

Discussion Guide

for House Meetings, Small Groups + Bible Study Groups

For Foundry's Summer of Great Discernment on the Proposed Declaration for Marriage Equality.
Prepared by the CHURCH CONFERENCE MINISTRY TEAM, a group commissioned to help the FOUNDRY
CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL conduct events to present the many facets of this issue, August 2010

To The Facilitator

Over the course of this summer, Foundry United Methodist Church has entered into a period of discernment in order to consider the issues before it related to same-gender marriage. After much prayer and deliberation, the Congregational Council announced a draft of a policy for marriage equality at Foundry UMC. The congregation is called upon to consider and discuss this policy.

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to facilitate a discussion in light of the proposed Declaration for Marriage Equality. Setting aside time in your small group or bible study, or a specially called house meeting, is an ideal way to thoughtfully discuss and pray about this issue. As such, this discussion guide provides a framework for your small group to use. Use it in whole, or use it as a starting point. This topic may well be very personal or elicit strong beliefs on the part of people in your group. Honor this with preparation for the discussion — 20 minutes on the Metro or over breakfast will help you facilitate a more fruitful discussion for all of the participants.

Please direct any questions, concerns, or suggestions resulting from your discussion to the Congregational Council by email to cong.council@foundryumc.org or directly to any member of the Congregational Council. The congregation is invited to gather on September 26, in a Church Conference, where all professing members of Foundry will vote on the proposed policy.

Apportionments

It is possible that some people will want to talk about apportionments. While we would suggest that you not actively draw out a discussion on apportionments, it may arise. The scope of the question before us at the Church Conference in September will not address apportionments. However, a bit of background: There are members of our congregation who have decided not to make pledges and rather donate in other ways in order for none of their giving to then go to the denomination. This is a very personal decision. Others strongly encourage the congregation to ensure it pays 100% of its apportionment in order to make a statement to the Annual Conference and the broader denomination.

Facilitator Prep

1. Read the Proposed Declaration for Marriage Equality
2. Read FAQ at <http://foundryumc.ning.com/page/5794588:Page:7>
3. Review the Discussion Guide and choose discussion starter questions you think will be good for your group. Some advance preparation (preparing print-outs) is required for some of the questions.
4. For further reading or resources, refer to the “Resources” section at the end of this document.

Discussion Materials

Handout 1 – Proposed Declaration for Marriage Equality

Handout 2 - FAQs

Additional optional resources listed below

Listening and Inquiring

Opening Prayer

Use your own prayer or the following, adapted from a prayer in the United Church of Christ resource “God is Still Speaking about Marriage”

God of Grace and Love, we gather with feelings of hope and fear, anticipation for the reign of God and concern of the costs of standing on the side of justice. We praise you, O God, for the ways you have touched our lives with a variety of loving relationships. We give thanks that we have experienced your love through the life-giving love of Jesus Christ and through the care and affection of other people. Help us to recognize your presence in our midst that we may hear and discern how you are still speaking to us today about marriage. Amen.

Introductions

Invite participants to introduce themselves (name, years at Foundry, etc) and say one word they think of when they hear the word “marriage.”

Introduce The Time Together

Read the following:

*In order to have a good discussion today, I am going to share key parts from **Foundry’s Principles of Christian Communication** which will guide our discussions: Effective communication is essential within a large church like Foundry. Open, healthy communication is a key to developing and continuously renewing a strong faith community that collaborates and cares for one another. As members of a Christian community recognizing our responsibility to be Christ’s representatives in and to the world, we will: affirm and edify each other in our conversations and written words, seeking to make our words to one another gifts fit for God and to receive the words of others as gifts, center ourselves by seeking the Holy Spirit’s presence among us through Biblically-based study and prayer at every gathering at Foundry, take time to listen deeply in order to understand real issues among us, and create space for all in our community to speak their truth in love, and to feel heard, acknowledge that our words*

have power to hurt or to heal, and pledge to be gentle with one another, choosing to heal and build up our community in covenant with God and each other, and cultivate thankfulness.

By conscientiously implementing these principles in our communications with each other and about our church, we can strengthen and renew trust among ourselves and can develop effective communication channels and styles so that we can hear and respond to God’s call for our community.

Next, read the following (or similar):

We’ll share together in an introductory discussion, we’ll read an FAQ prepared by the Church Conference Ministry Team. Then we’ll spend the rest of our time together in discussion. I will have some questions to guide our discussion, but is there anything you want to be sure to have a chance to talk about this evening? If there are question that I or any of us here cannot answer, I’ll refer your question to the Ministry Team working on this.”

For the Facilitator

Write down any questions/topics for discussion and make sure these are addressed in Discussion Time 2.

Discussion Time 1

Read from the proposed Declaration for Marriage Equality

“We therefore resolve that the congregation of Foundry United Methodist Church will celebrate the marriages of couples licensed in the District of Columbia equally, regardless of the couple’s gender. We offer and approve the use of our sanctuary equally for all marriage ceremonies, including same-gender marriages, and we affirm that any of our clergy who choose to celebrate such marriages may do so knowing that we pledge to them our full support.”

What are your hopes and fears for adoption of the proposed Declaration on Marriage Equality for yourself, our congregation, our clergy and staff, and/or the denomination?

Conversely, what would be the potential consequences — both positive and negative — of NOT adopting the proposed declaration for Marriage Equality?

Review of FAQs

Have someone (or multiple people) read selected FAQs — See Handout 2.

To the Facilitator

If there are any questions from the group that you (or someone else in the room) don’t know the answer to, please compile and return to the Congregational Council. We will add the question(s) and response(s) to the FAQ.

Discussion Time 2

To the Facilitator

More discussion with open-ended questions. Discussion starter questions have been provided in three areas — pick and chose what you think will be useful to your particular gathering. The aim is to facilitate a safe environment for people to reflect on the hopes, fears, and implications of affirming the proposed declaration. Make sure everyone has a chance to share if they want to. If someone is dominating the conversation gently remind him/her of the purpose of your time together and encourage others to share.

Marriage

What are the differences between religious marriage and civil marriage?

What role does the church play, if any, in a healthy marriage?

What do you think are the benefits of same-gender marriage, given that many gay and lesbian couples remain together for years, within and without civil partnerships?

How do you think the recognition of their “unions” and support by Foundry Church will enhance their relationships, our congregation, and/or our society? Or do you think it won’t make any difference?

ADVANCE PREPARATION REQUIRED From “God is Still Speaking About Marriage” pages 81–86: Prepare copies of “The 1968 U.S. Supreme Court Decision, Loving v. Virginia: Why the Ugly Rhetoric Against Gay Marriage Is Familiar to this Historian of Miscegenation” by Peggy Pascoe. Invite participants to read the article (allow 3–5 minutes). When it seems people have finished reading, discuss the article.

Questions:

What fears were expressed about this decision and how do they compare to the fears express about the freedom to marry today? How did this decision actually change marriage for today?

Your Faith and Social Justice

For many, marriage equality is a social justice issue. In your life, have there been other social justice issues for which you have taken an intentional, principled action? If so, share the issue and actions you took. In what way was it motivated by your faith or in what way did it impact your faith?

There is a long tradition of civil and ecclesiastical disobedience in the United States. Until our denomination, the United Methodist Church, changes the Book of Discipline (our church law) to accord same-gender couples the same opportunity for marriage or holy unions by our clergy and in our buildings as heterosexual couples, would you be in favor of Foundry engaging in ecclesiastical disobedience?

If so, why? If not, why not?

EXAMPLES OF ECCLESIASTICAL DISOBEDIENCE

- The Roman Catholic priest who knowingly serves communion to Protestants.
- Jimmy Creech, a former United Methodist pastor who performed same-sex unions, was brought up on charges, and the second church trial resulted in removal of his ordination credentials. Video Resource: <http://www.faithinamerica.info/creech.html>

Imagining a New Way. Is Now the Right Time?

For you, does the change in civil law in the District of Columbia increase the moral imperative of Foundry providing equal access to the service of Christian marriage for same-gender couples?

How could the congregation support any clergy who would decide to perform a same-gender wedding? Additionally, in terms of supporting our clergy, should Foundry or its clergy be encouraged to collaborate with other congregations or clergy in performing same-gender weddings as a means of potentially diminishing any potentially negative consequences?

Would Foundry treating all couples, gay and straight, alike in terms of offering marriage services provide any

new opportunities for the congregation? (evangelism, hospitality, example for the denomination, etc)

Given the increasing acceptance in society, particularly among younger people, of homosexuality, are there advantages in postponing a new policy until the Discipline catches up with society?

To What are We Called?

In light of our conversations today, what call do you discern God to be placing upon our congregation with regard to the question of same-gender marriage?

Wrap-up and Follow-up

Are you interested in any other small-group discussions?

Do you have any questions after tonight's discussion that you would like to see addressed by a resource person or by the congregational council before the September vote?

Has tonight's discussion helped you to decide how to vote? What could Foundry do to assist you further?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, we think you for the frank and earnest discussion of this difficult decision facing the Foundry congregation. We pray that we may be led by you as we decide. We know that some of us who favor the policy have fears for our church and our clergy. May we trust in your guidance and in our consciences. We ask dear God that you remind us to love those who have different views on this issue. We pray that we will treat each other with love and care in the spirit of Christ, no matter the result of our vote. May we be a beacon to the world and put forth an example of courage and wise discernment. Now be with us, we pray, as we return home to our families and friends. Amen.

Facilitator Follow-up

Please send any follow up questions and the total number of attendees to church.conference@foundryumc.org. Thank You.

Resources

Resources compiled by Foundry:

<http://foundryumc.ning.com>

Reconciling Ministries Network web resources site, includes an on-line tutorial for individual users and a curriculum to facilitate dialogue in small groups:

<http://rethinkinclusion.org>

From the United Church of Christ “God Is Still Speaking about Marriage” [Newly Revised, June 2008] www.ucc.org/lgbt/pdfs/god-is-still-speaking-about-marriage-rvsv-june-2008.pdf

Page 15: “Why I Got Married?” Discussion starter Questions: Why did the people in the stories get married? Why do people get married today?

Page 34 – 39: “The Gospel vs. Scripture? Biblical theology and the debate about rites of blessing” - An interview with Walter Brueggemann by Julie A. Wortman (for The Witness, November 2002).

Pages 70 – 79: “How Marriage Changed in the Twentieth Century” by Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer and Rev. Laura Tisher.

Pages 81 – 86: “The 1968 U.S. Supreme Court Decision, Loving v. Virginia: Why the Ugly Rhetoric Against Gay Marriage Is Familiar to this Historian of Miscegenation” by Peggy Pascoe.

Questions: What fears were expressed about this decision and how do they compare to the fears expressed about the freedom to marry today? How did this decision actually change marriage for today?

Video suggestion

On Sunday, March 28, United Methodists gathered at Mount Vernon Place UMC in Washington, DC to celebrate DC's Marriage Equality Law and to advocate for marriage equality in the United Methodist church. Worship participants included: Rev. Mary Kay Totty (Pastor, Dumbarton UMC), Rev. Dean Snyder (Pastor, Foundry UMC), Rev. Kate Murphey (Pastor, Wesley UMC), Rev. J. Philip Wogaman (professor emeritus at Wesley Theological Seminary) and Rev. Malcolm Frazier (Campus Minister, Howard University). Key parts of

the service, including words from Rev. Totty, Rev. Wogaman, and Sam Kilpatrick & Doug Barker, members of Foundry UMC who plan to marry, are available on www.youtube.com. Search for “United Methodist Marriage Equality Celebration.”

FAQs (Adapted from <http://foundryumc.ning.com/page/5794588:Page:7> – for full listing see website)

How will Foundry's same sex marriage policy be decided?

Foundry will intentionally consider all sides of a policy for its congregation and ministries, including opportunities and implications. The decision will be made in a formal process referred to by the UMC Book of Discipline as “Church Conference.”

What will be decided at the Church Conference?

As a church, we will decide Foundry's marriage policy.

Why Now?

The recent change in law in the District of Columbia allowing for civil marriage of same-sex couples brings new urgency to the question of celebrating same-sex marriages at Foundry.

When will the Church Conference take place?

Foundry's Church Conference will be on Sunday, September 26, 2010 following the 11am service.

Who will organize this Church Conference?

The Congregational Council and a specially commissioned Church Conference Ministry Team will organize the conference. You may email the Ministry Team at church.conference@foundryumc.org.

What is a Church Conference?

A Church Conference is a formal UMC process whereby all present (full professing) members of a congregation meet to vote on a specific issue.



Who can vote in September? Can associate members vote?

“Full professing members” are eligible to vote at the Church Conference on September 26, 2010. A full member is a person who has professed their faith and committed to being a member before the Foundry congregation. Affiliate Members and Associate Members are not permitted to vote. An Affiliate is one who has retained their membership at another UMC church. An Associate is one who has retained their membership at a non-UMC church of another denomination.

How can I verify if I am a full professing member of Foundry UMC?

By June 30, 2010, a complete listing of full members of Foundry UMC will be posted in the Fellowship Hall for congregants to self-verify. Foundry congregants may also call the church office (202.332.4010), stop by the church office or email Robert McDonald, Director of Membership Services (rmcdonald@foundryumc.org) to verify their membership status. If you have questions about your membership status, please email Robert McDonald.

What will happen at the Church Conference?

While plans are still under development for the process of the Church Conference, the plan is to have an “up or down vote” on the proposed policy. The Congregational Council is taking input on the initial proposal through July 18 and plans to release a final proposal for the Church Conference by July 25.

Will the policy to be voted upon address other aspects of this issue, such as apportionments, advocacy?

No, just Foundry’s marriage policy.

The mark of an inclusive society is one in which all persons are open, welcoming, fully accepting, and supporting of all other persons, enabling them to participate fully in the life of the church, the community, and the world.

— *The UMC Book of Discipline*

Proposed Policy for Marriage Equality

After much prayer and deliberation, the Congregational Council proposes the following policy for marriage equality at Foundry United Methodist Church. We call upon the congregation to consider and discuss this policy. The congregation is invited to gather on September 26th at 12:30 pm, in a Church Conference, where all present and professing members of Foundry will vote on this proposed policy.

JULY 25, 2010

AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH, we recognize God's profound blessing of committed life partnerships, including same-gender couples. Furthermore, we affirm that the celebration of committed same-gender relationships is an important part of the ministry of our church, and is a witness to the joyous gift of God's love. Our commitment to celebrating the blessing of all committed life partnerships is deeply rooted in our commitment to social justice and our mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

CURRENTLY, OUR SENIOR PASTOR makes himself available to lead services in our building that recognize and honor gay and lesbian committed relationships, however, our clergy do not conduct or fully celebrate same-gender marriages. This current practice is inconsistent with our commitment to social justice, and results in discriminatory treatment among us.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH states that "in The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition." We believe that social prejudices added to the Discipline that exclude gay and lesbian members from the full life of the church contravenes this basic Constitutional principle of the Church. Specifically, paragraph 341.6 of the Discipline, which states that "...ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches..." discriminates against same-gender couples and is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ, as well as the Constitution. We recognize that United Methodists are not

in agreement on these matters, and that celebration of same-gender marriage is a decision of individual clergy. We also recognize and support the right of clergy to act in differing ways with respect to this issue. However, we believe that it is appropriate for our clergy to know the mind of their congregation on this matter.

WE THEREFORE RECOMMIT to working within the denomination to change the *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church so that it may be consistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ. We also commit to supporting and honoring same-gender marriages in the same way that we support and honor other marriages. We fully recognize and assume the risks associated with these commitments, because we are called upon by God, through Jesus Christ, to resist injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

WE THEREFORE RESOLVE that the congregation of Foundry United Methodist Church will support and honor the marriages of couples licensed to be married in the District of Columbia equally, regardless of the couple's gender. We offer and approve the use of our sanctuary equally for all marriage ceremonies, including same-gender marriages, and we affirm that any of our clergy who choose to minister fully to "all persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition" by celebrating such marriages may do so knowing that we pledge to them our full support.

WE ASK that God guide our decisions and our prophetic leadership, so that we might bring the light of God's unconditional love to all.