

**One-page summaries on United Methodist Women's historical social policies**

**Related to  
Human Sexuality**

1. "Petition on Human Sexuality," 1976
2. "Resolution on Civil Rights of Homosexuals," 1978
3. "Study Document on Human Sexuality," 1979
4. "Policy Statement of the Women's Division: Ministries with Women and Ministries with Children and Youth, A Gift for the Whole Church," 1993

## **Petition on Human Sexuality**

This petition was approved by the Women's Division in 1976 and submitted to the 1976 General Conference. A revised version would eventually be adopted by the 2000 General Conference.

### Significant Language:

- “The Crucial questions of life center on understanding who we are, on how we relate to one another in community, and on our response to the love of God. This is the Gospel’s message. Current discussion in churches about the sexuality of men and women make evident the need for the Gospel’s message when we don’t fully face those questions.”
- This resolution was concerned with a broader scope of sexuality including: institutional practices that keep women in inferior roles, health care and health education, psychological dimensions of sexuality, civil rights of “homosexuals,” legal rights related to contraceptives, abortion, rape, and those in prison as well as the economic exploitation of sexuality.
- “Single and married persons, heterosexual and homosexual, must be free to speak about these issues without fear of being labeled or excluded by others in the church.
- There are four mistaken ways to view sexuality:
  - To worship it as an ultimate concern
  - To sacramentalize sexuality as so holy, so extraordinarily divine that it becomes threatening and dominating over our lives
  - To debase sex and sexuality, regarding these facts of life as automatically evil
  - To trivialize sex and sexuality, denying the deep interpersonal meanings of relationships
- “The theology of the 1972 Social Principles statement (where discussion of homosexuality first appeared) is contradictory when it comes to the issue of homosexuality. On the one hand it proclaims an inclusive Gospel and an inclusive church, and at the same time makes exclusions...Therefore, we call for a process in the church to resolve this contradiction.
- The petition calls on the Church to speak to human sexuality in all of the aspects named in the petition.
- Calls for General Conference to establish a four-year “Study Commission on Human Sexuality.”

Summary: This petition makes clear that Human Sexuality involves far more than the issue of “homosexuality” and the Church must acknowledge all of those aspects. It also affirms the Church’s position decrying “denial of civil rights on the grounds of sexual preference.”

## **Resolution on Civil Rights of Homosexuals**

This resolution was a response to a request from the Committee on Women's Concerns that the Women's division support the civil rights of lesbians and respond to particular legislation in various states limiting the rights of "homosexual" persons.

### Significant language:

- Quotes the Social Principles that "homosexuals...are persons of sacred worth."
- Quotes Women's Division Policy Statement on Human Sexuality calling for "full study and discussion...toward efforts to assure civil rights for homosexuals."
- Makes recommendations for the Women's Division:
  - Participate in process of study and discussion for its members about the impact of and need for civil rights legislation for homosexuals
  - Develop Criteria for evaluating and recommending legislation protecting the civil rights of homosexuals
  - Provide background materials to members related to the attack on human and civil rights of California teachers. (there were ballot initiatives limiting the rights of LGBTQ persons, particularly teachers)
  - Commending the leaders of Cal-Nevada Annual Conference for opposing the ballot initiative

Summary: In the mid 1970's, there were several ballot initiatives along with repeals of civil rights ordinances in counties, cities, and states around the country that were contradictory to what was affirmed in our Social Principles Statement causing United Methodists, many of whom were United Methodist Women, to speak out in opposition to harmful legislation. This resolution called for discussion and study among our members on the impact of these developments and affirmed the Church's statements on Civil Rights for "homosexuals" and their sacred worth as individuals.

## Study Document on Human Sexuality

This is a call of Women's Division in 1979 to the Church for study on human sexuality, upon the lack of response to the Petition on Human Sexuality of 1976. A resolution on human sexuality would eventually be adopted by General conference in 2000.

### Significant language:

God's love as promised in the Covenants and revealed in Jesus Christ is the norm for our relationships with each other. In current discussions within our church on sexuality there is:

- Fear, misconception, ignorance, hostility, indifference
- Need for forgiveness and renewal in human relationships
- Need for all to be welcomed in the church: single persons, married couples, widowed and divorced, young and old, different sexual orientation
- Need for expanding concept of sexuality beyond procreation and consider human sciences

Sexuality needs full study and discussion, addressing:

- Health care and health education related to sexuality
- Psychological dimensions of sexuality
- Institutional practices in society that have kept women in an inferior role or status
- Legal justice, including civil rights for homosexuals
- Legal rights relating to contraceptives, abortion, rape and incest
- Economic exploitation of sexuality

These are issues of basic human dignity; each person must be free to speak about these issues without fear of being labeled or excluded by the church.

Through this document, the Women's Division urges the Church to:

- Resist dogmatic views that set up different and divisive views regarding "normalcy" in sexual behavior of heterosexuality and homosexuality
- Honor persons of all sexual orientations as being equal and having compassion and strength, commitment and fidelity, and being gentle and warm.

Summary: Women's Division insists that a consideration of sexuality requires a study of life's total reality, including:

- The needs of single persons in all categories
- The needs of persons with physically or emotionally handicapping conditions
- Changes and needs facing the nuclear family
- Sex-stereotyping which results in inferior status for women
- The needs of older persons
- Sexual orientation including heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality
- The meaning of sexuality and the fear of sexuality, including homophobia
- The theological and biblical issues which would enlighten all the above.

**From the Policy Statement of the Women's Division  
Ministries with Women and Ministries with children and Youth  
A Gift for the Whole Church, 1993**

Significant Language:

In the section of Ministries with Women, it is expressed that we view ourselves as an instrument to transform the role of women in society and commit ourselves to **bridge gaps among women:**

- Church women and the women's movement in society
- Christian women and women of other faith traditions; women of various races, ethnic identities and languages
- Women with handicapping conditions and others
- Older women and younger women
- Poor women and all other women
- Single women and married women
- Lesbian women and heterosexual women
- Women employed outside the home and women working in the home
- The struggle of women and other freedom struggles
- Women in the U.S. and women in other countries.

It was important to emphasize our role as bridging the gap between women and men, challenging patriarchy, creating a system which:

- Allows equality and mutuality, encouraging women and men to full partnership in home and society
- Allows men the freedom to "let go" of their excessive power with the resulting positive, emotional and physical health implications
- Gives women increased power and authority over their lives and their bodies
- Is non-hierarchical, non-competitive and non-violent in economic, political, social, cultural and theological realms.

Summary: This policy statement provides a summary of the historic and current mission effort of women who empower themselves and seek continually to empower other marginalized people and groups. It also serves as an educational and interpretive tool for UMW. It is our stated mission and our vision. In the above section in defining women's role as 'bridging gaps among women,' it makes reference to bridging gaps between "lesbian women and heterosexual women."