

A Statement from the Evangelical Connection  
of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference  
of the United Methodist Church

*A Call to Accountability*

Recently it was announced that 31 local United Methodist clergy are planning to conduct a same-sex wedding in our region this month. Such a ceremony is contrary to the stated position of our global United Methodist Church, and is specifically prohibited by church law as outlined in our *Book of Discipline*. Our Church's declarations that "the practice of homosexuality... [is] incompatible with Christian teaching," and that "sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage" (161F), are consistent with the definition of marriage offered to us by Jesus Christ in Matthew 19, and with the worldwide consensus of the Christian Church for 2,000 years.

The immediate question before us, however, is not that of sexuality but of accountability, community and integrity. In ordination, every United Methodist minister enters into a solemn covenant with fellow clergy and the laity, and vows to abide by our rules. The right to dissent from those rules and work to change them is unquestioned. But those entrusted with ordination have no right to break those rules unilaterally in their official roles, or seek to do so without consequence.

We have a process we call "holy conferencing," in which representatives and leaders of our church meet regularly at the local, regional and global levels to prayerfully discuss and debate difficult issues, set policies, and enact rules that govern our common life. This process is public, democratic, and always open to revisiting questions previously decided. This process represents the common covenant that binds us together, and holds us accountable to one another.

Having failed thus far to persuade our church through its process of holy conferencing to change its teachings, these 31 clergy have chosen to break their covenant with fellow clergy and the laity of the United Methodist Church. They have also made it clear that their intended action is designed to paralyze our system of accountability, and render our *Book of Discipline* inoperable, by placing impossible strains on the financial and human resources of our community. We grieve over the potential of this intended action to threaten the very fabric of our unity.

We implore these colleagues to reconsider their intended course; to consider the grave harm it will inflict on the covenant that binds us together as United Methodists; and to reflect on the irreparable damage it will render to trust, community, and collegiality among us.

We further call upon our bishop and all our fellow United Methodists in Eastern Pennsylvania to reaffirm their commitment to our common covenant, to pray for these dissatisfied brothers and sisters, and to work to maintain both the unity and integrity of our beloved Church.

November 1, 2013