



*"From Where I Sit ..."*

**"Same-Sex Marriage" ... And then what?  
(A case for "trained" ministers in Pastoral Care)**

On Thursday, July 2, 2015, during the meeting of the Women's Missionary Council's Quadrennial Assembly in Arlington, VA, the College of Bishops issued a statement in response to the US Supreme Court's ruling *"that nothing in the Constitution of the United States forbids same sex marriages"* ... and therefore *"opened the door officially to same sex marriages."*

The response from the College cited the *Social Creed* that had been adopted by the General Conference which forbids the performing and blessing of same sex unions (THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE, REVISED 2010, PAGE 38). The response went further to specify that forbidding the performing and blessing ... meant that "our clergy ... who perform a same sex marriage or blesses a same sex union is in violation of the Discipline of the Church and subject to disciplinary action. Furthermore, no property of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church can be used for any same sex marriage or celebration."

Let me first say that I applaud the College of Bishops for issuing such a speedy response to this ruling and let me also say that, as a CME, I both agree with and am bound by the College's response as an interpretation of our Social Creed. I suspect that their statement was not a hurried response but instead had been contemplated at least over the past nine years since the first specific reference to same sex marriages and same sex unions was printed in the *Social Creed* of THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE, REVISED 2006.

Through this action, I believe the College of Bishops has attempted to provide leadership and direction for the Church, as a Christian body, as the Church attempts to exist within a secular society; and in so doing has more clearly identified the boundaries of separation between what we may understand as the religious and the secular.

If we are honest, we must admit that the whole matter of homosexuality and the concerns of and about the LGBT community is not only an issue that is far from settled but is also an issue quite different from other issues that have faced the Church, i.e. gambling, alcohol, drugs (marijuana), selling on Sunday (Blue laws), etc. all of which have been since legalized by the secular society. As the statement also says, *"... we must continue to prayerfully consider the issues of human sexuality ... the theology of grace, the theology of love, and what it means for the Church to embody and express God's grace and to be the active symbol of God's continuing love in the world."*

Finally, the statement closes with the need to *"continue to explore what it means to be proactive Christians, demonstrating love for all people and extending the same grace that God has extended to us."* This is truly a lofty goal and is absolutely necessary if we are to be faithful to our calling as Christians.

As referenced earlier, I laud the College of Bishops for a timely response and for the further clarification of what is deemed as forbidden. However, my concern is that in regards to this matter, many of the pastors of our local congregations are ill-equipped to counsel their parishioners in general or a faithful and active family from within their congregation in particular about these issues when a loved one becomes involved. I know from the personal experience of my seminary training that the "pastoral care" courses are exceedingly helpful in preparing ministers to face these kinds of issues. Since our church on several occasions, through General Conference action, has rejected any requirement for the seminary training of our ministers as is found in the Christian Church Disciples of Christ or certain Presbyterians, I would then urge and

encourage our Bishops to go a step further than their statement and work to provide additional specific statements on how to address this matter and other opportunities to especially empower our ministers who have not experienced seminary training.

I wish there was more space to address this subject but perhaps retired Bishop Othal Lakey's well-intended effort to open a dialogue on this general issue was well-timed but under appreciated. Perhaps it should be revisited. One thing is a fact, regardless of how any of us may feel about this subject, the die is cast and it is not likely to soon go away. ...Or at least that's the way it looks to me ...

*"From Where I Sit"*

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