

Changing Language around Marriage In 2024 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church

In the United Methodist Church, we develop our doctrines and polity through a conciliar method. This means that every four years, democratically elected delegates gather from all over the world to discuss, pray, discern, and define more specific statements of our shared beliefs rooted in our historic doctrinal standards. In 2024, this General Conference made some changes to reflect global changes in the way we talk about Christian marriage:

<p>Social Principles: The Nurturing Community: D. Marriage</p> <p>Within the church, we affirm marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith, an adult man and woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age into union with one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.</p> <p>While The United Methodist Church does not recognize marriage as a sacrament, we celebrate and cherish this union as an expression of the couple’s faith, grounded in their relationship with God and one another. Marriage thus reflects a continued willingness to grow together in Christ and a commitment to cultivate a covenantal bond that encompasses intimacy, grace, and love.</p> <p>As members of the larger society, we also affirm the importance of civil marriage, the legal recognition of domestic unions by the state. Such legal recognition is vital for guaranteeing family stability and the orderly regulation of inheritances, and for providing assurance that spouses and children are afforded all the rights, benefits, and protections to which they are entitled.</p>	<p><i>The Social Principles are shared articulations of how United Methodists agree to respond to questions about how we live and act in our social relationships. They are a beginning point for conversation, consensus, and discussion by United Methodists in their local churches. But the Social Principles are not a binding or absolute set of beliefs. In fact, they invite local church members into their own further study and discernment.</i></p> <p><i>This “double-barreled” definition of marriage was articulated by one of our African leaders, in conversation with U.S. and world-wide delegates.</i></p> <p><i>The Social Principles are the same throughout the world-wide United Methodist Church.</i></p>
<p>Requirements for Ordination as a Pastor (¶304.2)</p> <p>To this end, they agree to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, integrity in all personal relationships, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social responsibility, and faithful sexual intimacy expressed through fidelity, monogamy, commitment, mutual affection and respect, careful and honest communication, mutual consent, and growth in grace and in the knowledge and love of God.</p>	<p><i>This standard was rearticulated and expanded, and it is evaluated by each Conference’s Board of Ordained Ministry through its examination process.</i></p> <p><i>This standard applies to the U.S. UMC, but may be differently articulated or defined outside the U.S.</i></p>

<p>Chargeable Offenses for Clergy (¶2702)</p> <p>a) Immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage;</p> <p>b) crime;</p> <p>c) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church;</p> <p>d) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church;</p> <p>e) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor;</p> <p>f) child abuse;</p> <p>g) sexual abuse;</p> <p>h) sexual misconduct including the use or possession of pornography,</p> <p>i) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment;</p> <p>j) racial or gender discrimination; or</p> <p>k) fiscal malfeasance</p> <p>l) domestic violence.</p>	<p><i>These are specific offenses that might trigger a clergy misconduct hearing, called a church trial. The specific language in part a) was removed, but the larger category of “immorality” was retained.</i></p> <p><i>The removed language was only added in 1984, and its author, Bishop Jack Tuell, described that its intent was specifically to screen out homosexual persons.</i></p> <p><i>This standard would be interpreted by the Bishop and the clergy selected to adjudicate during a church trial based on these charges.</i></p> <p><i>These charges apply to the U.S. UMC, but may be differently articulated or defined outside the U.S.</i></p>
<p>Local Discernment of Marriage & Wedding Services (¶419.13)</p> <p>13. The superintendent shall not penalize any clergy for performing, or refraining from performing, a same-sex marriage service.</p> <p>14. The superintendent shall neither require any local church to hold or prohibit a local church from holding a same-sex marriage on property owned by a local church.</p>	<p><i>In ¶416.7 this same rule is articulated for bishops.</i></p> <p><i>The Judicial Council (Decision #1503) specifically vested the local church Board of Trustees, subject to the direction of the charge conference as described in ¶2553, with the authority to create a policy which might prohibit same-sex marriage services on their property.</i></p>
<p>Local Discernment of Marriage & Wedding Services (¶340.2)</p> <p>3. No clergy at any time may be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union, or blessing of any couple, including same-sex couples. All clergy have the right to exercise and preserve their conscience when requested to perform any marriage, union, or blessing of any couple.</p>	<p><i>This affirms the long-standing polity that gives the pastor of a local church discretion of their individual conscience in discerning which weddings to conduct.</i></p>