

So: this is interesting and, of course, sad.

One of the things that puzzles me...still, and for a long time...is the question of the biblical authority for majority rule. How did a democratic vote ever rise to the standard of carrying the sanction of God, particularly in a Trinitarian tradition? It seems like a straightforward, simple (and simplistic) adoption by the mainline church of of Lockean enlightenment philosophy, probably in the late 18th century. How is majority rule consistent with any reasonable theology of the Holy Spirit?

Were there 19th or 20th c. Anglican or Methodist theologians that dealt with this question? If so, why have we not heard about them (and their ideas) from the pulpits of Methodism?

Point is, the majority voting at General Conference are wrong on the human sexuality issue, theologically and practically, and have been wrong for a generation. And the rigidity of worshipping the Book of Discipline--beautifully illustrated in this Bishop's missive--allows the Church to hide, i.e., to avoid dealing with the theologies of grace, of creation and creativity and, particularly, of the Holy Spirit. Yes, there needs to be a theology, too, of accountability. But why should that particular theology doggedly cling to majority rule, particularly where there is no biblical witness for such a stance?

There is accountability in the practice of community. This is never helped by voting, which creates winners and losers. There is accountability in consensus, that is, in the process and practice of consensus, and biblical authority, too. (Philippians 2 comes to mind instantly, which happily also brings up the importance of humility. One can then ask: can the judicial authority of the UMC act with theological soundness and with humility, simultaneously?) I have, over the years, figured out how to hybridize the whole thing: as a lay leader (yes, even in a Methodist church, though more deeply in an ELCA one), I facilitated the practice of consensus decision making and paid homage to the rules that required voting by having the votes essentially be about confidence in the consensus decision-making group, its process and, of course, its decision.

I know this crisis makes you sad and, perhaps, angry. Me, too: sad, mostly.

Kindest Regards,

Reid

The newsletter of the Upper New York Annual Conference www.unyumc.org

The Episcopal Office of The Upper New York Annual Conference has issued the following statement. As many are learning through various blogs, Facebook pages and other social media not affiliated with the Upper New York Annual Conference, a complaint has been brought against the Rev. Stephen Heiss, pastor at Tabernacle United Methodist Church in Binghamton, regarding Rev. Heiss' public statements acknowledging that he has officiated at "several" marriages of gay and lesbian couples.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church expressly prohibits clergy from performing same-sex marriages.

Paragraph 363 of the Book of Discipline outlines the process for handling a complaint brought against a clergy or lay member of the Church. This process, known as a supervisory response, is both pastoral and administrative in nature, and has as its primary goal to reach a just resolution of the complaint. If the supervisory response does not lead to a just resolution, it is up to the bishop to either dismiss the complaint (on the grounds of a lack of evidence or lack of basis in law) or refer the complaint for administrative or judicial action.

As the first step of the supervisory response, Upper New York Area Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb will meet with Rev. Heiss.

This is a personnel matter, and the Conference will not comment on the specific details of the complaint or this process.

While members of the denomination are not of one mind on the issue of same-sex marriage, it is important to understand that this is not a theological debate between the Conference and its clergy or lay members. The Upper New York Annual Conference is not authorized to make or change Church law, but is obliged to fully and fairly administer Church law.

Through their delegates to General Conference, the Church's highest authority, it is the members of the denomination who determine the official positions of The United Methodist Church, which are codified in the Book of Discipline.

Those official positions, Church law, begin as petitions submitted to General Conference. Delegates working on legislative committees accept, reject or amend the petitions, then report their recommendations to the General Conference as a whole for a vote.

When General Conference next meets in 2016, petitions regarding issues of human sexuality and same-sex marriage can be introduced. Whatever General

Conference decides – in 2016 or beyond – the Upper New York Annual Conference's position will remain unchanged: It will uphold the Book of Discipline.

Supporters of Rev. Heiss have organized a prayer vigil for Aug. 1, 2013. Bishop Webb indicated his support of prayer for this process, and encourages all within the Upper New York Annual Conference to join together in prayer on that day.

“Prayer is one of the foundations of our life together,” Bishop Webb said. “As we seek God’s will and wisdom, let us determine to love one another and make unity within the Church our priority. May we all engage in an attitude of fervent prayer for Rev. Heiss, the Upper New York Annual Conference, the communities we serve and the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.”

As a Church, we pray that whatever our differences, we will continue to see each other first as brothers and sisters in Christ and allow God to show us the way forward. Or as John Wesley said, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may.”