desiring to be in ministry with same-sex couples who plan to be married may not preside over the wedding ceremony. They may not officiate at the vows, exchange of rings, or the declaration/pronouncement of marriage. They also may not sign the certificate of marriage or participate so it appears to others that they are conducting the wedding. What clergy may do is assist same-gender couples in finding other venues for their weddings, provide pre-marital counseling, attend the ceremony, read Scripture, pray, or offer a homily.
6. Anna and Tyler lament the realities of injustice, fear, and isolation that harm our covenant with one another. We reject claims that LGBTQ lives and loves harm our covenant with one another, or divide the church. We call upon clergy everywhere to live out The United Methodist Church's avowed commitment "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends" but to "be in ministry for and with all persons" (§ 161G) by offering pastoral care fully and equally, including the blessing of same-gender unions. Further, we call on clergy and laity to come out of closets of fear and intimidation, testifying openly to the love of God and movements of the Spirit known through the lives and loves of LGTBQ persons. When we refuse to conform to unjust laws by openly disobeying parts of the Book of Discipline that deny God's calling and blessing of LGBTQ persons, we do not do so to break covenant. Rather, we act in accordance with a sacred trust in Spirit-filled, sustained, prayerful conviction of call and conscience, rooted as disciples of Jesus in his teachings that prioritize relationships over rules, justice over order, and faithfulness over fear.
7. The Appointive Cabinet desires to avoid further Cabinet-initiated or conference-initiated complaints and trials regarding United Methodist clergy officiating same-gender weddings until the work of the Commission on a Way Forward is completed and acted upon by the General Conference in 2019.
8. Knowing that complaints and trials related to being LGBTQ disrupt ministry, deepen division, and further discrimination, Anna and Tyler call The United Methodist Church to

move from a stated desire to avoid complaints and trials to intentional action toward reconciliation and repair. The first step in repairing legacies of harm is to stop actively inflicting harm. Thus, we encourage the bishop to respond to any complaints against ministries of and with LGBTQ persons by committing to a supervisory response that aims primarily to bring healing and reconciliation to LGBTQ persons (§362.1a, f). We urge the bishop and appointive cabinet to take their authority, as granted by the Discipline (§362.1e[1]), to dismiss complaints that undermine the lives, ministries, and relationships of LGBTQ people.

9. The Appointive Cabinet urges United Methodist clergy and congregations to be faithful to apportionment-giving, acknowledging that withholding apportionments as a sign of protest also harms our covenant and puts at risk countless ministries around the world.
10. Anna and Tyler believe that God's love and justice become through our enactments of radical care for one another. We urge United Methodist clergy and congregations to be faithful to our connectionalism, investing our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness in the places and people most in need of creative, liberating, transforming, reconciling ministry. We urge the Iowa Annual Conference and The United Methodist Church to center and prioritize ministries with and for young people, people on the margins of the church and society, and those whose lives are marked by the injustices of racism, sexism, colonialism, heterosexism, and economic exploitation. Ministries led by LGBTQ persons, as well as ministries with and for LGBTQ persons, are creating new places for new people, making disciples of Jesus Christ and transforming the world. The UMC cannot be faithful or effective without the prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness of LGBTQ people.
11. The Appointive Cabinet affirms the presence, faith, and deep commitment of untold LGBTQ persons in congregations around the United Methodist connection. They preach the gospel as clergy, lead congregations in ministries of music, education, and pastoral care, teach Sunday school, and reach out to their communities in service and mission. Together, we are the body of Christ.

Closing Statement from Bishop Laurie Haller

I am deeply grateful to the appointive cabinet and Rev.'s Anna Blaedel and Tyler Schwaller for humbly offering this just resolution. In a time when there is increasing mistrust and advocacy for division in The United Methodist Church, we believe that it is time to take a new approach to our impasse around human sexuality.

In John Wesley's sermon, *The Character of a Methodist*, he writes, "But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think." And in his sermon, *Catholic Spirit*, Wesley writes, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike. May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may."

In the spirit of our Wesleyan heritage, we are seeking another way. We confess that judging, condemning, or trying to change one another not only does not work, but it does not model the unconditional grace of Jesus Christ for all or create an environment allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us.

Furthermore, we acknowledge the harm that has been done to the LGBTQ community over many years in the name of Christianity. We have not always welcomed our LGBTQ neighbors who have sought a home in The United Methodist Church and treated them justly. We also recognize that built into the structure of The United Methodist Church are policies and practices that by their very nature exclude LGBTQ persons from full participation in the life of The UMC and prevent open and honest conversation about human sexuality.

This just resolution not only gives voice to our differences, but it witnesses to the example of Jesus that Christian unity is not a state of being or doing where we all become the same. Rather, the unity we seek compels us to search the scriptures in a way that will lead us to the grace and hope that characterizes God's reign on this earth.

All those who are a part of this just resolution accept the fact that we are not of one mind around how we interpret scripture. Some welcome all people to participate in the life of the church, including those who identify as LGBTQ. However, they believe that God's good gift of sexual expression is only expressly sanctioned in a marriage relationship between a woman and man. Others believe that biblical references to homosexuality reflect a different historical and cultural background and that the various Biblical models of marriage/covenant relationship have always been more diverse than "one man and one woman." Each person is uniquely created in the image of God, no matter how they understand or practice their sexuality within a covenantal relationship.

Some United Methodists believe the current Book of Discipline is the best expression of our covenant together. Others are convinced all United Methodists are bound to honor The Book of Discipline, even if they don't agree with parts of it. Still others feel called to a holy disobedience in an effort to change parts of the The Book of Discipline that they deem to be unjust and discriminatory. It is painful to disagree with each other. We are eager, however, to continue the journey of listening to and learning from each other. Furthermore, we are committed to remaining connected in the spirit of love because we are certain that God's grace is freely and joyfully offered to all.

Indeed, we are not called to be the same, for God did not create us to be the same. In fact, God delights in diversity. Therefore, the Rev.'s Blaedel and Schwaller and the Appointive Cabinet of the Iowa Annual Conference covenant to stay connected with each other and work for justice, reconciliation, and hope in our own communities as well as around the world. We remember the vows of our baptism and reaffirm our commitment "to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves."

In this time of reflection and prayer as the Commission on a Way Forward continues its work, we will follow Christ's example and love one another, even when it is not easy. We will be faithful in supporting the ministries of The United Methodist Church, will seek to avoid further harm to one another, and humbly empty ourselves of the need to be right and judge those who disagree with us. We see diversity as a gift, a blessing, and a challenge and embrace the freedom to live with different points of view.

Further, we call on the Iowa Annual Conference and the broader United Methodist Church to courageously and faithfully live into our shared belonging to God and our connectional belonging to one another, through honest and challenging conversation, study,

action, and witness. Boldly proclaiming the expansive love and saving grace of the God who creates, calls, and claims us is both a pastoral and a prophetic act.

We remember that the Christian tradition has always been a living tradition, manifest through faithful diversity and multiplicity of beliefs and practices. And we remember that the people called Methodists have been wrestling together, and faithfully reforming and revitalizing Methodism for longer than there has been a United Methodist Church, or Book of Discipline. We remain convicted that faithfully and honestly living into these challenges opens us to God's unimaginable grace, deepens our faithfulness as followers of Jesus, and strengthens the faithful witness of The United Methodist Church.

Signed by:

Rev. Heecheon Jeon, *Central District Superintendent*

Rev. Kiboko Kiboko, *East Central District Superintendent*

Rev. Harlan Gillespie, *North Central District Superintendent*

Rev. Jackie Bradford, *Northeast District Superintendent*

Rev. Tom Carver, *North West District Superintendent*

Rev. Paul Smith, *South Central District Superintendent*

Rev. Lilian Gallo Seagren, *Southeast District Superintendent*

Rev. Terra Amundson, *Southwest District Superintendent*

Rev. Anna Blaedel

Bishop Laurie Haller

June 5, 2017