

To Delegates to the United Methodist General Conference in Pittsburg, 2004



Greetings!

We are the United Methodist Planning Team of Soulforce, Inc., a national interfaith organization committed to ending spiritual violence perpetuated by religious policies and teachings against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people.

More than 250 Soulforce volunteers were present in Cleveland at GC2000 and we are writing to explain exactly why we will be present during General Conference again this year.

Many, if not most of our volunteers in Pittsburgh, will be United Methodists who are committed to helping our denomination live up to its motto of "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors." During our peaceful, loving presence in Pittsburgh April 27th -May 7th, we are requesting the following of delegates to the GC.

**First, we respectfully ask that you remove the following language from the Social Principles: *"Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. . . ."***

Do you understand the tragic consequences of these words in the lives of our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers? Here is just one example (of thousands we've received) that illustrates the terrible price of keeping those words in place. The e-mail reads: *"Cindy H. received word earlier this week that her 28 year old nephew, Mark B. hung himself. He was a gay man. He accepted his sexuality until he became a Christian a few months ago. Understanding from the Bible and the Church that he could not be both a Christian and a gay man, Mark's suicide note addressed to God read, 'I don't know how else to fix this.'"*

We hope that one day you will officially end the marriage and ordination bans against GLBT persons, but until that day we can live with simply replacing the above mentioned language with words such as those suggested by a Methodist Federation for Social Action petition: *"Differences of opinion among faithful Christians regarding sexual orientation continue to deeply divide the church. We stand before God admitting that we have thus far been unable to reach common ground. As we continue to discern God's will together, we are united in declaring our understanding that God's grace is available to all."*

**Second, we respectfully ask that you DO NOT support the Federal Marriage Amendment or any other federal or state legislation that discriminates against GLBT persons.**

Why would the United Methodist Church even consider endorsing a Constitutional Amendment that codifies discrimination, denies more than 1,000 basic civil rights to millions of lesbian and gay couples in loving, committed relationships, and makes second class citizens of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and their families?

**Third, we respectfully ask that you DO NOT support any action to discriminate against transgender persons within the life of the church.**

Already, transgender Americans are the number one victims of misinformation, bigotry, intolerance, psychological suffering, physical violence and death. Like lesbian, gay, and bisexual United Methodists, transgender people of faith serve our denomination with courage, creativity and commitment. It would be unconscionable to pass legislation that singles them out for further intolerance and discrimination.

**Fourth, we respectfully ask that you DO NOT support any action which attempts to reverse the decision of the trial court related to the recent Karen Dammann verdict or any action that would attempt to punish or impose sanctions against the Pacific Northwest Conference for its support of that decision.**

Although the United Methodist Church is divided on this issue, allowing each Annual Conference the right to decide how it will handle ordination or appointment questions would be an historic affirmation of our central and primary commitment to the Gospel of Christ and to Christ's command that above all else we love one another.

General Conference is in session for almost two weeks. During those days Soulforce volunteers from across the country will join us to stand in loving, prayerful vigil around the Convention Center in Pittsburgh. We are there to support you and to wish you God's best in your deliberations. However, in good conscience we have to make it clear, that we cannot stand by in loving, prayerful support:

- a) If delegates refuse to replace the offensive and misleading language that makes homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching";**
- b) If delegates support the Federal Marriage Amendment or other discriminatory federal or state legislation;**
- c) If delegates pass legislation discriminating against transgender persons in the church;**
- d) If delegates support legislation that retaliates against the Dammann verdict and refuses to allow Annual Conferences to make their own ordination and appointment decisions.**

If any or all of these unfortunate decisions are made, during the last days of GC, Soulforce will publicly hold delegates of the UMC accountable in a nonviolent act of civil disobedience. Through our willingness to face arrest, fines and even time in jail, we will say to the world that the decisions made at GC2004 to discriminate against sexual and gender minorities are the source of spiritual violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.

Soulforce is committed to the principles of relentless nonviolent resistance as taught and lived by M.K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Gandhi and King both credit the teachings of Jesus as the heart and soul of nonviolence. Jesus condemned the religious leaders of his day for their intolerance and discrimination. He welcomed outcasts to the table and condemned those who turned outcasts away.

We are compelled to resist with our whole being any further suffering which delegates to GC2004 might cause lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith. We hope, instead of an act of nonviolent civil disobedience, to be able to celebrate with you any step you take to help the United Methodist Church end an era of discrimination, injustice, and exclusion and prove to the world that we are truly a Church committed to "Open Minds. Open Hearts. Open Doors."

For Soulforce,

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