

THE HOUSTON DECLARATION

Out of love and concern for the United Methodist Church, 48 pastors from 18 states, from Massachusetts to California, from Illinois to Florida, representing large churches and small, came together in Houston, Texas, December 14-15, 1987. We came as pastors who baptize and marry, confirm and bury and live among our people. We came to reaffirm and promote the central certainties of our faith. In the face of actions by some Boards and agencies and some caucus groups that tend to undermine these certainties, and in the fulfillment of our ordination vows, we feel compelled to speak to three crucial truths which are essential to the life, witness and scriptural integrity of the church: (1) the primacy of Scripture; (2) the nature and name of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; (3) the high and holy character of ordained ministry.

ORGANIZING MINISTERS

James B. Buskirk
First United Methodist Church
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Maxie D. Dunnam
Christ United Methodist Church
Memphis, Tennessee

Ira Gallaway
First United Methodist Church
Peoria, Illinois

William H. Hinson
First United Methodist Church
Houston, Texas

J. Ellsworth Kalas
The Church of the Saviour
Cleveland, Ohio

John Ed Mathison
Frazer Memorial Methodist Church
Montgomery, Alabama

O. Gerald Trigg
First United Methodist Church
Colorado Springs, Colorado

I. THE PRIMACY OF SCRIPTURES

We United Methodist pastors affirm the Wesleyan principle of the primacy of Scripture and recognize that we share a common heritage with Christians of every age and nation. We have witnessed the confusion and conflict resulting from the ambiguity of the present doctrinal statement as contained in Paragraph 69 of the 1984 Discipline.

We therefore endorse the following declaration regarding the primacy of Scripture, as included in the newly proposed doctrinal statement:

United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for authentic Christian truth and witness. The Bible bears authoritative testimony to God's self-disclosure in the pilgrimage of Israel, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit's constant activity in human history, especially in the mission of early Christianity. As we open our minds and hearts to the Word of God through the words of human beings inspired by the Holy Spirit, faith is born and nourished, our understanding is deepened, and the possibilities for transforming the world become apparent to us.

The Bible is sacred canon for Christian people, formally acknowledged as such by historic ecumenical councils of the church. Our doctrinal standards identify as canonical thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Our standards affirm the Bible as the source of all that is "necessary and sufficient unto salvation" (Articles of Religion) and "the true rule and guide for faith and practice" (Confession of Faith).

We properly read Scripture within the believing community, informed by the tradition of that community. We interpret individual texts in light of their place in the Bible as a whole. We are aided by scholarly inquiry and personal insight, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Wesley's method of interpretation applied this rule: "The obscure text is to be interpreted by those which speak more plainly," and the more difficult passages understood in terms of the "analogy of faith," that is, "the whole scope and tenor of Scripture," the core witness of Scripture as a whole . . . The Bible serves both as a source of our faith and as the basic criterion by which the truth and fidelity of any interpretation of faith is measured.

II. THE TRINITY

We confess the historic Christian faith in the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Jesus Christ, the divine Son, God has been definitively revealed to humankind, and the world graciously reconciled to God. At the exaltation of Jesus, the one whom he consistently called Father sent forth the Holy Spirit to declare the things of Christ, so that the good news of our redemption might be proclaimed to all people. At least since the gospel of St. Matthew, the church has consistently baptized "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" those who accept the message (Matthew 28:19-20).

We deplore the effort in baptism, ordination, and the total liturgy of the Church to resymbolize the Faith by abandoning the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit or adopting inadequate substitutes. To do so is to deny the revelation attested in the Scriptures, transmitted by faithful men and women in the Christian tradition, and offered to the world for its salvation.

Formulas such as “Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer” or “Creator, Christ, Spirit” are inadequate substitutes. As to the first: God’s richly personal being cannot be defined merely in functional terms. As to the second: Christ and the Spirit are not mere creatures.

We affirm equality and inclusive language in all human relationships.

III. THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

The Church, on the authority of the Scriptures, has never viewed homosexuality as a part of God’s diverse, good creation, but has always considered homosexual practices as a sin and a manifestation of the brokenness of God’s fallen creation. Every scriptural reference to the practice of homosexuality is negative (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; I Corinthians 6:9-10). Following the Old Testament prohibitions, the apostle Paul sees homosexual practices as the sign and consequence of a turning away from the Creator in order to worship the creature. Homosexual practices become an extreme expression of the turning in upon itself which is the essence of humankind’s sin.

We repudiate all irrational fear of and contempt for homosexual persons. We affirm a ministry of Christian compassion, care and redirection for those who have engaged in homosexual practices as they seek help in overcoming temptation and changing their style of life. Persons may or may not be able to change their sexual orientation; persons can change their lifestyle. That possibility is the very essence of the gospel of Christ (I Cor. 6).

It is not acceptable in the context of the Christian faith that persons engaging in homosexual practices should be ordained to the ministry or continue in representative positions within the Church

CONCLUSION

We covenant together to proclaim these central truths of the Christian Faith and to invest our lives and ministry in the continuing renewal of our beloved Church. We invite all, laity and clergy of the United Methodist Church, to join with us as persons who have been called to follow Christ and give our lives to advancing the gospel and the historic Christian Faith. The need is urgent — the time is now!

We stand as servants and disciples of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reverend Barbara Brokhoff
Evangelist
Clearwater, Florida

Reverend Joseph H. Bullington, Jr.
Cokesbury U.M.C.
Pensacola, Florida

Reverend Kirbyjon Caldwell
Windsor Village U.M.C.
Houston, Texas

Reverend Riley Case
District Superintendent
Marion, Indiana

Reverend Brad Dinsmore
Lake Magdalene U.M.C.
Tampa, Florida

Dr. Malone Dodson
Roswell U.M.C.
Roswell, Georgia

Reverend Roy Dunn
Good Samaritan U.M.C.
Cupertino, California

Reverend P. Jackson Edwards
Wesley Memorial U.M.C.
Cleveland, Tennessee

Dr. Thomas E. Farmer
First U.M.C.
Jacksonville, Florida

Reverend Larry Goodpaster
Oxford University U.M.C.
Oxford, Mississippi

Dr. C. W. Hancock
District Superintendent
Macon, Georgia

Reverend Don Harp
Gainesville U.M.C.
Gainesville, Georgia

Reverend Carl Harris
St. Paul's U.M.C.
Orangeburg, South Carolina

Dr. Cornelius Henderson
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Dr. J. William Jones
Grace U.M.C.
Decatur, Illinois

Dr. Jimmy Jones
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Reverend William R. Key
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Dr. R. L. Kirk
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Dr. Arthur Landwehr
First U.M.C.
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Dr. J. R. McCormick
Parkway Heights U.M.C.
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Reverend Henry Matthews
Bon Air U.M.C.
Richmond, Virginia

Dr. William Morris
District Superintendent
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Dr. Raymond Owen
First U.M.C.
Bartlesville, Oklahoma

Reverend John Patterson
Grace U.M.C.
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Reverend Ora Bell Peck
Bardwell U.M.C.
Bardwell, Kentucky

Reverend William Pickett
Pine Castle U.M.C.
Orlando, Florida

Reverend Joe A. Rand
People's U.M.C.
Bradford, Massachusetts

Dr. Richard Rohrer
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Reverend William W. Roughton
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