



# The United Methodist Church

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### Guidelines for conducting same-gender weddings in The United Methodist Church under the Traditional Plan

Same-gender marriage is legal in the United States, but the United Methodist Church, under the present Traditional Plan, has harsh penalties if complaints are filed against clergy and they are brought to trial for conducting same-gender weddings. As an annual conference we have declared to do no harm by limiting complaints and trials. There are some clergy who will perform same-gender weddings in spite of the Traditional Plan. But for those who do not wish to jeopardize their credentials in providing ministry to LGBTQIA+ couples, these guidelines, if followed and documented, will result in any complaint being dismissed by the present resident bishop of Northern Illinois.

It is best if in following these guidelines, that the clergyperson discuss them with the church council in order to maintain good communication.

- Be honest about what you are willing to do or not do.
  - Seek to help the couple find options for whatever you are unable or unwilling to do for their wedding.
- United Methodist church buildings are not to be used for same-gender marriages
  - Help find another venue—another church, home, etc.
  - Hold the service outside the church!
- You can participate in these ways:
  - Pre-marital counseling
  - Attend
  - Read scripture/pray/give the meditation
- Lift up a same-gender, newly married couple in worship/announcements as you would a heterosexual couple (again, please consult with church council)
- You cannot participate in these ways:
  - Preside over the ceremony, specifically the vows/exchange of rings, declaration and pronouncement of marriage
  - Sign the certificate of marriage
- Possible ways to assist in those things you cannot do:
  - Have the couple give their vows to each other without assistance as you stand aside
  - Have someone else assist in the vows/pronounce the couple married/sign the certificate
    - Another clergy from another denomination
    - A layperson who becomes licensed to do so (be sure to check any state laws if in states other than Illinois)
- The bishop/DS cannot give permission
  - You may inform your DS if you wish.
  - Do inform your DS if you believe someone is bringing a complaint against you
- Even if you abide by these guidelines, it does not preclude the possibility of complaint. Remember that everyone's cell phone has a camera and can quickly post pictures that may appear as if you are “celebrating” a same-gender marriage
  - You will need to verify your role in the service should a complaint be brought against you

I am aware that many clergy or laity will not be satisfied with these guidelines in terms of what they would like to be able to do in relation to ministry with LGBTQIA+ persons and families. Some clergy won't be comfortable in participating in a same gender wedding but it is my hope these guidelines will provide some avenues of ministry to LGBTQIA+ couples for more clergy.

May God lead us as the United Methodist Church toward full inclusion of all people!