

**TRANSGENDER PERSONS AND THE UMC****OPTIONS**

Legislation will be coming before General Conference that would prohibit transgender persons from pursuing ordination or serving as clergy, effectively preventing their full participation in the Church. MFSA takes the position that now is a time to seek greater understanding, not a time to make judgments.

**ISSUE**

At issue is whether The United Methodist Church will precipitously vote to exclude transgender people from ordained ministry. The term “transgender” is here understood as an umbrella term that refers to a wide range of people whose physical bodies, self-understanding or self-expression varies from what society considers “normal” or appropriate for a male or female.

The stance of MFSA is that the structures are already in place in the form of Boards of Ministry at the Annual Conference level to determine the fitness for ministry of any given candidate for ministry, including any candidate who happens to be transgender. Delegates will decide whether the independence of the annual conference Boards of Ministry will be compromised with a blanket policy that prohibits transgender persons from even entering the candidacy process.

**ANALYSIS**

The participation of transgender persons in the Church has come under continued scrutiny in recent years due to several high profile cases that have questioned their presence in church leadership positions. In 2002 and 2007, for example, the respective Bishops of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference were faced with decisions of whether to reappoint ordained elders who had successfully completed gender reassignment. Related issues include whether to continue to allow transgender persons to pursue ordained ministry and to hold lay leadership positions in the Church.

We live in a time when some churches are struggling with how to be in ministry with transgender persons. Other congregations have already discovered that their mission and ministry have been richly blessed by the presence of transgendered persons.

Some within the church feel strongly that transgender persons should not even explore the possibility of ordination. Others within the church have already experienced transgender persons who clearly have gifts and graces for ministry.

One thing is clear. This is not a time to draw more lines in the sand. This is the time to use our best resources in reaching out to transgender persons as we seek clarity and understanding. As

followers of Jesus we should approach this task as those who seek always to love, be compassionate and do justice.

MFSA is calling on General Conference to continue on a journey of increased understanding to help the church in its ministry to transgender persons and to encourage their participation as fully recognized members of the body of Christ and the United Methodist Church.

We believe the church should:

- 1) Seek to better understand the experience and reality of transgender persons and their families.
- 2) Seek to better understand the emotional and mental impact of gender reassignment on those transgender individuals who chose to undergo such treatment and identify ways to be in ministry with and for transgender persons.
- 3) Educate Boards of Ordained Ministries so they will better understand issues related to gender

## **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Since we depend on the good judgment of Boards of Ordained Ministry at the Annual Conference level to determine the fitness of candidates for ministry, MFSA recommends that no new language prohibiting transgender persons from serving as clergy be added to the *Book of Discipline*. Instead, we should continue to use the same criteria for transgender persons seeking to become ministers as we do for those who are not transgender.

### **Vote against:**

**Petition 81031-C2-161.G**, pp. 328, 329, “Human Sexuality”

**Petition 81032-C2-R9999**, pp. 417- 418, “The Church, Transgenderism and Transsexuality”

**Petition 81033-C2-161.G**, p. 330, Definition of Gender

**Petition #81123-C2, 161.G** pp, 331-332, “Defining Terms”

**Petition #81351-C2-R999**, p. 431, “Sexuality and Ministry

**Petition #81356-C2-161.G**, pp. 333, “Transgenderism”

**Petition #81034-FO-91304.3**, p. 923, “Gender Definition”