

# Scripture and Marriage Equality: Resources

2006 Colloquy resource materials



## Response to the UMC decision – Wesley Theological Seminary

---

Teaching Document on Recent Judicial Council Decisions  
By Wesley Theological Seminary Leaders and Faculty  
Nov. 3, 2005

### Ecclesiology and History

The history of Methodism is distinguished by its proclamation of the grace of God as both reconciling and transformative. Therefore, from the beginning, its associations have been welcoming to all who “feared God” while engaging in practices of self-examination and mutual accountability. There are historical examples and theological rationales in Wesleyan thought both for admission of sinners and for disciplinary exclusion based upon persistent and notorious sin. But practices of accountability and discipline were collective and comprehensive in their concerns. They were not exercised by individuals acting alone, nor did they single out one particular moral issue as a litmus test for participation. This approach is contrary to the pursuit of holiness.

### Polity

The rationale of the decision regarding Beth Stroud was, presumably, that the Northeast Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals did not have the authority to set aside the trial court’s decision, inasmuch as it was based on and consistent with the Discipline adopted by the General Conference. Some may regard this decision as regrettable, particularly if they judge the current disciplinary standards of the UMC to be in need of revision. However, the decision is not manifestly improper. Even one who favors revision may regard the Appeals Committee action as the wrong way to seek change. Therefore, this decision can be respected as a matter of United Methodist polity, even by those who take different normative positions on the matter of homosexual practice.

The second decision, however, undermines the preceding rationale. It places the conscientious judgment of an individual pastor (whose integrity and sincerity need not be questioned) above the judgment of the church as a whole, as that is represented in the General Conference and the Book of Discipline. The mind of the church has been expressed by the Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, the Cabinet and an overwhelming vote of the Clergy Session of the Virginia Annual Conference. The pastor is not asked to morally approve what his or her conscience judges to be contrary to Christian teaching. However, he/she is not authorized to prefer their own judgment about conditions of church membership to the decisions of the whole body.

Finally, a pastor does not act consistently when moral standards for membership are applied selectively and arbitrarily. This is the case when sexual conduct is an issue, but other central moral commitments (judgments about consumerism, our duty to the poor, gambling, or the rejection of exploitation of workers) are ignored. It is likewise the case when same sex relations are a barrier, but marital infidelity or sexual relations outside of marriage are not examined or used as criteria for membership.