

Tabled Resolution from Annual Meeting 2005

Resolution on the Quality and Equality of Marriage

Sponsored by the Commission on Witness Life and the General Synod Delegates

Background

Ideas about marriage have shifted and changed throughout human history and in the history of the church. At different points in time the purposes of marriage have been defined in response to economic realities, by the primacy of procreation and by societal roles for men and women. Scripture itself, along with the global human experience, offers many different expressions of what family is. Jesus reinterpreted the meaning of family from blood relation to whoever does the will of God.

It was not until the English Reformation that weddings took place in the church building. Before that, the participation of the clergy in weddings came about to provide legal written documents of the marriage since clergy were often the only literate persons in townships. Legal documents were needed to prevent clandestine marriages, to provide for the legitimacy of offspring and uncontested inheritances. The legal character of marriages is reflected in the earlier language of contracts – “to have and to hold,” “from this day forward,” and “I give thee my troth.”

21 When clergy officiate at the rite of marriage, they serve in a dual role. One is as pastor of
22 their local congregation and the other is as civil servant of the state. The rite of marriage
23 has both religious and legal meanings and implications.

24

25 Legal marriage carries with it significant access to institutional support, rights, and
26 benefits. There are more than 1,400 such rights and benefits in the federal statutes alone.
27 Efforts to ban civil marriage to couples based on gender denies them and their children
28 access to these rights and benefits, undermining the civil liberties of these couples and
29 putting them and their children at risk.

30

31 The United Church of Christ and its antecedent denominations have been at the forefront
32 in the struggle for justice and equality. For more than 30 years, the General Synod of the
33 UCC has adopted resolutions affirming **lesbian**, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)
34 persons, consistently calling for an end to discrimination, equal protection under the law,
35 deploring hate crimes and violence against LGBT persons, supporting LGBT
36 relationships and families, celebrating the gifts of LGBT persons for ministry and
37 encouraging all settings of the church to be open and affirming of LGBT persons,
38 welcoming them and encouraging their **participation in** every aspect of the mission and
39 ministry of the church.

40

41 Although some of a growing number of local congregations and Associations in the
42 Maine Conference have become open and affirming, stood against discrimination, and
43 acknowledged the calls of LGBT persons to ministry, the Maine Conference has yet to

44 address the injustices against LGBT persons nor supported through a resolution the
45 vocations of LGBT persons baptized into the church and their participation in the rites
46 and sacraments of the church.

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48

49 **Theological and Biblical Foundations**

50

51 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given*
52 *to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the*
53 *Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I*
54 *have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

55 Matthew 28:18-20

56

57 *Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but*
58 *those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the*
59 *dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Luke 20:34-35*

60

61 *...let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This*
62 *is my rule in all the churches. 1 Corinthians 7:17*

63

64 *For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all;*
65 *therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer*
66 *for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore,*

67 *we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a*
68 *human point of view, we know him no longer in that way...All this is from God, who*
69 *reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...*

70 2 Corinthians 5:14-18

71

72 *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There*
73 *is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and*
74 *female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:27-29*

75

76 *For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an*
77 *opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.*

78 *For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your*
79 *neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:13-14*

80

81 The Sacrament of Baptism was instituted by Jesus who was baptized in the River Jordan
82 by John and sent his disciples into the world to baptize. Through the Sacrament of
83 Baptism, we are united to Jesus Christ, one with each other, and called to participate in
84 Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Our life together in the Church is a covenantal
85 relationship characterized by equality and freedom expressed in neighbor love.

86

87 Though much has been said recently about marriage regarding its legality, definition
88 and/or description; the biblical narrative offers little regarding the definition of marriage.

89 When Jesus addressed issues of marriage in the Gospels, it was in response to theological

90 traps set to test him by the Sadducees and Pharisees (Lk. 20:27-40, Mt. 19:1-12, Mk.
91 10:1-12) and to turn water into wine at the wedding in Cana, a sign of God's presence in
92 him (Jn. 2:1-12). What we learn from Jesus is that marriage is a commitment for this
93 lifetime only and that divorce is not what God had intended for married couples. Jesus'
94 statements are descriptive, not prescriptive. Quoting from Genesis (1:27 and 2:24), Jesus
95 does assume that marriage is between a man and a woman.

96

97 Within the tradition of the Protestant Church, marriage is not a sacrament. John Calvin
98 wrote for all Reformers: *No [man] ever saw it (matrimony) administered as a sacrament*
99 *until the time of Gregory VII. And what sober [man] would ever have thought it such?*
100 *Marriage is a good and holy ordinance of God; and farming, building, cobbling, and*
101 *barbering are lawful ordinances of God, yet not sacraments. For it is required that a*
102 *sacrament be not only a work of God but an outward ceremony appointed by God to*
103 *confirm a promise.* (Institutes IV, xix, 34, p.1481) Marriage has been understood as a
104 sacred covenant for the expression of affection, the provision of companionship (Gen.
105 2:18), the nurturing of children, and the public witness of faithful commitment. The
106 covenant of marriage is a vehicle of God's grace when couples experience the "patience
107 of undeserved forgiveness." It is the obligation of the faith community to nurture and
108 uphold persons in their marriage, *those whom God has joined together, let no one*
109 *separate.* (Mk. 10:9)

110

111 Despite all his behavioral admonitions which cause us to react negatively to the Apostle
112 Paul, it is his writings that provide theological insight for the quality and equality of

113 marriage beyond the war of biblical proof texting. As the Gospel was preached and
114 welcomed among people who were not Jews, the question of inclusion of gentiles into the
115 church arose. Did gentiles have to become like Jewish Christians and obey the Law of
116 Moses (be circumcised and adhere to the dietary prohibitions) to be included in the
117 covenant? Or, did Jesus establish a new covenant that included gentiles by faith through
118 baptism alone? Paul brought the question to the first Church Council of Jerusalem (Acts
119 15). In the company of the apostles and elders, it was decided that the gentiles did not
120 have to become like Jews first.

121

122 If we extrapolate this biblical narrative to the present day question regarding the full and
123 equal inclusion and participation of LGBT persons in the church, the decision of the
124 Council of Jerusalem would lead us to agree that LGBT persons do not have to become
125 like heterosexuals to be included and participate in the sacraments and rites of the church.
126 LGBT persons are called to lead the life assigned them by God in whose image all
127 humankind is made.

128

129 The church has a pastoral and ethical obligation not to abandon LGBT persons. Pastoral
130 care without public recognition of the covenantal vows made by same gendered couples
131 undermines the faithfulness of their commitment and the extravagant welcome of the
132 church. Through baptism, all people are equal members of the church and equal
133 participants in the sacraments and rites of the church.

134

135 The theme for this Annual Meeting comes from Micah and reminds us of what God
136 requires: to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God. We are a
137 people of God in the world who cannot ignore systems of injustice that demean and
138 marginalize persons because of race, gender, sexual orientation, or economic status.
139 Justice as right relationship seeks both personal and communal well being.
140 Walking humbly with our God, we recognize the distress this resolution may cause some
141 among us and in our local congregations. Prayerfully, we speak from the conviction of
142 our own hearts and without condemnation of anyone who struggles with this resolution.
143 Relying on God’s reconciling love already accomplished in Jesus, we seek to be
144 reconciling where kindness and mercy flourish among us.

145

146 **The Resolution**

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148 WHEREAS the Bible narrates the purpose of God for creation as communion/community
149 and the making of covenants as the intervention of God’s redemptive love to restore
150 communion; and

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152 WHEREAS the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth provides ample examples of not negating
153 Scripture, but reinterpreting it; and

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155 WHEREAS Jesus spent most of his ministry advocating for and befriending
156 oppressed persons, so too, we are called to treat oppressed persons with
157 dignity and care; and

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159 WHEREAS we give witness to a faith in the “crucified and risen Savior” who has

160 reconciled the world to God; and

161

162 WHEREAS we proclaim ourselves to be listening to the voice of a Still Speaking God

163 and that at all times in human history there is always yet more light and truth to break

164 forth from God’s holy word; and

165

166 WHEREAS the Constitution of the United Church of Christ provides for ordained

167 ministers to administer the rites of the church (of which marriage is one) and exercise

168 pastoral care and leadership; and

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170 WHEREAS legal recognition of marriage carries with it significant access to institutional

171 support, rights and benefits; and

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173 WHEREAS children in families, regardless of their parents’ genders, should be raised in

174 safe, secure homes with loving parents and should receive all legal rights and protections

175 of marriage and welcome into the church through their baptism; and

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177 WHEREAS legislation to ban recognition of same-gender marriages further undermines

178 the civil liberties of gay and lesbian couples and contributes to a climate of

179 misunderstanding and polarization, increasing hostility against gays and lesbians; and

180

181 WHEREAS a Constitutional Amendment has been introduced to this Congress to limit
182 marriage to “only the union of a man and a woman,” and

183

184 WHEREAS the meaning and quality of Christian marriage deserve serious, faithful
185 discussion by people of faith, taking into consideration the long, complex history of
186 marriage and family life, layered as it is with culture practices, economic realities,
187 political dynamics, religious history and biblical interpretation; and

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189 WHEREAS the church is also concerned about the condition of marriage, given the
190 divorce rate and troubling situations of spousal and/or child abuse; and

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192 WHEREAS the church is called to uphold persons in their covenant commitments and
193 nurture that which makes for holy and healthy marriages and families

194

195 AND

196

197 WHEREAS the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirms equal
198 marriage rights for couples regardless of gender and declares that the government should
199 not interfere with couples regardless of gender who choose to marry and share fully and
200 equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of legally recognized marriage; and

201

202 WHEREAS the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirms equal
203 access to the basic rights, institutional protections and quality of life conferred by the
204 recognition of marriage;

205

206 LET IT BE RESOLVED that the 2005 Annual Meeting of the Maine Conference of the
207 United Church of Christ commends to its congregations prayerful consideration of the
208 above; and

209

210 LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the 2005 Annual Meeting of the Maine
211 Conference of the United Church of Christ encourage member congregations to engage in
212 the prayerful study of the covenantal relationship of marriage including both the **equality**
213 **and quality** of marriage, regardless of gender, to live out the church's vocation in the
214 nurture of healthy, holy families where faithfulness, commitment, mutuality, respect and
215 love **abound; and.**

216

217 LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that 2005 Annual Meeting of the Maine Conference
218 of the United Church of Christ urge congregations to explore and make use of a variety of
219 resources, including those at the Maine Conference Resource Center and the *God Is Still*
220 *Speaking, About Marriage* study materials (produced by the Wider Church Ministries of
221 the United Church of Christ) , relating to both **equality** and **quality** of marriage; and

222

223 LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the 2005 Annual Meeting of the Maine
224 Conference of the United Church of Christ calls upon congregations, after prayerful

225 biblical, theological and historical study, to consider adopting Wedding Policies that do
226 not discriminate against couples based on gender; and

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228 LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the 2005 Annual Meeting of the Maine
229 Conference of the United Church of Christ urges congregations and individuals of the
230 Maine Conference to prayerfully consider supporting local, state and national legislation
231 to grant equal marriage rights to couples regardless of gender, and to work against
232 legislation, including constitutional amendments, which would deny civil marriage rights
233 to couples based on gender.