

Fact Sheet: Amendment One

Paragraph 4, Article IV of The United Methodist Constitution

The work of Annual Conference members will be particularly challenging this year as we vote on amendments to the Constitution. Amendment I on Paragraph 4, Article IV of the Constitution has generated a particularly lively debate. There is a fair amount being written about the amendment, much of which is misleading. It is our intention with this fact sheet to state clearly our understanding of the substance of this amendment and to correct inaccurate information currently being circulated.

In May 2008, **by a vote of 558 to 276**, General Conference amended Par. 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 Annual Conference and Central Conference delegates must vote “yes.”

Paragraph 4 of the Constitution of The United Methodist Church makes explicit the ways in which our church is inclusive. It is written specifically to ensure that people will not be excluded from the life of the church. The list of “protected” groups, i.e. those who will not be excluded, contains many, but not all, of the groups of persons who have often been discriminated against. The paragraph as amended, which MFSA strongly supports, does away with the list and simply states that the church is in “ministry to all” and the “all persons” should be able to attend worship and otherwise fully participate in the life of the church.

Much of the criticism being circulated is not a response to the content of the amendment, but is aimed at the group that submitted the amendment and the “true agenda” of this group. While the petition’s sponsor, in this case a group called Breaking the Silence, is of interest, clearly voting should be based on the merits of an amendment, not on who sponsored it.

Background:

- **This proposed amendment is presented to us by the General Conference.** It was submitted to General Conference last May and assigned to a legislative committee. The legislative committee recommended that it be adopted. 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 submitted petitions, wishing to add other groups currently left out and unprotected from discrimination.** Some suggested that “age” or “sexual orientation” be added to the list. Still others asked to have “persons with disabilities” among those protected from exclusion. Every petition was submitted in an attempt to complete the list and prevent anyone from being left out.
 - **Breaking the Silence reviewed the paragraph and** concluded that a list of any kind is inherently exclusive. Thus they submitted a proposed amendment that would 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.*

Certain critics have created confusion by raising false concerns that the amendment **does not address** and **will not change**.

Contrary to the misinformation being circulated:

- **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. It would merely widen the circle of those who are included.
- **Gay and lesbian persons are currently included in the list of protected groups of people in the UM Constitution.** Paragraph 4, as *currently* written, includes "status" as a protected category. According to Judicial Council Decision 702, under this provision, the rights of people of all sexual orientations are already protected with regards to church membership. The proposed amendment would simply replace the current list of categories of people 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 at 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

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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 Paragraph 4, Article IV. Every vote counts!

Paper compiled by the Methodist Federation for Social Action (*material from other fact sheets included with permission*).
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