

**Statement by the clergy and lay leadership of the Arch Street United Methodist Church on behalf of the Reconciling United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania:**

On Saturday, November 9, 2013 at three o'clock in the afternoon, 36 United Methodist Clergy and 9 clergy from other faith traditions presided over the marriage ceremony of a same gender couple. In addition, 17 United Methodist Clergy and 8 clergy from other faith traditions, from all over the United States, had their names added to the marriage certificate by proxy. In total, there 74 co-officiants.

During the wedding ceremony, the loving and committed couple invited God and the congregation gathered to bless their union. The couple became members of Arch Street United Methodist Church over 20 years ago. Now they are rejoicing and praising God that their 25 year love for each other has been blessed by God in the church they love.

In contrast to The Discipline of the United Methodist Church which prohibits United Methodist clergy from performing same gender weddings, we pronounced that the couple is married in the eyes of God. By this pronouncement, a loving couple is affirmed spiritually and welcomed fully into the community of faith.

In addition to celebrating and confirming a couple's love; we, the couple, the clergy and the congregation demonstrated our solidarity with the Reverend Frank Schaefer, United Methodist clergy, who was tried in a church court for performing the same gender wedding of his son. The jury returned a verdict of guilty and issued a penalty of 30 days suspension from pastoral duties with the instruction to consider whether he could agree to uphold the entire Discipline of the United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Church in its current Discipline states in one breath that every person is a person of sacred worth and yet, in another breath, singles out homosexuality as being incompatible with Christian teaching. We challenged this contradiction, the hypocrisy it signals, its denial of scripture and the threat it poses to the integrity of our call by God to provide pastoral care to all. We acted as a matter of ecclesiastical conscience in the center of a compelling community context. We believe that this act of pastoral care reflects the love of God and honors and abides by The Bible as well as the Discipline of the United Methodist Church as a whole, if not in part.

We are sad that our actions may cause some discomfort, pain and conflict within our circles of peers, friends, family members and neighbors. We hope and pray that the Holy Spirit will provide a pathway to prayer-filled and positive interactions that will make a way out of what appears to be no way. Yet, we will not let this circumstantial sadness stand in the way of the great day of rejoicing this is for the married couple,

their church family, the participating clergy and the people of God gathered. We are not anything special, really. So many other people of faith, for many years before today, have made profound contributions to the movement of gay rights in the church. For their witness and example we say thank you - well done good and faithful servants. It is our honor and privilege to have been called by God to take our turn in contributing to a growing tradition and movement within the United Methodist Church that seeks to free the church from heterosexism, homophobia and hypocrisy and fill it with the all-inclusive, transforming love of God.

United Methodist congregations and allies of full inclusion are asked to pray for the Reverend Frank Schaefer, his family and his congregation. Please join the growing number of United Methodists and their community partners in proclaiming the all-inclusive love of God.

*"Have the courage to light a candle for clergy and congregations and communities that live by the code of love." "For now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." I Corinthians 13:12-13*

*"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the Day of Judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love." I John 4:16-18*