

Methodists Take 1 Step Closer to Blessing Gay Marriage

Same-sex partners can't marry in a **United Methodist Church**. But if one of the spouses works at one of the denomination's 13 general agencies, the couple can get benefits if state laws allow it.

The decision, made at last week's meeting of the UMC's Judicial Council in Little Rock, Ark., affirms one made in October by the church's General Council on Finance and Administration, which expanded the definition of "spouse" to include same-sex spouses and partners.

Same-sex marriage is roiling the 7.5 million-member U.S. denomination, which in recent years has struggled with a growing rebellion among clergy willing to flout church law and preside over the marriages of same-sex partners. While some welcomed the Judicial Council's decision, other decried it.

The Rev. Tom Lambrecht of Good News, a conservative Methodist ministry, blogged last week about the extension of benefits: "It adopts a policy that contradicts church teaching on the definition of marriage, not only violating the beliefs and values of church members (not to mention Scripture) but creating confusion by sending a mixed message about what United Methodists believe."

The decision does not extend benefits to the same-sex spouses and partners of those who work for the church's general agencies in states that prohibit same-sex marriage.

Also at its April 23-26 meeting, the board affirmed that clergy candidates should be allowed a job interview no matter their sexual orientation. The denomination prohibits noncelibate gay clergy.

The council also struck down part of a **gay rights** resolution passed by the UMC's Desert Southwest Annual Conference, because it supported clergy who performed same-sex weddings.

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