

“Religious TOLERANCE” and Homosexuality?

What is the Pcusa stance on homosexuality?

The tide has turned for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender couples seeking to be married in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). Following years of debate and introspection, America's largest Presbyterian denomination has announced a change to its constitution that allows for a more inclusive definition of marriage. Mar 18, 2015

What is the Methodist Church stance on homosexuality?

Nevertheless, in keeping with historic **Church** teaching, it considers the "practice of **homosexuality** [to be] incompatible with Christian teaching," For this reason, the "United **Methodist Church** does not condone the practice of **homosexuality**" or allow "self-avowed practicing **homosexuals**" to be "certified as candidates, ...

As with most issues, there is a diversity of **views of members of [Baptist churches](#) on [homosexuality](#)**. Some denominations remain more conservative, believing in what they describe as 'traditional' marriage between one man and one woman. Other more liberal or moderate denominations allow local and autonomous congregations to determine their own regional policies. Thus, denominations are generally divided on the issue and reflect a diversity of opinions.^[1]

Nevertheless, Baptists generally believe that homosexuality must be an issue that is approached with compassion and love. Dr. [Albert Mohler](#), President of The [Southern Baptist Theological Seminary](#), emphasizes that: "Our response to persons involved in homosexuality must be marked by genuine compassion. But a central task of genuine compassion is telling the truth, and the Bible reveals a true message we must convey. Those seeking to contort and subvert the Bible's message are not responding to homosexuals with compassion. To lie is never compassionate — and their lie leads unto death."^[2]

A relatively small, albeit growing, number of Baptists and congregations are open to the acceptance of homosexual relationships.^{[3][4]} This openness may, however, be based on sustaining a beneficial relationship than a change in the teachings of the Holy Bible.

[Al Sharpton](#), a [Baptist](#) minister and [Civil rights](#) leader, during his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004 said that asking whether gays or lesbians should be able to get married was insulting: "That's like saying you give blacks, or whites, or Latinos the right to shack up – but not get married [...] It's like asking 'do I support black marriage or white marriage'. . . . The inference of the question is that gays are not like other human beings".¹

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

In July 2013, the General Assembly of the [Disciples of Christ](#) issued a "Sense of the Assembly" resolution (GA-1327 "Becoming a People of Grace and Welcome to All") that (in part) acknowledges that people within society and within the church have been "devalued and discriminated against... because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity," calls for the church to "welcome to all God's children though differing in... sexual orientation, (and/or) gender identity," and that it "affirm(s) the faith, baptism and spiritual gifts of all Christians regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and that neither are grounds for exclusion from fellowship or service within the church, but are a part of God's good creation." Through this resolution, the General Assembling endorsed the ordination of LGBT clergy.^[27] GA-1327 also states, however, that local congregations have final say over matters of consciences.^[28]

Local Disciples of Christ congregations have also performed same-sex marriages (such as the First Christian Church of Davenport),^[29] although the General Assembly has no official policy on same-sex marriages.

Erica Lea to Become First Openly LGBTQ Lead Pastor of Mennonite Church USA

By [Betsy Shirley](#) 9-18-2017

[Print](#)



Erica Lea. Image via Erica Lea.

Albuquerque Mennonite Church will announce today that they have called Erica Lea to be their pastor — the first openly LGBTQ person to serve as a lead pastor in the [Mennonite Church USA](#), a denomination that claims more than 70,000 adult members in the U.S.

Lea joins several other openly LGBTQ pastors who serve in various associate roles throughout the denomination.

“We look forward to finding more ways of articulating and sharing an Anabaptist faith that can flourish in locally derived expressions of Jesus’s call to discipleship, peacemaking, and justice,” Andrew Clouse, a member of AMC who served on the search committee to find a new pastor, said. “We think Erica is well equipped to help us do this.”

Mennonites are part of the Anabaptist tradition, a movement that began in the 16th century and whose members were persecuted for their practice of re-baptizing believers as adults. Though Mennonites share this Anabaptist heritage with the Amish, with whom they are often confused, many Mennonite groups in the U.S. including the MCUSA do not prescribe that their members dress a certain way, avoid certain technologies, or live in self-enclosed communities.

Officially, the MCUSA does not condone same-sex relationships. The [membership guidelines](#) of the MCUSA define marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman, categorize “homosexual...sexual activity as sin,” and forbid MCUSA pastors from performing same-sex marriages. The denomination does not plan to revisit these guidelines until 2019.

Yet disagreement with church’s official position on LGBTQ inclusion has become increasingly visible in recent years.

[READ: 'This Is My Church Too!' LGBTQ Christians On Why They Stay in Denominations That Are Less Than Affirming](#)

During the denomination’s 2015 general convention in Kansas City, Mo., delegates passed a resolution acknowledging “there is currently not consensus within Mennonite Church USA on whether it is appropriate to bless Christians who are in same-sex covenanted unions” and called on MCUSA churches to offer “grace, love, and forbearance” towards those whose perspectives differed from their own.

According to [a list](#) published by Pink Menno, a group that seeks to create greater LGBTQ inclusion in the MCUSA, there are now more than 70 MCUSA churches that have publicly expressed their welcome for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Albuquerque Mennonite Church officially joined those congregations in 2007. The church's [mission statement reads in part](#): "Open and affirming, we hold that every person is created in God's image, valued without regard to origin, sexual identity, affiliation, or status."

In fact, calling Lea to be their pastor is a way of "being inclusive when it came to leadership" and a "tangible" example of how the congregation is living out its mission, Albuquerque Mennonite Church member Jeffrey Newcomer Miller said in an email.

Lea, who will move to New Mexico with her partner shortly after their wedding in November, told Sojourners she looks forward to joining Albuquerque Mennonite Church, which she believes is "a community that celebrates families of all shapes and sizes, is an ally to immigrants and people of color, and is a community that truly lives out its Mennonite value of hospitality."

She also admitted it felt a little "awkward" to be in the denominational spotlight.

"In Menno culture, we often don't want this kind of attention," said Lea.

Nevertheless, Lea believes this is a moment for the church to celebrate.

"It's like the Grand Canyon distance between becoming open and affirming and actually calling an LGBTQ pastor who is out," says Lea. "A lot of churches struggle to make that movement."

Lea also hopes her own position as an openly LGBTQ pastor will encourage others to be leaders in the church.

"I think this is an opportunity to encourage others who have not seen someone like them in a pastoral role," said Lea. "I want LGBTQ people and women to be celebrated and encouraged in pastoral and ministry leadership roles."

[READ: When Community Requires Boundaries, Who Gets Left Out?](#)

At the same time, Lea emphasized "the Mennonite values of community and team work" and explained that the Mennonite tradition had a non-hierarchical view of ministry.

"In our denomination, we have 'the priesthood of all believers,'" Lea said. "Everyone is called to minister.

Luke Miller, a leader of Pink Menno and a board member of the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests, agreed.

He described Lea's call as "a wonderful encouraging sign...of a growing sense in the Mennonite church that God created and blesses queer people and queer lives."

Yet Miller cautioned against using denominational "firsts," including Lea's call to ministry, as a measure of progress in the church.

"When...I look into the eyes of a queer person (especially a queer youth) and see that they know themselves to be fully known and loved and embraced... that's how I truly measure progress in the church," Miller said.

Editor's note: After the publication of this article, we learned that Michael Schaadt served Alpha Mennonite Church, a MCUSA church in Alpha, N.J., from 2003 to 2011. Schaadt initially served the church as interim pastor, but came out to the congregation as gay when they invited him to be a permanent pastor. In 2009, the regional MCUSA conference to which the church belonged [revoked Schaadt's ministerial credentials](#).

When the Reverend Karen Oliveto was asked if she would consider becoming a bishop in the Methodist Church, she wasn't sure what her response would be. "I don't want who I am—because I am so out—to harm the church," Oliveto said before pausing. "And I don't want to be harmed." But despite all the hostility within segments of the broader church community toward homosexuality, there was strong support from leaders in her district for elevating San Francisco's 58-year-old, openly gay pastor to the role of bishop with leadership [over Methodist churches](#) in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and two Idaho churches. Oliveto prayed on it and asked her wife, Robin Ridenour, a church deaconess, for advice. On a Saturday night, during one of their many conversations on the subject, Robin sighed and turned to Karen. "You know what? Perfect love casts out all fear," she said, quoting 1 John 4:18 in the Bible.

"Maybe this is the time," Oliveto thought before she fell asleep. She had to give church leadership an answer the next day.

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The next morning, the couple woke up to news that a shooter had killed 49 people and wounded 53 others at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in the bloodiest mass shooting in the history of the United States. "We realized that people are still being murdered every day for their sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity," Ridenour said. "Someone told me, 'If Karen becomes bishop, she will save lives.' So after the shooting, we both felt that it was really important that the Church see that everybody needs to be included, and we really need to change."

It's been a year since the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage. But despite increasing social acceptance over the past two decades—[a poll from Pew Research Center](#) says 55 percent of Americans support gay marriage, and only 37 percent are explicitly against it—much of organized religion has been resistant to accepting those who openly identify as LGBT as members, much less in leadership positions. Religious institutions such as the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches have confronted schisms in their leadership and communities over the issue of gay rights.

The same fate may be in store for the Methodists. Oliveto's nomination as bishop has become a lightning rod for much of the free-floating concerns about LGBT rights in a church that claims 12.8 million in their worldwide membership and [864 delegates](#) responsible for legislative decision-making. The existing standard was established in 1972, when a provision was added to the *Book of Discipline*, the church's governing text, on the requirements to become an ordained pastor: "[S]elf-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."

Much has changed since then. The first female bishop, Marjorie Matthews, was elected in 1980, although even today there are only [14 female bishops out of 66](#), and a 2011 UMC overview had only [25 percent](#) of U.S. clergy as female. But the role of LGBT members in the Church has not been fully addressed. A strong wing of fundamentalist Methodists believe same-sex relationships are sinful and LGBT people are not fit to lead. Approximately 40 percent of the church's 864 delegates are from other countries, and 30 percent of that number are from Africa, where there has been a [history of intolerance](#) to LGBT relationships. This is where the Church's divide over LGBT issues gets complicated because, unlike more strictly hierarchical institutions such as the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church tries to be a democracy.

The highest authority of that democracy is the church's general conference, which occurs every four years and where legislative decisions are made about the Church's teachings and its function. At this year's General Conference in May, in Portland, Oregon, the question of LGBT rights assumed a central role.

The delegates in Portland, frustrated after years of debate, asked the bishops to confer, weigh in, and provide guidance on how to handle a number of important questions surrounding what they refer to as "human sexuality." Can ordained Methodists perform marriage ceremonies for gay couples? Are gay churchgoers allowed to become clergy people? And most basic: Is homosexuality a sin? The bishops proposed any human sexuality legislation be tabled for this year and created a commission to explore and pray over options. A special session is likely to be called in 2018 or 2019 to act on the commission's findings.

The factions against inclusion appear to leave no room for compromise. The Reverend Rob Renfroe, the president and publisher of the anti-LGBT Methodist publication *Good News Magazine* and pastor of a 11,000-member church in Texas, told his followers in [a YouTube video](#) that the election of a lesbian bishop has put the church "in a crisis," speculating that the Western Jurisdiction deliberately selected her to cause a schism. Renfroe, a well-known leader on the more conservative end of the Methodist spectrum, called for her dismissal and criticized the discussion of inclusion as "happy talk."

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"There's going to be a better day for faithful United Methodists," he said. "Whether we're able to hold this Church together, whether we're able to step into a place of vibrant Wesleyan orthodoxy within this denomination—which I am still bold enough to pray for—or whether there is going to have to be some kind of separation that will set evangelical, orthodox, Wesleyan believers free to pursue a missionary Church that is committed to converting people to the truth of Jesus Christ."

Oliveto knows that many in her religious community consider homosexuality a sin and justify this belief with biblical references. She acknowledges "there are six or seven passages that may or may not be about homosexuality," but points out "we have a lot more on economic justice...on what it means to live and love, and to me, those are the things we ought to be focusing on." The fundamental question, for Oliveto, involves God's love: "If you're going to tell me that my love is wrong, I'm concerned about the church and its ability to recognize God. Because we believe God is love and love is of God. So if you're telling me that my love is invalid, then what is that saying about your understanding of God?"

For her eight years at the uber-progressive Glide Memorial, no one in her congregation ever lodged a complaint against her as a senior pastor who was also an out lesbian. But San Francisco is not representative of the rest of the nation, much less the world. "The fact is that there have been faithful LGBTQI folks serving not only in the pews but in the pulpits at every level of the Church," Oliveto says in her cramped office at Glide, hands clasped over her desk. But in less tolerant communities, many have faced serious consequences.

Irene Elizabeth Stroud, a lesbian pastor who lived with her partner, was defrocked in 2005. The Reverend Amy DeLong [faced church trial](#) in 2011 for officiating a wedding between two lesbians, and for being in a lesbian partnership herself. The Reverend Frank Schaefer, who performed a marriage ceremony for his gay son, [was defrocked](#) in 2013 (although he was ultimately 'refrocked' the following year). And just this year, the Reverend Cynthia Meyer, a pastor at Edgerton United Methodist Church in Kansas, lost her job.

On January 3, Meyer, dressed in a long white robe and adorned with a stole illustrated with the images of people of different nationalities and cultures, [came out to her congregation](#) after a period of "serious, prayerful discernment." About five minutes into her sermon, she told her congregation that she'd seen "a star breaking through the dark clouds that have overshadowed" her ministry.

“The Lord has led me here to share my deep truth with you,” she said, lifting her arms, palms upward. “I’ve been an ordained United Methodist pastor for 25 years, and at last, I’m choosing to serve in that role with full authenticity, as my genuine self—as a woman who loves and shares my life with another woman.” She looked down, and her lips tightened into a firm, determined line. She told her congregation that after being single for more than 20 years, she met a woman named Mary a few years ago, and they fell in love.

Two days later, a [complaint was filed](#) against her by her district superintendent. And after nearly eight months that included difficult negotiations with the region’s bishop, four lawyers, and two mediators, Meyer announced that she would step down from Edgerton, effective September 1. She feared a drawn-out church trial would cause harm to her congregation and the denomination as a whole. But her decision to resign was neither easy nor just, Meyer says. “One of the general rules of the denomination is to do no harm, and I would assert that these policies and practices in general and certainly what has happened in my particular case caused a lot of harm,” Meyer tells me. “It’s been hurtful and difficult.” After September 1, she can’t be appointed or perform the functions of an ordained elder, which means she could not officiate the sacraments of baptism and communion. Meyer will be paid \$37,000—about a year’s salary—and she will technically keep her credentials for the next four years, until just after the next church General Conference meeting, where the Methodists may have new guidelines regarding gay clergy.

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Oliveto seems destined for religious leadership. Born on Good Friday and raised in a town called Babylon, she says she heard “the call to ministry” at age 11. At 16 she had already preached her first sermon. After high school, she went to the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, and came out toward the end of her first year. Oliveto was terrified. “I kinda knew my whole life, you know there’s something different about you, and you can’t name it,” she remembers. After coming out in Berkeley, she fled to Nova Scotia, where her grandparents lived. Somewhere in Utah, she broke down crying. ““Okay, God, this is who I am, I’m a lesbian,” she prayed. And a peace that she says “passes all understanding” washed over her.

Oliveto landed in San Francisco at Bethany United Methodist Church, where her activism against homelessness and LGBT discrimination began in earnest. When she began her 12-year tenure there in 1992, her first instinct was to “go back in the closet,” she said, but the Church’s leadership insisted she was wanted because of who she was, not in spite of it. After she performed the [first gay marriage ceremony](#) in a United Methodist Church in 2004, she received her first complaint, filed by someone outside the church. Facing the possibility of a trial, she went back to the Pacific School of Religion as associate dean of academic affairs and remained there for four years before becoming pastor at Glide. Oliveto declined to elaborate on the complaint, simply saying that it was resolved and she moved on.

Oliveto met Ridenour at an annual church camp for junior high school students where they both worked—Oliveto as the program director, and Ridenour the camp nurse. The two stayed in touch and reconnected in Chicago 17 years ago. They dated long-distance for a year, before Ridenour moved to San Francisco. They were married two years ago and viewed the importance of being public about their relationship as a way “to take away the mystery,” Ridenour says.

A month after Oliveto made her decision to be a candidate for the bishop position, the couple traveled to Scottsdale, Arizona, where the Western Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church was holding its annual conference. Those who attended would be voting for bishop among nine candidates. As the conference progressed, each of the other candidates dropped out to make way for Oliveto. The first Tongan candidate for bishop, the Reverend Siosifa Hingano, withdrew his candidacy because his gay son, who was also a delegate at the conference, was voting for Oliveto.

“I pray that my people will open their minds, so that my son,” he paused and pointed his finger for emphasis, while choking up, “and all gay and lesbian people will walk freely on the bridge where I lay down my life through a wide door where people with open arms and open hearts will welcome them all home.”

On Friday night, July 15, a delegate draped a lei of white flowers around Oliveto’s neck and a bishop pinned the Episcopal pin to her dark pink blazer, signifying her election as bishop for the Mountain Sky Episcopal Area, and her status as the first openly gay bishop in the Methodist Church. She stepped up to the podium under fluorescent light, blinking in a vain attempt to clear her vision of tears, and took a deep breath. “I think at this moment I have a glimpse of the realm of God,” [she said](#), her voice wavering, gripping the side of the podium. She bowed her head briefly. “I think,” she whispered.

Her wife stood behind her, surveying the crowd. Occasionally, she wiped her eyes.

But Oliveto’s position is not completely secure. The South Central Jurisdiction [filed a challenge](#) with the Judicial Council, what Oliveto describes as the UMC’s “Supreme Court,” the same day she became a bishop. The Church will need to rule on whether Oliveto can be a bishop and be openly gay at the same time. The matter is on the docket for April, but because there has never been an openly gay bishop before, it’s unclear what will happen.
