

Initiative for More Respect and Against the Discrimination of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans* People within the United Methodist Church in Germany

In the United Methodist Church in Germany - as in our society in general - a discussion is currently taking place regarding our position on homosexuality and how to treat people with a lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans* identity.

We, the supporters of this initiative, emphasize above all that we are in this matter speaking about people in our midst. However, we should not just be speaking about them but also with them wherever possible. Regardless of the opinion we hold or the extent to which we are concerned personally, our response to sexual and gender identity cannot be treated purely as a factual issue. Sexual and gender identity are essential parts of a person's personality. Thus it is almost impossible for someone to experience an assessment of their identity as being separate from an assessment of their whole person. This does not simplify the matter and at the same time it underscores the need for this discussion. We are concerned about people in our midst, our sisters and brothers.

- We advocate treating gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans* people in our church with respect - regardless of what position we take regarding different forms of sexuality.
- We oppose all forms of discrimination regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans* people in our church.

We consider lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* to be valid forms of sexual and gender identity experienced by human beings who are created by God and not the result of a deliberate decision. Such forms of sexual and gender identity, therefore, cannot and should not be a reason for discrimination any more than nationality, gender, skin-colour, language or characteristic of birth.

Our understanding of the few biblical passages, which criticize homosexual activity, is based on the complete context of Holy Scripture. When considered from the centre of scripture, individual statements on homosexuality become relative just as certain biblical statements on the role of women, on violence or on the role of slaves do too. We consider ourselves bound by biblical and Methodist tradition to oppose discrimination. We see every human being in the light of God's unconditional love and advocate relating to one another without any form of discrimination.

- We advocate that the congregations of our church welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans* men and women and clearly oppose their discrimination.
- We advocate supporting homosexual partnerships in our church just as we support heterosexual partnerships - with the promise of God's blessing and the call to mutual faithfulness and love.
- We advocate that there be no limitations - on the basis of their gender and sexual identity - to admission to the ministry and ordination for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* men and women.

On the way to becoming a church free of discrimination we recommend the following steps:

- The United Methodist Church in Germany establishes a point of contact for gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans* people and for members of their families, where they can receive help regarding counselling, contact-addresses and further information .
- The United Methodist Church in Germany organizes educational events on the subject of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* issues.
- The Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church in Germany formulate propositions to the General Conference with the intention of amending the Book of Discipline in order to remove all forms of discrimination against homosexuals.

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Carolyn Kappauf, Christian Voller-Morgenstern, Ralf Würtz

The Forum for Social-Diaconal Ethics of the German Central Conference of the UMC (Forum sozialdiakonische Ethik der Zentralkonferenz der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche in Deutschland) had decided during its 2014 spring session to concentrate predominantly on the subject of „Homosexuality and the Church“ during the next two years, the main aim being to talk about how we as people with differing sexual identities within the church could walk together on a joint path.

Much at the same time but independent from the forum, a small group in Berlin decided to start the „Initiative For More Respect And Against The Discrimination of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans* People Within The United Methodist Church in Germany“.

The Forum for Social-Diaconal Ethics very quickly adopted the intention of the initiative and was subsequently involved in the wording of the initiative as it now stands.

- The Forum for Social-Diaconal Ethics supports the intention of the initiative unconditionally and will be actively involved in the discussion process during the next few years within the framework of our church.
- The Forum for Social-Diaconal Ethics requests people to support the initiative, hopes that a fruitful and productive dialogue will be forthcoming and is grateful for ideas and suggestions which can help our church become more and more a place free of discrimination.

On behalf of the forum: Norbert Böhringer, Dr. Lothar Elsner, Reiner Kanzleiter, Åsa Nausner, Wilfried Röcker