

October 4, 2016

(Address for the Council of Bishops, and the Judicial Council.)

Dear XXX;

My name is Rick Stiles, and I am a member of Evangelical United Methodist Church in Billings MT. Coming to the realization that I needed to write this letter has been a very difficult path filled with sleepless nights and hours of prayer.

You have probably received many comments about the recent election of a practicing homosexual bishop in the Western Jurisdiction. The election issue is merely a visible sign of a cancer growing within the United Methodist Church: that cancer is the loss of integrity by many clergy in pulpits and in leadership.

There are four key items I would like to highlight regarding the ordination of elders and consecration of bishops within the United Methodist Church:

1. When elder-candidates are participating in the ordination service the candidate is asked, 'Will you be loyal to The United Methodist Church, accepting its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline', and the candidate responds, 'I will, with the help of God.' Later in the service the elder-candidate kneels on the altar before God and church body, with their hand on the Bible, and accepts their ordination with the words, Amen'.
2. In the introduction portion of the bishop consecration service it states, 'Bishops are elected . . . from the group of elders', and 'Bishops . . . share in the full ministry as ordained elders.'
3. When bishop-candidates are participating in the consecration service the candidates are presented to the presiding bishop with the words, 'we present to you (full name of bishop-elect), an elder in the church. Later in the service the candidate is asked, 'you are now called, as bishops in the church, to reaffirm the vows made at your ordination as elders', and the candidate responds, 'I will, with the grace of God.' At the end of the service they are given the charge, 'May the God who has given you the will to do these things give you grace to perform them', and the new bishop responds, 'Amen.'
4. The United Methodist Book of Discipline, Article 4.304.3 states: The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

The first three items are taken directly from the Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church, 2013-2016. Elder candidates agree at the altar before God and the church body, with their hands on the Bible, that they will be loyal to and accept the doctrine and discipline of the United Methodist Church. Bishop candidates are asked to reaffirm their commitment to the church doctrine and discipline. The last item, on homosexuality, is taken from the Book of Discipline.

This is no longer a situation about the acceptance of homosexuality; it has now become a situation about the ends justifying the means. In other words, do the means (ignoring the vows taken at the altar before God with a hand on the Bible), justify the ends (acceptance of a preferred agenda).

So, here is the real question we should be asking, 'does God believe that lying and dishonesty are justified when doing something in His name?'

Lying is a strong word, but when an elder or bishop candidate makes a vow to support the church doctrine and discipline at the altar before God and church body, with their hand on the Bible, while knowing full well that they will not do so, they have lied.

Dishonesty is also a strong word, but when an existing elder or bishop has committed to supporting the church doctrine and discipline and now decides to use their ministry to practice things in opposition to that commitment they are being dishonest.

Nowhere in the Bible do I find God's acceptance for lying and dishonesty for any reason. Even though there are many passages in the Bible related to those words, two come to mind:

1. Proverbs 12:22: Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.
2. Luke 16:10: One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

I fully endorse the Book of Discipline as written, which begs the question, 'would I still send this letter if I supported the practice of homosexuality.' Prior to writing this letter I spent a significant amount of time in introspection and believe that I would still feel this way. In part I can say this because of sacrificing significant amounts of money and career advancement as a result of a position taken at work during a similar situation.

Integrity is defined as 'the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles'. If the church clergy and leaders cannot be trusted to uphold vows taken at the altar before God with their hand on the Bible can there be trust in anything they say?

Certainly, I understand many church members, clergy, and leaders favor the practice of homosexuality. I have NO problem with people expressing views different from mine. There are many ways to act on your personal views without sacrificing integrity.

The Hindus have a word called 'karma', which expresses the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction. Are the clergy and leaders teaching people that lying and dishonesty are acceptable as long as you are doing it in God's name after thoughtful prayer and discernment? That is a very slippery slope to place the cross of Christ on.

In the movie 'The Confession', Ben Kingsley said, "It's not hard to do the right thing; in fact it's easy. What's hard is knowing what the right thing is. Once you know that, doing the right thing is easy."

Based on the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church the Western Jurisdiction does not have a qualified bishop. In failing to be loyal to the Book of Discipline many conference leaders and clergy no longer meet the requirements for being elders in full connection, either.

I ask the Council of Bishops to install a temporary qualified bishop, conference leadership, and necessary clergy persons until such time as permanent qualified leadership and clergy can be appointed and a qualified bishop can be elected. This request is NOT made because of the issue of homosexuality. This request is made because lies and dishonesty were used by a group of leaders and clergy to advance the nomination and election of someone that was unqualified per the United Methodist Book of Discipline.

Lies and dishonesty should NOT be tolerated by a church that spreads God's message of love and salvation through His word, the Bible.

With God's love and blessings I am,

Rick Stiles