

Just the facts . . . about the Amendment to Paragraph 4, Article IV

Annual Conference is right around the corner and this year, the stakes are higher than usual. Along with every Annual Conference and Central Conference worldwide, we will be voting on an amendment to the United Methodist Constitution that will include ALL people in the life, leadership and sacraments of the Church. By a vote of 558 to 276, General Conference amended Paragraph 4, Article IV of the Constitution (see the amended paragraph below). General Conference now places the amendment before us. To approve this amendment, 2/3rds of all conference delegates throughout the United Methodist Church must vote "YES."

"It would appear that some individuals opposed to the Constitutional Amendments are so distrustful of the process," said Bishop S. Clifton Ives, "that they have resorted to distortions of the truth and fear mongering in order to influence persons to vote against what the General Conference approved after careful study and debate in their presence."

After prayerful consideration, this brief background and the following facts are offered so that we might arrive at annual conference fully informed and ready to cast our votes.

First and foremost

- **The amendment to Article IV is about the Christ-like inclusion of all persons.** It is not about any one group of people, but about our entire church and the world as our parish.

Critics are not attacking what the amendment actually says. Instead, they base their criticisms on the fact that it was submitted by Breaking the Silence. When you understand the bigger picture, the petition's sponsor is irrelevant. Voting should be based on the merits of an amendment, not on who sponsored it.

A brief background.

- **This proposed amendment is presented to us by the General Conference.** Breaking the Silence (BTS) authored the petition. It was recommended for adoption by the General Administration Legislative Committee. It was discussed, amended, and adopted by General Conference, and now comes to us as a General Conference amendment for ratification.
- **Many individuals and groups submitted petitions requesting a change to Paragraph 4, Article IV.** In fact, *thirteen entire annual conferences* submitted petitions to change this paragraph.
- For example: **The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) submitted a petition to change Paragraph 4** because, as it stands, women are one of the groups currently left out of the protected categories. COSROW has since published a statement endorsing the amendment.
- **Others also submitted petitions, wishing to add groups currently unprotected from discrimination.** (disabled persons, divorced persons, persons in certain age categories, etc.) Every petition was submitted in an attempt to complete the list and prevent anyone from being left out.
- **BTS reviewed the paragraph and wondered if Jesus would ever make such a list.** We wondered if having a list of any kind inherently means that someone is excluded. That led us to the decision to scratch the list altogether and simply state that, upon meeting the two current requirements (baptism and seeking relationship in Jesus Christ), all persons would be eligible for church membership. *It really is that simple.*

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False concerns have been raised and confusion created. The following list points to things that the amendment does not address and will not change.

- **This proposed amendment does not affect the pastors' authority to discern readiness for membership.** Currently, the Book of Discipline only requires that individuals affirm the vows of membership for themselves. This amendment would not change the rights of a pastor.
- **Gay and lesbian persons are currently included in the list of protected groups of people in the UM Constitution.** The current Constitutional Article on inclusiveness already protects the rights of people of all sexual orientations to be members in the church under the category of "status." (See Judicial Council Decision 702) This proposed amendment would simply replace the current list with the word "All."
- **This proposed amendment in no way prohibits membership classes in local congregations.** The amendment simply replaces the list of categories of protected people with the word "ALL." It in no way changes current requirements or practices regarding membership in the local church.
- **This proposed amendment does not change the current standards for ordination.** The Book of Discipline already outlines a series of pre-requisites for ordination that go above and beyond the requirements for membership in a local church. These include seminary education, years of service and intensive interviews to name just a few. Membership and ordination remain two separate issues.
- **This proposed amendment in no way affects the ability of local congregations to implement programs like Safe Sanctuaries that require certain background checks and trainings for those who serve the church.** The amendment deals with issues of membership alone, not with the standards for service within the local congregation.

CURRENT PARAGRAPH 4, ARTICLE IV (*proposed additions are in bold type; proposed deletions are stricken through*)

Inclusiveness of the Church. The United Methodist Church is part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth **and that we are in ministry to all.** All persons ~~without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition,~~ shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, **and** upon baptism be admitted as baptized members. **All persons, and** upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith **and relationship in Jesus Christ, shall be eligible to** become professing members in any local church in the connection. In the United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body. ~~of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.~~

PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Inclusiveness of the Church. The United Methodist Church is part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth and that we are in ministry to all. All persons shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, and upon baptism be admitted as baptized members. All persons, upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith and relationship in Jesus Christ, shall be eligible to become professing members in any local church in the connection. In the United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body.

Friends, let us engage in and encourage holy conversations. Let us research and understand the facts. Take this to annual conference. Talk to other delegates. Ask them to read the amendment for themselves so they are not confused, but clear about the facts. Please, be present at Annual Conference and cast your vote in favor of the amendment to Article IV. Every vote counts!

Grace and peace, -The Breaking the Silence Executive Committee