



## Created in God's Image

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As a member of the LGBTQI community and as an ordained clergy person in the United Church of Christ (UCC), my heart is deeply saddened and my soul is greatly troubled as I pen this article. On February 26, 2019, the United Methodist Church (UMC) held a vote at a special session of the denomination's General Conference in St. Louis in an attempt to resolve the UMC's debate regarding LGBTQI clergy and gay weddings.

Delegates from around the globe voted 438-384 to uphold the UMC's stance against ordaining clergy who are LGBT and against performing same sex weddings. Known as the "traditional plan," this position preserves the denomination's belief that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching," as has been written in the UMC Book of Discipline since 1972.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed the diagnosis of homosexuality as a type of mental illness, which was groundbreaking and redemptive for members of the LGBTQI community. Yet still some conservative theologies purport that being gay is unnatural and is thereby curable. As a same gender loving man who did attempt to "pray the gay away" in the 1980s, I can state clearly and unequivocally that one's sexual orientation cannot be prayed away.

Opportunely, there are religious organizations and theologies that wholly affirm members of the LGBTQI as created in God's image, celebrating their ordinations and same sex weddings. The UCC is one faith denomination among other religious bodies, crossing ecumenical and interfaith lines, which support LGBTQI people. Such welcoming bodies may find UMC members gravitating to their doors. When there are UMC clergy who desire to affiliate with the UCC, Committees on Ministry should review the resource "Guidance for UCC Committees on Ministry: UMC FAQ Document, 2019."

The choice to consider leaving one's religious family does not fully eliminate the heartache many are feeling. The UMC denomination cannot fully comprehend the impact of such a decision for years to come. Many are predicting that a denominational split is imminent, although because the February 2019 vote will have to be addressed by the UMC's Judicial Council, which meets in April.

In 2005, the UCC journeyed on our own path of discernment at the 25th General Synod, which passed a resolution affirming "equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender." Our decision too caused heartache alongside joy, loss alongside gain. I predict that history may someday reveal that the UMC's recent action will result in a similar outcome as we experienced in the UCC: celebrations, disappointments, a possible loss of membership, a possible growth in new faith communities. Until such a time and beyond, our siblings in Christ deserve our prayer, patience, and unwavering love.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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