

Joint Statement of Complainants and Respondents
Philadelphia Area of the United Methodist Church
Just Resolution Process
September 30, 2014

The undersigned representatives of both the complainants and the respondents have agreed to the following statement and course of action:

*The **respondents*** who co-conducted the same-sex marriage ceremony on November 9, 2013 believe that our act reflects the love of God and honors and abides by the *Discipline* of the United Methodist Church as a whole, if not in part. We believe that the current disciplinary language is discriminatory toward “practicing homosexuals,” and stands in contrast to Jesus' example, which extended love and grace to those at society's margins. Further, we believe that discriminatory policies and practices continue to cause emotional and psychological harm to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) persons, as shown by social science literature. In participating in the Arch Street ceremony, we took a stand in solidarity with our LGBT friends, family members, neighbors and church members, and gave witness to what we understand to be “Jesus' pattern of love and service.” In undertaking our actions in a spirit of civil disobedience, we recognize that we have violated certain rules of our *Discipline*, which are binding on all United Methodist clergy, and therefore have opened ourselves to certain consequences, which we are willing to face.

*The **complainants*** who began a disciplinary complaint process in response to the event of November 9, 2013, believe our action reflects the love of God, and faithfulness to both the spirit and letter of the *Discipline*. We do not believe that our current disciplinary language is inconsistent, or constitutes discrimination against any persons, and have brought our action in the sincere conviction that it is necessary, to maintain both order and unity within our church, to hold all our clergy accountable to their ordination vows to uphold the *Discipline*. We support the right of those who conscientiously object to current teachings to advocate for change through all appropriate and legal means, and also believe that where intentional violations of such vows take place, even for reasons of conscience, disciplinary action must be taken.

To avoid the cost and pain of an ecclesiastical trial, and to maintain the unity of the church amid our deep disagreement, we agree to the following:

- The undersigned clergy **respondents** acknowledge their obligation to obey the *Discipline* and understand that if they perform future same-gender weddings or blessings of homosexual unions they will be subject to a complaint process per Paragraphs 355, 362, 366 or other applicable provisions of the *Discipline* and will be subject to prompt and appropriate disciplinary action.
- The undersigned clergy and lay **complainants** agree to forgo any complaint in response to violations of the *Discipline* regarding same-sex ceremonies up to Sept. 30, 2014.
- Both **respondents** and **complainants** agree to refrain from defamatory language and characterizations of each other, acknowledging that both are acting out of conscience and in an attempt to be faithful to the call of Christ.
- Both **respondents** and **complainants** agree to engage in a process of dialogue and discussion designed to find ways that enable both groups to live together within the same communion with integrity. The plan is outlined below:
 - We recommend two meetings, the first to define the process to insure that the dialogues are held in a respectful manner and do not include ‘drama.’ This session would include listening to each other and speaking straight-forwardly about our perspectives on the issue. We can then divide into smaller groups

with an outside facilitator for each group. The second session would be for thinking creatively about how we can live and work together moving forward, considering our differences on this issue. This is where we can move the next step in our conference and model a sense of unity for the denomination.

- Both *respondents* and *complainants* will not discuss publicly any of the internal debates or statements which were part of the negotiations which led to these final statements.

Statement of Bishop Peggy Johnson Philadelphia Area of the United Methodist Church

I am pleased that the complainants and respondents have come together in a way which is respectful, and supportive of our covenantal obligations under the *Discipline*. The respondents acting out of their principled belief that some provisions of the *Discipline* should be changed acknowledge they have violated certain rules of the *Discipline* and have opened themselves to consequences they are willing to face. Though I may sympathize with the pastoral concerns of the respondents, it is unacceptable to disregard and disobey the Book of Discipline; change must be sought through our established means of Holy Conferencing. The complainants have filed a complaint acting out of their principled belief that in order to maintain unity when there is sincere disagreement, we United Methodists must uphold and live by the *Discipline* of the United Methodist Church.

The respondents and complainants have suggested a plan which I have accepted. The complainants will withdraw the complaint concerning the action on November 9, 2013. The complainants and respondents will meet for dialogue about the core issues on which there is disagreement and the role of the *Discipline* in our life together as United Methodist disciples of Jesus Christ. Our goal is to humbly and steadfastly live out our call to follow Jesus Christ and do our best to keep the church faithful and healthy.

In light of the foregoing agreement, I have determined that the complaint process in regard to the event of November 9, 2013 is hereby resolved, and all further proceedings ended. I pledge that, in future cases where clergy within my jurisdiction officiate or host a same-gender ceremony, any complaints that I receive will be handled swiftly and with significant and appropriate consequences, which may include a trial, involuntary leave of absence without pay, or other significant consequences, in accordance with the *Discipline* and in consultation with the Board of Ordained ministry and the clergy session of the annual conference. It is my hope that the dialogues shortly to begin will provide a way forward for us, and model for the church a way of engaging one another in love and respect in accord with the *Discipline* amid profound disagreement. It is my hope that persons from all perspectives will engage in future dialogues.