

MEDIA RELEASE

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Citing Continuing United Methodist Injustice Against LGBTQI+ Persons, Former Foundry Pastor The Rev. J. Philip Wogaman surrenders clergy credentials

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Citing continuing injustices against LGBTQI+ persons who are barred from ordained ministry, the Rev. J. Philip Wogaman, pastor of Foundry United Methodist church between 1992 and 2002, announced today that he voluntarily surrendered his clergy credentials during the clergy session of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference.

Wogaman, who was ordained 60 years ago, said he made his decision after Foundry member T.C. Morrow's candidacy was delayed by the conference's Board of Ordained Ministry during the clergy session. Morrow is a married lesbian. Her candidacy had previously been approved by the 2016 clergy session.

"This case in the Baltimore-Washington Conference has brought home how a gifted person of high Christian character can be excluded from ordained ministry because of bad church law, applied legalistically and hurtfully. This person, and many like her, have been excluded from the company of ordained clergy. I had to ask myself, how can I continue to be a part of that company when such people are excluded," Wogaman said.

He made his announcement during a moment of personal privilege that he requested from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling during the clergy's executive session at the start of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference.

"I do this with a heavy heart, but knowing that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was right about there being a cost of discipleship at every stage in our life as Christians," Wogaman said.

Wogaman noted he did not want the focus from his action to be about him. "This was not about me, this is about shining more light on bad church law, applied legalistically and hurtfully and the harm that continues to happen."

Even as he steps away from being a clergyperson into a new role as a layperson, Wogaman is encouraging LGBTQI+ persons that believe God is calling them to ministry to step forward within The United Methodist Church.

"Change in the UMC will occur more quickly if increasing numbers of such persons keep knocking at the door. It will be seen increasingly that many such persons are genuinely Christian and that the theological rationale underlying the prohibition is seriously flawed," he said.

Wogaman said that he urged other clergy concerned about the exclusion of LGBTQI+ persons from ordained ministry to not follow his example. They are needed to remain within the circle to affect change.

Since retiring in 2002, Wogaman's clergy status had related to Foundry.

Wogaman is a widely renowned United Methodist ethicist. He served as professor of Christian Ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. from 1966-1992. Wesley Theological Seminary honored him by naming him Professor Emeritus of Christian Ethics. He also served as professor of Bible and Social Ethics at the University of the Pacific from 1961-1966. He is a past president of the American Theological Society and the Society of Christian Ethics of the United States and Canada.

A four-time delegate to the United Methodist General Conference, Wogaman helped to establish and served as a member of the denomination's 1988-1992 Special Committee to Study Homosexuality. It was after that service that he became a strong advocate for full LGBTQI+ inclusion in all aspects of church ministry.

Wogaman is also known for his role as one of the religious leaders who counseled President Bill Clinton, who along with his family, attended Foundry Church during his terms as U.S. president.