

A RESOLUTION TO RENEW THE OPEN AND AFFIRMING COVENANT OF THE  
MICHIGAN CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST.

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# A RESOLUTION TO RENEW THE OPEN AND AFFIRMING COVENANT OF THE MICHIGAN CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST.

## A Prudential Resolution

Submitted by Phoenix Community Church UCC (Kalamazoo, MI),  
First Congregational Church (Kalamazoo, MI),  
and the Southwest Association of the Michigan Conference.

### SUMMARY

This resolution calls on the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ to renew its commitment as an Open and Affirming (ONA) body of the United Church of Christ by updating its official ONA Covenant. The resolution calls on the Michigan Conference to: 1) affirm worth, dignity, and rights of persons of all sexual orientations, companionship orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions; 2) adopt the welcoming statement below as its ONA Covenant; 3) adopt and/or continue policies that affirm and encourage the full participation of LGBTQ+ people in its hiring practices, including those pertaining to ordained ministry, and every aspect of the life of the Conference; and 4) invite and encourage associations and local congregations of the Conference to prayerfully consider adopting covenants of affirmation and welcome of persons of all sexual orientations, companionship orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

### BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

God created diversity, made all of humankind in the image of God, and God saw that this was good (Genesis 1). However, the Christian church has historically denied the full dignity of those with diverse expressions of gender, sexuality, and companionship and failed to celebrate the full spectrum of loving human relationships that gives meaning to our lives and reflects the love that God shows to each one of us. Jesus' command to love everyone, neighbor and enemy alike, is a call to affirm the worth of each of God's children and that means no matter their sexual orientation, companionship orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Each person is special and loved not despite who they are but because of who they are. The church should welcome and affirm all of God's children, acting as an agent of healing and reconciliation in all communities that have been silenced and dehumanized. We see this lived out whenever Jesus welcomes the marginalized. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus proclaims that how we treat each other is how we also treat Jesus and God. In Acts 10:9-28, God gives Peter a vision to show him that no one should be called profane or unclean. In Isaiah 56:3-5 and Acts 8:26-40, eunuchs, previously excluded because of their non-conforming gender in Deuteronomy 23:1, are welcomed into God's family as fully worthy.

Open and Affirming is the United Church of Christ's (UCC) designation for bodies in the UCC which make a public covenant of welcome and affirmation to persons of all sexual orientations, companionship orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions into their full life and ministry. Beyond just a welcome of attendance, affirmation means that we advocate for basic human rights of the LGBTQ+ community, support all expressions of loving

relationships, and invite LGBTQ+ persons to share in the leadership of the Conference as well as partake in the sacraments when offered at Conference gatherings.

At its annual meeting in 1987 the Michigan Conference passed a resolution “To Covenant as Open and Affirming toward Lesbian and Gay Persons:”

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ encourage local churches, Associations, and organizations of the Michigan Conference to study the issue of discrimination in local church employment, volunteer service and membership policies with regard to sexual orientation; and encourage local churches, Associations, and organizations of the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ to adopt a non-discrimination policy and to covenant together as open and affirming of persons of lesbian and gay orientation within the faith community.

SUBMITTED BY THE DIVISION OF CHURCH IN SOCIETY AND THE COALITION FOR LESBIAN/GAY CONCERNS.

However, this statement is somewhat vague. Although the title declares it an open and affirming covenant, the text only says the Conference will encourage other bodies and says nothing of its own actions and policies. Further, it does not mention those who are under threat because of their gender identity or gender expression. Especially in this time when transgender people are being attacked and erased and all LGBTQ+ people are under threat in our culture, it's important for the church to intentionally and publicly affirm our beliefs and commitments.

- LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth.<sup>1</sup> Our silence hurts the youth in our communities when we refuse to tell them the truth that they are beloved children of God.
- LGBTQ+ youth are 120% more likely to face homelessness than their heterosexual peers.<sup>2</sup> Our silence means that families are more likely to reject children who come out, thus putting them in danger.
- Our silence doesn't only hurt LGBTQ+ people. Many in our congregations who have family and friends who identify as LGBTQ+ will not feel comfortable talking of their own struggles with issues of faith, sexual orientation, companionship orientation, and gender identity and expression in a culture of silence.

Note: this resolution only applies to the Conference committees and projects that make up the life of the Michigan Conference. Although we hope that everyone will give this issue serious reflection, in the UCC each association and local church decides for themselves what is best in their context. This resolution does not require that any individual association or congregation become Open and Affirming.

#### TEXT OF THE MOTION

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/> (accessed 21 February, 2025)

<sup>2</sup> <https://truecolorsunited.org> (accessed 21 February, 2025)

WHEREAS the Michigan Conference approved a resolution “to covenant as open and affirming toward lesbian and gay persons” in 1987; and

WHEREAS the Open and Affirming covenant adopted in 1987 is vague in its commitments; and

WHEREAS the Open and Affirming covenant adopted in 1987 does not address the welcome and inclusion of persons of all gender identities and gender expressions; and

WHEREAS the Bible and Christian theology affirm that all people are created in the image of God; and

WHEREAS Jesus Christ, the Bible, and Christian theology call for Christians to stand for justice in support of the marginalized; and

WHEREAS LGBTQ+ people are threatened and under attack by governmental entities and in the wider American culture

- As of February 13, 2025, the ACLU counted 390 anti-LGBTQ bills are under consideration to be made law around the United States<sup>3</sup>
- As of February 21, 2025, a different source counted 551 anti-trans bills under consideration in 2025, including 21 at the federal level.<sup>4</sup>
- In the first month of the Executive Branch Administration multiple executive orders were signed targeting transgender people.<sup>5</sup> One of the executive orders banned federal agencies from even referring to transgender people, thus attempting to erase them from existence.<sup>6</sup> Another order was issued to deny transgender youth appropriate medical care.<sup>7</sup>
- In 2023, the number of anti-LGBTQ+ hate groups tracked by the Southern Poverty Law Center increased by one-third.<sup>8</sup>

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ affirm the God-given worth, dignity, and full human rights of persons of all sexual orientations, companionship orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ adopt the following statement as its Open and Affirming Covenant:

The Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ seeks to follow the path of Jesus’ inclusiveness and welcome by being an agent of healing and reconciliation in all communities that have been silenced and dehumanized by

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2025> (accessed 21 February, 2025)

<sup>4</sup> <https://translegislation.com> (accessed 21 February, 2025)

<sup>5</sup> <https://translegislation.com> (accessed 21 February, 2025)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Executive\\_Order\\_14168](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Executive_Order_14168) (accessed 21 February, 2025)

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Executive\\_Order\\_14187](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Executive_Order_14187) (accessed 21 February, 2025)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/anti-lgbtq/>

interpretations of the Good News that do not recognize God's love poured out for all humankind.

Therefore, we declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming Conference of the United Church of Christ, advocating for and committing to the full inclusion of all people of all sexual orientations, companionship orientations, gender expressions, those identified as Two Spirit, gender identities, and types of families in the vital life of our Conference. The Michigan Conference also commits itself to the effort to end the systemic injustice faced by people of all expressions of human diversity, including but not necessarily limited to race, class, ethnicity, national origin and residency status, age, ability, sexuality, companionship, gender expression and gender identity throughout our society.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ adopt and/or continue policies that affirm and encourage the full participation of 2SLGBTQ+ people in its hiring practices, including those pertaining to ordained ministry, and every aspect of the life of the Conference;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ invite and encourage associations and local congregations of the Conference to prayerfully consider adopting covenants of affirmation and welcome of persons of all sexual orientations, companionship orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

FUNDING: The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the Michigan Conference and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Board of Directors of the Michigan Conference United Church of Christ will determine the implementing body.