

United Methodist bishops say they'll uphold ban on same-sex unions

WASHINGTON – The United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops said in a Nov. 10 letter they would continue to uphold the denomination's ban on blessing same-sex unions.

"As the Council of Bishops we will uphold the Book of Discipline as established by General Conference," the denominational assembly that meets every four years and is the church's highest policymaking body, said the letter, which was addressed to all Methodists.

Paragraph 341.6 of the Book of Discipline says, "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." The book also calls homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching" and bans its churches from hosting, and its clergy from officiating at, "ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions."

The bishops, again quoting the Book of Discipline, also said they "implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends," saying they were committed to ministry "for and with all persons."

Earlier this year, about 1,000 clergy signed a letter declaring they would bless a gay marriage if they believed the couple was sufficiently prepared. They were joined by 36 retired Methodist bishops who called on the denomination to end its ban on ordaining "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy.

In response, more than 2,500 other Methodist clergy and 11,000 laypeople signed petitions urging the Council of Bishops to uphold the gay marriage ban.

The United Methodist Church has about 7.8 million members in the United States and more than 12 million members worldwide, with 44,000 ordained clergy.

In June, one Methodist minister was suspended for 20 days and ordered to enter into a yearlong process “to restore the broken clergy covenant relationship” after being convicted by a jury of her peers, as called for in the Book of Discipline, of officiating at a same-sex marriage.

While acknowledging “the deep disagreements and divisions within the church” on an issue that has caused “deep pain” throughout the church, “at times like these we call upon each other to remember and renew our covenant with God and with one another as United Methodist Christians,” the Council of Bishops said. “As bishops chosen, consecrated and assigned by the church, we declare once again our commitment to be faithful to this covenant we have made.”