



April 26, 2017

RE: 2017 MI AREA ANNUAL CONFERENCE and Paragraph 4, Article 4

Dear Grand Rapids District Laity,

- ❖ There is a flurry as we scurry to prepare for Annual Conference. Laity attend as a church delegate and others as an equalization member. We are required by the Discipline to have the same number of laity as clergy. The Grand Rapids District elects a Lay Leader who, by virtue of the office, attends this conference as an equalization member with voice and vote. This is my second year attending in that capacity.

Laity Orientation will be held Thursday, June 1st, 2:00-4:00pm, presented by the MI Area Conference Board of Laity. Please seek me out because I want to meet Grand Rapids District laity and be helpful. Meanwhile you will find information and reports at <http://2017.michiganumc.org>. Be prepared for a large amount of reading! That site is accessible to everyone.

- ❖ All Annual and Central Conferences will vote in 2017 and 2018 on changes approved at General Conference 2016 to Paragraph 4, Article 4 of "The Constitution" contained in The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. No amendments will be allowed. The proposed amendment reads as follows:

**In The United Methodist Church, no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, ability or economic condition, nor shall any member be denied access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church because of race, color, gender, national origin, ability, age, marital status, or economic condition.**

What do these changes mean?

#### **ABILITY**

☐ Adds ability to the list of categories constitutionally protected from exclusion in the Church; the Church cannot discriminate based on a person's physical or mental circumstances.

☐ Adding this word to "The Constitution" means that a person may not be denied membership privileges based on their abilities (abilities are God-given gifts versus skills which are learned behaviors).

**GENDER**

☐ Adds gender to the list of categories constitutionally protected from exclusion in the Church; the Church cannot discriminate against a person because they are male or female.

☐ Throughout The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, gender is used when addressing fair treatment of both men and women; this language is consistent with The Discipline.

**AGE**

☐ Adds age to the list of categories constitutionally protected from exclusion in the Church; the Church cannot discriminate based on a person's age.

☐ This reminds us that the Church is a multi-generational community; all ages are important.

**MARITAL STATUS**

☐ Clarifies that status refers to marital status in the list of categories constitutionally protected from exclusion in the Church; the Church cannot discriminate against a person because they are single, married, divorced or widowed.

☐ These words prevent unfair treatment of a person based on their marital status.

Laity, thanks again for all the good you do. We are Disciples of Jesus Christ. Together we are making Disciples of Jesus Christ who will reconcile all of Creation with God. For the transformation of the world.

Godspeed,

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p.s. next month topics: clusters and encouraging

p.s.s. John Wesley's 3 Simple Rules:

1. Do good.
2. Do no harm.
3. Stay in love with God.