



Love Prevails

revolution 3-D: disclose(t), divest, disrupt

July 18, 2016

To the Bishops of The United Methodist Church:

We rejoice at the election of seven women (including four African-Americans) to the episcopacy—more than at any other time in our denominational history. This is all the more significant as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the removal of the categorical exclusion of Methodist women called by God to ordained ministry from *The Book of Discipline*.

In the more than 200 years of Methodism in which this renewal movement has transformed into a settled institution (Mr. Wesley's worst nightmare), we have run into a number of impasses that took seismic shifts to move us away from discrimination and toward a focus on gifts and graces—not the least of which were centered around women and people of color.

And now similar shifts are occurring again regarding the lives of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Christians. We are experiencing a *kairos* moment of change within the church. The self-avowing of more than a hundred Queer pastors, conferences committing to non-conformity with exclusionary church polity, and the election of an out, partnered Lesbian to the episcopacy are tremblings in the foundations of institutional violence and discrimination. Deep tectonic shifts are creating new revelations as the plates of law and the plates of grace collide.

Regrettably, The Council of Bishops' first response to the election of the Rev. Dr. Karen Oliveto to episcopal office appeared more interested in advancing a unity built upon the invisibility of LGBTQ people, whose grace-filled lives you never mentioned. Additionally, in a recent "Pastoral Letter", the Southeastern Jurisdiction College of Bishops refused to rightly identify heterosexism as the cause of division in our church, and instead relied on the well-worn tactic of scapegoating the lives of God's Queer children and the ministry of their allies. In their letter, they wrote, "We view the acts of nonconformity [to *The Book of Discipline*] as divisive and disruptive." To this classic reaction of the oppressors to the liberatory activities of the oppressed, we respond with the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail":

Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action [and non-conformity] are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

You seek to bring about change through unity. We understand that this is your burden. However, what is before you is not a balancing act to mollify the politically left or right regarding "human

sexuality.” The healing, reconciliation, and liberation needed will come from a basic return to gifts and graces to build a renewed body that honors the mystery of Spirit, blowing where it will.

We will communicate with you at more length about the Council of Bishops’ “Offering For a Way Forward” once meaningful action has been taken and those decisions and actions have been made transparent to the connection. Prior to your executive committee meetings on Tuesday, we would like to make a few points clear.

- **Be explicit about the work of the Commission.** “Human sexuality” is code language for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer. Do not use coded language when speaking about our lives. The Commission is gathering for the sole purpose of determining whether and how the United Methodist Church will continue to discriminate against LGBTQ people in its life and ministries. You will not have meaningful conversation about the full and healthy spectrum of human sexuality and gender identity – for that, justice for LGBTQ people would be mandatory.
- There can be no discussion of LGBTQ lives without our bodies and voices present at the table. **Love Prevails demands that a full majority of the members of the Commission be LGBTQ people.** Those chosen must represent the broad spectrum of LGBTQ people, in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, class, ability, geography, ordination status and tactics of engagement. Tokenizing a small number of Queer people who are moderate and acceptable to your vision of polite conversation and debate does not do justice to our full lives.
- The only merciful and just outcome of the Commission will be **the full removal of all language from The Book of Discipline which categorically discriminates against and punishes LGBTQ people, as well as policies which penalize those who seek to be in ministry with and for LGBTQ people.** There is no “just resolution” short of this one goal. Our burden is not church unity, but justice for God’s Queer children.

Remember, there was fear in the air as disciples begged Jesus not to go to Jerusalem. There will be many begging you not to go in the direction of love and justice. But, it will only be as you are willing to join countless others, lay down your lives and be, yourselves, crucified on the current cross of ignominy and incompatibility that resurrection will be possible. Are you able?

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