

Letter to UMC Minnesota Annual Conference – November 2005

Subject: Letter from Bishop Dyck Regarding Judicial Council Decision 1032

November 1, 2005

Dear Friends and Members of the Minnesota Annual Conference:

You may have learned that the United Methodist Judicial Council, which met last week, ruled that a Virginia United Methodist pastor had the right to refuse church membership to a gay man on the basis of the man's sexual orientation. I am struggling to understand this decision. Our United Methodist tradition affirms the Scriptural teaching that "whoever believes in him [the Christ] may have eternal life" (John 3:15, 16). This is reflected in Article IV of the United Methodist Church Constitution, which states that all persons are of sacred worth and shall be eligible to attend United Methodist worship services, participate in our programs, receive the sacraments, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the United Methodist connection. Exclusion is strictly prohibited in this constitutional article of our church.

My fear is that the Judicial Council's decision will be used in ways that undermine the Wesleyan tradition of our church. I am concerned that some pastors will refuse membership to those they deem unready due to sinfulness. This would constitute a misunderstanding of church membership. Church membership is not earned but is a gift that God extends to all who will accept it. In his theology of prevenient grace, John Wesley taught that God's grace works in us even before we are aware of it. Sanctifying grace continues to work in us throughout our lives, shaping us to be the people God intends us to be. Each one of us is a work in progress.

I know that our Minnesota United Methodist congregations welcome all who profess faith in Christ. I encourage you to continue to do so, extending to all others the grace that God has extended to you.

The Council of Bishops, which is meeting this week, is still discerning how to effectively respond to this decision by the Judicial Council. Please keep our church in your prayers during this difficult time, as we strive to realize the justice and grace that characterize the realm of God.

In Christ's love,

Bishop Sally Dyck

Minnesota Annual Conference