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# The marriage division: a case study on clerical dissension in the United Methodist Church

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**The marriage division:  
A case study on clerical dissension in the United Methodist Church**

by

**Erin E. Meek**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies

Program of Study Committee:  
Adam Foley, Co-Major Professor  
Susan Stewart, Co-Major Professor  
Robin Veldman

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2015

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## DEDICATION

To so many who helped me in completing this study- thank you seems far too perfunctory to express my gratitude. I share the credit for this composition with you, just as you shared the workload with me.

To my parents- had it not been for your undying support, even in the face of that which you did not understand, I would not have had the opportunity to do this work that I love. Thank you for always reminding me where I come from and where I have the potential to go.

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## NOMENCLATURE

The following definition of terms will assist in familiarizing readers with the colloquialisms of this study:

- Ally:** defined as "...a person who is a member of the 'dominant' or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed" (Washington and Evans, 1991, p. 195).
- Book of Discipline:* the UMC's main governing document with bylaws and spiritual guidance for clergy and laity, language can be changed every four years at General Conference.
- Book of Resolutions:* contains all resolutions voted on by the General Conference. These resolutions may seek to change language in *The Book of Discipline* or affirm important discussion from General Conference.
- Institutionalization:** an analytically distinct process by which an institution forms and maintains routine mechanisms of discourse (Wuthnow, 1989, p. 11).
- LGBT:** lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
- Out:** described as an LGBT or allied individual who is open about their sexual identity or allyship.
- Queer:** defined as "shorthand for LGBT or lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered" (Udis-Kessler 2008, p. xii).
- Pastor Adams:** ordained minister, and leader of congregation under study (pseudonym).
- Same-sex marriage:** either a legal or religious marriage between two individuals of the same sex, that is, a marriage between two men or a marriage between two women.
- SPRC:** the staff-parish relation committee at Pastor Adams' church. Responsible for managing all staff associated with the church.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Also, I would also like to thank my colleagues, the department faculty, and staff for making my time at Iowa State University so unforgettable.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the subjects of this study, who made time and space in their lives for me. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and counsel with me during the research process. This would not have been possible without your willingness and trust.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand the relationship between a dissenting clergy member in the United Methodist Church and his/her congregation in relation to same-sex marriage. This study seeks to answer: Why is the United Methodist Church resisting change when American society at large is altering its views on same-sex marriage? What is the experience of a clergy member who diverges from the denomination's bylaws regarding sexual identity and the performance of same-sex marriage? How does that dissension affect the relationship with a clergy member's parishioners? What effect does clerical dissension have on a clergy member's ability to perform his/her job?

This case study offers a snap shot into a Midwestern United Methodist Church community, with a dissenting pastor who sought to use his position as a church authority figure to act as an ally for LGBT individuals. This attempt came with a myriad of educational, generational, and ideological complications.

Data collection occurred over a two-month period and employed descriptive case study methodology, grounded theory, and in-depth interviews. Following data collection, coding identified six overarching themes: (1) dialogue, (2) generational concerns, (3) ideology, (4) denominational concerns, (5) outcomes of dissension, and (6) an uncertain future. Findings from this study describe the current relationship between a dissenting Pastor and his congregation, in addition to providing theoretical frameworks for understanding what dissent looks like in the United Methodist Church and what congregational roadblocks currently prevent social change on the issue of same sex-marriage.

**Keywords:** Marriage, religion, LGBT, social power, allyship, dissent, same-sex marriage

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

Scholarship dedicated to gender and sexuality has seen tremendous growth and diversification in recent years. Intersectional<sup>1</sup> approaches to identity (sexual, racial, gendered, religion, etc.) are becoming more commonplace. Transgender studies is positively flourishing, moving beyond the identity-centered discipline it once was and expanding into an entirely new form of transgender analysis (Kunzel, 2012). We are seeing glimpses of this same growth and diversification in discussion of sexual orientation in American news, government, and religious discourse. It is no longer socially acceptable, in most social situations, to openly discriminate against someone because of their sexual preferences or gender presentation. These changing social and political rules make now the opportune moment to study these phenomena.

Since the Stonewall Riots of 1969, the United States has been experiencing a broader shift toward acceptance for gay and lesbian individuals (Rimmerman, 2015). This shift has forced mainline Protestant churches to address and discuss this topic (Olson and Cadge, 2002). Much like slavery and the civil rights movement in previous generations, this continues to be a significant point of contention for American religious institutions and their followers. The debate among religious institutions continues to revolve around two polarizing choices: recognizing that discriminatory language and policies must be changed in order to adapt to the social and political majority, or refusing to change policies on doctrinal or moral grounds. When religious institutions choose the latter, this has led to instances of

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning, complex and variable effects which ensue when multiple entities of differentiation intersect (Brah & Pheonix, 2004), or, the intersection of different forms of oppression or discrimination.

dissent within clerical and parish ranks (Udis-Kessler, 2008). Such is the case now in the United Methodist Church (UMC) in regard to their positions on sexual orientation and same-sex marriage, also known as marriage equality. Their governing documents claim that homosexuality<sup>2</sup> is “incompatible with Christian teaching”<sup>3</sup> (The United Methodist Church, 2012). This refers to laity and clergy both. Why is the United Methodist Church resisting change when American society at large is altering its views on same-sex marriage? What is the experience of a clergy member who dissents from these teachings? How does that dissension affect the relationship with his/her parishioners? What effect does clerical dissension have on a pastor’s ability to perform the various functions of his/her job?

This case study is a snap shot into a Midwestern UMC in a small community (referred hereafter as “Littletown”, due to the small size of the community) with a dissenting pastor (referred hereafter by the pseudonym “Pastor Adams”) who sought to use his position as a church authority figure to act as an ally for LGBT individuals, a group he believes to be disadvantaged. His choice has the potential to cause real social consequences for himself and his congregation. Since his decision to “out” himself publicly as a UMC pastor who will openly defy church doctrine to perform same-sex marriages, his relationship with his congregation has changed significantly. The majority of his congregation does not agree with his stance, and they have made their opinions known. This study seeks to better understand the ramifications of this pastor’s dissent through targeted, intensive interviews with church members. Doing so is meaningful because such dissent is likely happening elsewhere, yet scholars have yet to examine the repercussions of these changes at the church level. More

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<sup>2</sup> Chauncey argues that “‘homosexual’ has the ring of colored now” (as cited in Peters, 2014). The term has become pejorative, with some LGBT rights groups declaring the term off limits and calling for its limited usage by media outlets and scholars because of the negative clinical history (GLAAD, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> This language originally added at General Conference in 1972 (Udis-Kessler, 2008, p. 27).

broadly, as of 2015 the UMC has a reported domestic membership of 7.3 million (United Methodist Church, 2015), making it the second largest Protestant denomination in North America. If these breakdowns between clergy and laity are occurring across the United States, there will certainly be lasting repercussions for American society. Analyzing Littleton's experience thus offers a means of beginning to understand this phenomenon within a changing religious landscape.

To understand the individual perspectives and experiences of participants, this thesis utilizes case study methodology. Stake (1995) defines case study research as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). This study provides knowledge unique to the participants of this study and the community in which they reside, in relation to the specific policies surrounding sexual identity and same-sex marriage within UMC doctrine. While all responses are specific to the research site, the trends found within the data have the opportunity to provide insight into the future trends of the UMC and American Protestantism.

#### *Significance of the Study*

Glaser (1978) wrote, “the data of the substantive area becomes theoretically tractable. It guides future research in the same area, and its formulations guide work in other areas” (p. 3). A study has never been performed on an individual UMC clergy member who is in open defiance of the denomination's regulations about same-sex marriage. This work examines and analyzes the relationship between a UMC pastor (Pastor Adams) and his congregation in a way that has never been attempted. It can provide insight not only into the specific case, but may also act as a guide for research into other cases of clerical dissension. This study may also recognize larger trends within the denomination as a religious institution.

In recent years, the UMC has seen a sharp decline in lay membership, and their denomination's stance on marriage may be an attempt to draw conservative members back to the pews (Waldrep, 2012, p. 955). However, this raises questions of what can happen when a conservative congregation is led by a younger, more progressive pastor, with a spiritual calling to promote marriage equality. This study examines such a case, and may assist in better understanding similar situations in other congregations around the United States.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this research is to utilize descriptive case study methodology and grounded theory to advance our understanding of the consequences associated with clerical dissent. The use of grounded theory allows themes to emerge from the data itself, thus providing a contextual method for examining the attitudes and views of participants. This study is a collaboration between myself, (the researcher) a dissenting clergy member, and the congregation he serves.

### *Research Questions*

Clerical dissension begets consequences; from one's congregation, one's community, and from one's denomination. This study examines those consequences and analyzes their severity by examining the data with the following guiding research questions: Why is the United Methodist Church resisting change when American society at large is altering its views on same-sex marriage? What is the experience of a clergy member who diverges from the denomination's bylaws regarding sexual identity and the performance of same-sex marriage? How does that dissension affect the relationship with a clergy member's parishioners? What effect does clerical dissension have on a clergy member's ability to perform his job?

### *Positionality*

Consideration of one's experience as a researcher, or their positionality, is basic to all qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 145). As the tool of data collection, it is necessary that I recognize my position and influence on the study. I am a queer-identified woman. While I may not belong to the UMC, I recognize the disadvantaged position of LGBT members who are denied the opportunity to marry their partners within their religious community. My sexual orientation is seemingly knowable because of my choice of clothing, accessories, and hairstyle, and it affects how people interact with me- it certainly affected how participants in this study interacted with me. I recognize my effect on the data presented here and do not diminish my role as the individual responsible for data collection and analysis.

My biases extend from experiencing discrimination myself, and I sought to address these throughout the research process. However, the purpose of this study is not to highlight discrimination, but rather to recognize the consequences of one clergy member's dissent from his denomination. The study was designed to recognize these consequences.

I know the pastor in question personally. While this study is not about discerning what actions are right and what actions are wrong, I cannot deny I admire and respect his attempts to encourage queer inclusion in his denomination. When speaking to lay members who did not feel the same way toward him, I made every attempt to recognize and honor their position.

### *Organization of the Study*

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study and explains its significance. Chapter two is the literature review, which recognizes previous

scholarship and highlights gaps that this study would seek to fill. Chapter three describes how qualitative research methods will be employed to recognize and analyze emergent data. Chapter four provides analysis of the data collected through intensive interviews using grounded theory. Chapter five summarizes the study and makes recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Same-sex marriage is a highly contested issue within the UMC. “The UMC” refers to the Protestant Christian denomination commonly referred to as “United Methodist”. The UMC is a global denomination, though the research site for this study is a UMC church in the Midwestern region of the United States. This study seeks to examine one UMC pastor’s experience as an ally to queer<sup>4</sup> individuals. In this study, an ally is someone who works on behalf of those seeking same-sex marriage rights within the UMC community.

While recent research has investigated the acceptance of LGBT individuals into evangelical and mainline Protestant denominations (Baunach, 2012, & Pew Research Center, 2015), little scholarship has focused specifically on the current situation in the UMC. Less scholarship has focused on the role of allied pastors within the UMC (Udis-Kessler, 2008). And little to no scholarship has ever focused on the role of a dissenting cleric as an ally (Dewey, 2011). This study seeks to better understand that particular phenomenon, as it is especially relevant to the current social and political climates of the UMC and the United States more broadly.

This literature review is rooted in grounded theory tradition, where the research necessitates taking a critical, reflective stance (Charmaz, 2014, p. 307). A literature review influenced by a grounded theory approach seeks not only to address gaps in current literature, but also to use both the research product and the research process to inform the guiding theory of the study.

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<sup>4</sup> Queer will be used henceforth to define this community. Although it is a contested term, I have chosen to utilize it, as I feel it best represents the population in question.

### *Relevant Theoretical Frameworks*

Four relevant theoretical frameworks have been chosen to better analyze the data gathered for this study. They assist in “[stimulating] questions during the analysis process” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 51) while also “[directing] the researcher to situations that he or she might not otherwise have considered” (p. 51). Furthermore, these theories assist in illuminating gaps in existing scholarship. The first theory is that of institutionalization, which describes the cyclical nature of the UMC’s governmental process. The second framework describes the perceived trauma of change and how it can be utilized to resist social change. The third framework examines social power and how it may be used to encourage change. A fourth theory, social capital, addresses the foundation for social power.

#### **Institutionalization**

The UMC is a substantial, bureaucratic institution with a vested interest in maintaining its conservative structure (Waldrep, 2012). In his work *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (1989), Robert Wuthnow tackles challenges of fruitful discourse within religious institutions, and the way in which an institution shapes ideas, discourse, and even social change. Wuthnow did not pioneer the concept of institutional discourse, but his work does offer a revealing study of the way ideology is formed and dispersed, and the use of institutional power and resiliency to dissent.

Wuthnow’s understanding of institutionalization describes what he calls routine mechanisms for the production and dissemination of particular modes of discourse (1989). In such discourse,

“an ecclesiastical structure is modified to ensure the survival of a particular creed or doctrine... the organizations in which culture is produced gain greater control over

their own access to resources and become more autonomous in setting up their own systems of rewards and expectations. The net result is that not only is a particular ideology produced, and not only does it compete with alternative ideologies, but it becomes a relatively stable feature of the institutional structure of a given society” (Wuthnow 1989, p. 10).

This theory of institutionalization, while typically utilized in an effort to describe discourse as a method of seeking social change, may also be used to understand an institution or organization’s interest in maintaining existing social conditions. Applying Wuthnow’s theory to the practice of the UMC’s legislative body allows us to recognize a governing system that fosters discourse between minority and majority factions. From afar, this process appears to offer the opportunity for social and organization change through discourse, but in reality routinized mechanisms assist in protecting and disseminating the status quo. Following Wuthnow, I suggest that that the UMC’s deliberations on same-sex marriage are cyclical because of the routinized mechanisms that protect the status quo by disseminating existing ideologies.

Wuthnow’s theory of institutionalization helps explain why the UMC tolerates dissenting discourse, while punishing dissenting action. Articulation and discussion are acceptable because the institution is built to withstand verbal disagreements and mounting tension among members while still maintaining its strength and institutional clout. However, when dissent turns to action, the institution can no longer contain or control the circumstances- the dissent is no longer in the institution’s best interest. I use this as a framework for understanding the UMC leadership’s decisions to punish clergy who perform same-sex marriages.

### **Trauma of change as resistance**

Social change is always met with some form of resistance. In his work determining the optimal rate of social change for human well-being, Lauer (1973) theorized that some people resist change because they have internalized the notion that “change is traumatic” (p. 5). The threat of trauma, whether real or perceived, is a compelling argument for resisting change. The UMC as an institution is attempting to avoid trauma on a global scale, and individual UMC congregations are attempting to avoid trauma in their local communities.

Lauer (1973) expands on the work of Spicer (1952), who recognized that people “will resist change under three circumstances: when the change is perceived to be a threat to basic securities; when the change is not understood; and when the change is imposed upon them” (p. 7). Lauer (1973) sees change as something that is inherent to the very nature of social life. If social change is inevitable as both Spicer and Lauer claim, then the views of clergy and members of the UMC regarding homosexuality and same-sex marriage should change as the views of the wider public change. But this is not the case, so there must be some motivation to resist the change.

Many UMC clergy members perceive the acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage to be a threat to marriage as a whole (Dunnam, 2003). One could also argue that the lack of cultural reflexivity within the institution of the UMC and their doctrine does not allow for universal definitions of any topic, let alone those surrounding gender and sexuality. Subjectivity is not valued in the UMC, even among laity.

As the interviews conducted in this study will show, resistance to defining the UMC’s relationship to homosexuality and marriage is not exclusive to clergy. Many lay members are reluctant to accept a more open policy. If we once again employ Lauer’s description of social

change we can see that this reluctance might be related to lay members' lack of understanding in regard to the need for the change, and their unhappiness at having institutional and doctrinal change imposed upon them.

### **Use of social power and capital**

Clergy inhabit positions of power. They wield influence over their congregation, and often the larger community in which their congregation resides. Pastor Adams has chosen to use his position and influence to act as an ally to the LGBT community and work toward changing a social and political system he deems unjust.

Bierstedt (1950) describes power as “a universal phenomenon in human societies and in all social relationships.” (p. 730). Further, he describes power as “never wholly absent from social interaction,” (p. 730) and as “institutionalized as authority in the formal organization” (p. 735) Pastor Adams has power within Littleton and within the UMC. He has chosen to use that power to act on behalf of those who have little to no power. Framing his use of his position through Bierstedt encourages an examination of the political systems at play in Pastor Adams' dissent against the UMC.

Examining power dynamics also reveals when an individual or institution is losing power in a given social situation. Some lay members expressed the concern that when Pastor Adams made his statement of opposition to the UMC's stance on homosexuality, LGBT clergy, and same-sex marriage that he “lost” his power as the leader of the congregation. They claim he relinquished his social capital. Bierstedt's work is useful in defining what social power is and in what situations it is being used. Use of social power is only possible through the possession and usage of capital.

Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as “accumulated labor... which, when appropriated on private, i.e. exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (p. 241). In another way, capital can be interpreted as a kind of currency, allowing the possessor access to certain opportunities. He describes capital as an inertia inscribed in the objectivity of things, which creates a system where everything is not equally possible or impossible (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241).

For Bourdieu (1986), capital is understood in three sets of usable resources and powers: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital (p. 243). Economic capital is convertible to money or in the case of institutions, property rights. Cultural capital is convertible to educational qualifications. Social capital is the “aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). This study will focus on social capital and its relationship to power.

Social capital is a sum of resources. Pastor Adams’ position affords him a breadth of resources, which he has chosen to use on behalf of LGBT individuals who do not have the same resources. Bourdieu posits that,

“The central proposition of social capital theory is that networks of relationships constitute a valuable resource for the conduct of social affairs, providing their members with the collectivity-owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. Much of this capital is embedded within networks of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1986, p. 249).

This would seem to indicate that social capital only has value when relationships are recognized and valued. One only has social power (Bierstedt, 1950) when they have a foundation of social capital.

*A Brief History and Structural Overview of the United Methodist Church*

The UMC is a denomination built around a rigid organizational structure and with considerable legislative oversight. Methodism began not as a church, but as a movement of individuals within the Church of England led by the theologian John Wesley (Frank, 2006). The mission of this movement was simple: to better the followers' spiritual condition (Tuell 2006). This was done by implementing strict rules and spiritual guidelines. Tuell (2006) writes that this stringent historical adherence to order "...has, for better or worse, left its imprint upon United Methodism" (p. 11-12).

Following Wesley's death in 1791 Methodism's split from the Church of England, the movement eventually became its own church. The institution traveled across the Atlantic with Wesley's mission at the core of the church's organizational patterns (Koskela 2013). Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Methodism has endured many reorganizations, splits, and revivals. The UMC we know today was formed in 1968 and consists of three streams of religious tradition: the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, the Evangelical Association, and Methodism (*The Book of Discipline*, 2012) and boasts a substantial bureaucratic structure. Protestantism (both evangelical and mainline) declined from 51.3% of American adults identifying as Protestant in 2007 (Pew Research Center, 2007) to 46.5% of adults identifying as Protestant in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, Protestantism still makes up the majority of religious composition in the United States, with 20.8% of American adults identifying as Catholic, 1.9% identifying as Jewish, .9% identifying as Muslim, and .7%

identifying as Buddhist. According to Lindner (2012), the UMC is the largest mainline Protestant denomination in North America, and they are losing members in the United States each year- though the global numbers continue to grow. As of 2015, the UMC reports a domestic (US) membership of 7.3 million members and a membership of 5.5 million the Central Conferences, or all other nation-states (The United Methodist Church, 2015).

Weems (2012) describes how the UMC's rigid bureaucratic structure and policies of universality have become outdated and incompatible with their global configuration. UMC pastors are not given the freedom to interpret scripture according to their own individual beliefs or the needs of their individual congregations, but must instead adhere to a universal set of rules and theological interpretations of scripture, as laid out in *The Book of Discipline*. However, some UMC clergy members question the sustainability of these restrictions as the denomination continues to grow in the global community.

#### *Moments of Dissension*

As previously discussed, the UMC of today has been disassembled and reassembled many times, and dogma has evolved. This is to be expected of any religious organization, and yet certain events have led to irreparable schisms in the UMC. One of these was the concern of the slave trade and slave usage in the United States, and another was the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Many participants of this study argue that the issue of same-sex marriage and LGBT inclusion in church life will be the next social problem to cause a rift in membership. In fact, some think it already has. Examination of past social movements may shed further light on the UMC's current situation.

### **Slavery and racial prejudice in the nineteenth century**

John Wesley was vehemently anti-slavery. And yet in nineteenth century America, the majority of White Methodists from the North and South experienced devolution from Wesley's commitment to grace for all to a slavery-supporting position (Strong, 2013). Indeed some preachers began proselytizing that owning slaves was a Christian duty. Heyrman (1997) describes how Southern Protestants barred slave owners from their churches in an attempt to spark change, but the restrictions were always dropped. She writes that normalizing slavery in the church and growing the slave trade "assured those southerners who had the greatest stake in the existing social order" (p. 24). And yet, like just like with same-sex marriage today, groups of Methodist clergy rejected the status quo.

There was a small but strong group of Methodists- Black and White -who refused to accept the majority's position. Instead, they had become "abolitionized" and sought not only to evangelize on the sin of slavery, but also to assist enslaved Blacks in gaining their freedom. After decades of disagreement, the Methodist Church saw what would become one of the many fissures in its membership. A group of morally-motivated individuals rejected the institutionalization of their denomination (Wuthnow 1989) and rather than continuing to reproduce the routinized mechanisms which had come to allow slavery to be widely accepted in the first place, this group chose to dissent from the status quo, multiple splinter Methodist denominations were formed (Strong, 2013).

This moment in Methodist history is also significant because it saw White individuals working for liberation from a cause they themselves were not harmed by. In this instance, White Methodist abolitionists used their social power and capital to emancipate a marginalized group because of their beliefs. These Methodist abolitionists used their position

as a privileged group to promote messages of godliness (Strong 2013) and act as allies. Much like allied UMC clergy are doing now for queer-identified individuals.

### **Civil rights movement**

Prior to the Civil Rights Era, the Methodist Church of America was segregated in the South. Not only were churches segregated according to race, but their entire governmental structures were separated as well. However, much like with slavery, concerned Black and White clergy (and laity) fought against the entrenched racism of the Methodist institution. Sharing his experience as a Methodist clergy member of color in 1950s Alabama, Collins writes,

“For decades Whites in the South had seemingly been unified in maintaining their economic and social control over the Black community, but during the 1950s and 1960s different voices began to be heard. The struggle shifted to fight for the conscience of the South. The conflict of White against White was particularly felt in the church” (1998, p. 51).

Many White clergy, like Pastor Floyd Enfinger and Reverend Stanley Mullins, chose to combat racism and racist doctrines by using their positions to draw attention to the indoctrinated Jim Crow spirit of the southern Methodist Conferences (Collins, 1998). These clergy and laity acted as allies to bring about institutional and theological change on behalf of their brothers and sisters of color. A similar phenomenon is occurring presently, but instead of racism, a number of UMC allies are seeking institutional change for their LGBT brothers and sisters. Ranks of “defiant [UMC] Clergy” are on the rise (Gadouda, 2014).

### *Historical Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriage*

Marriage varies across history and differs by culture. For the purposes of this study, I define marriage as a romantic or sexual union, used as a means of acquiring privileges that are only distributed to legally or religiously legitimized couples (Parker et al., 2003: Hull,

2003; Moss, 2002). Historically, marriage has been recognized by many societies as only a casual act (Coontz, 2004). The traditions of both the licensing of marriage by the state, and the sanctification of marriage by a religious body began in an era much more recent than we might imagine (Coontz, 2004). Marriage definitions and traditions differed greatly between countries, and even religions. For well over one thousand years, the Catholic Church took the position that if a man and a woman exchanged words of consent; the couple was in fact married (Coontz, 2004). Coontz (2004) also describes “the *real* traditional marriage” over the course of history, wherein emotional attachment was optional and the best investment a woman could make in her future was finding a husband. It is the arrival of love unions which have altered the definition of marriage, and it is now society’s responsibility to “help people in a wide array of different committed relationships minimize their shortcomings and maximize their solidarities” (Coontz, 2004, p. 979). In other words, this is a moment to promote social change.

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, marriage equality for LGBT individuals has become increasingly commonplace parts of the global community. On March 31, 2001, in Amsterdam, Netherlands four same-sex couples exchanged rings and vows as they took part in the first nation-state same-sex marriage ceremony. Dolf Pasker married his partner of six years, Gert Kasteel. One of the four couples married that day had been living together 36 years before being able to marry. Since 2001, 22 nation-states<sup>5</sup> have adopted laws legalizing same-sex marriage (Pew Research Center, 2015), including the United States since 2015 (*Obergefell v. Hodges*).

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<sup>5</sup> Argentina (2010); Belgium (2003); Brazil (2013); Canada (2005); Denmark (2012); England/Wales (2013); Finland (2015); France (2013); Greenland (2015); Iceland (2010); Ireland (2015); Luxembourg (2014); The Netherlands (2000); New Zealand (2013); Norway (2009); Portugal (2010); Scotland (2014); South Africa (2006); Spain (2005); Sweden (2009); United States (2005); Uruguay (2013) (Pew Research Center, 2015).

As of 2015, even before the Supreme Court ruling, more Americans reported support for same-sex marriage than reported opposition (Pew Research Center, 2015). Indeed, the Pew Research Center has found that 72% of Americans now believe that recognition of same-sex marriage is “inevitable” (2015).<sup>6</sup> And yet, this does not necessarily translate into nationwide support for these unions currently. This opposition seems to be rooted largely in religious belief (Baunach, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2015; Rimmerman, 2015; & Sherkat et. al 2011) According to the 2013 Pew Research Center survey, which gathered the opinions and attitudes from a national sample of 2,002 adults, both opposition to same-sex marriage and acceptance of homosexuality continues to be associated with religious beliefs (2013). This same survey found that 33% of Americans feel there is a conflict between their religious belief and homosexuality, a significant drop from the 48% who expressed the same conflict in 2013 (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Table 1. Is Homosexual Behavior Sinful?

<b>Is Homosexual Behavior Sinful?</b>			
<i>% who say that homosexual behavior is...</i>			
	<b>A sin</b>	<b>Not a sin</b>	<b>DK/Ref</b>
	%	%	%
Total 2014	50	43	8=100
May 2013	45	45	10=100
<b>2014 among...</b>			
Protestant	67	26	7=100
White evangelical	82	13	5=100
White mainline	42	46	12=100
Black Protestant	77	18	5=100
Catholic	44	49	7=100
White Catholic	47	44	8=100
Hispanic Catholic	38	56	7=100
Unaffiliated	19	72	9=100

Survey conducted September 2-9, 2014. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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Table 2. Views on Same-Sex Marriage

<b>Views on Same-Sex Marriage</b>			
<i>Do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?</i>			
	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
	%	%	%
Total	49	41	10=100
Rep/lean Rep	34	57	9=100
Dem/lean Dem	62	30	8=100
Protestant	35	56	9=100
White evangelical	18	75	7=100
White mainline	57	33	9=100
Black Protestant	36	51	13=100
Catholic	52	35	13=100
White Catholic	50	38	12=100
Hispanic Catholic	55	29	16=100
Unaffiliated	76	16	8=100

Survey conducted September 2-9, 2014. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

<sup>6</sup> The wording of this question could be interpreted as ambiguous, as there is no indication from the Pew Research Center whether they are referring to state or federal marriage recognition for same-sex couples. Additionally, this statement does not necessarily indicate support for same-sex marriage.

As Tables 1 and 2 show, another Pew Research Center survey<sup>7</sup> from 2014 questions participants about both their views towards homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Respondents' views appear to be fairly similar in regard to whether or not they would say homosexual behavior is sinful or whether or not they would be in favor of same-sex marriage. Though, interestingly, Protestant respondents score 67% to the national average of 50% as to whether or not they believe homosexuality is sinful. Protestant respondents also show lower than average rates in support of same-sex marriage with 35% in favor to the national average of 49%. As the UMC is the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the country, could these approval numbers be related to the denomination's policies regarding sexuality and same-sex marriage?

The UMC's General Conferences have seen many discussions about homosexuality and marriage with little movement toward inclusion. In response to the UMC General Conference of 1996, one delegate stated that in regard to homosexuality "...the church appears to be polarized into two camps, separated by a continental divide. [There] appears to be no middle ground; everything flows to one side or the other" (Bell, 1999, p. 271). The 2004 UMC General Conference saw the words "being a self-avowed practicing homosexual" added to the list of chargeable offenses for a UMC clergy member (Peck, 2012). In 2012 the debate grew again, dominating much of the public discourse at that year's General Conference. While the 2012 Conference saw "more than a dozen U.S. Annual Conferences [petitioning] General Conference on the church's stance and statements on homosexuality" (The United Methodist Church, 2012) the language was retained.

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<sup>7</sup> The wording of this question could be interpreted as morally loaded, and there is no indication from the Pew Research Center whether they are referring to state or federal marriage recognition for same-sex couples. Additionally, those statements marked "not a sin" and "favor" do not necessarily indicate support for same-sex marriage.

*Global and Domestic Struggles*

Debates over formal denominational statements about homosexuality are not exclusive to the UMC. In a 2006 study, both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church (EC) were found to have significant difficulty even deciding on agendas to discuss forming a new policy (Djupe, Olson, Gilbert, 2006); though the Episcopal Church did legalize same-sex marriages in 2015. This struggle is also found outside of Protestant Christianity. In fact, the debate within the Jewish Conservative Movement in the early 2000s greatly resembles the current situation in the UMC. However, in 2006 the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS), the body which determines halakhic<sup>8</sup> policy for the Rabbinical Assembly adopted a document entitled “Homosexuality, Human Dignity, & Halakah” (Dorff, Nevins, & Reisner, 2006) which “normalizes gay and lesbians in the Jewish community” (p. 19) and allows for the ordination of lesbian or gay cantors and rabbis. This was followed by a clarifying document, also adopted by the CJLS in 2012 outlining wedding ritual and divorce procedures for same-sex couples. Conservative Judaism is seen as a middle road between Orthodox Judaism, which considers all 613 commandments of the Torah to be binding and Reform Judaism, which typically considers the Torah as a set of guidelines rather than binding law. Conservative Judaism holds that the Torah should be binding, yet should also reflect historical progress. This desire to reassess laws out of synch with current social and political norms is what fostered Conservative Judaism’s current policies about sexuality and marriage. Many UMC clergy member have this same desire, but have not been successful in changing their denomination’s policies about sexuality and marriage.

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<sup>8</sup> Defined as of or pertaining to Judaic law.

The UMC, which Joyner (2007) claims is often portrayed as a liberal denomination, cannot come to an agreement on the place of LGBT individuals in its churches. Frank (2006) holds that this may stem from the UMC's global presence, as they have churches and clergy in countries all across the globe, rather than just in the United States. He states "as the number of delegates from non-US parts of United Methodism to General Conference continues to increase, divisions over gender and sexual orientation will become sharper and require far greater efforts at reconciliation" (Frank, 2006, p. 101). Since the United States is typically more socially progressive than many of the nations United Methodism is growing (i.e. Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe to name a few), reaching consensus or even a majority decision on issues such as gender equality and sexuality at General Conference has become increasingly more difficult.

While the American chapters of the UMC are battling with the other cultures present within their global denomination, there is also plenty of contention in the domestic arena between State Conferences and the General Conference. In 2012, for example, the UMC annual Iowa Conference saw 500 members (clergy and laity) sign a document admonishing the General Conference for failing to acknowledge the harm they were doing unto LGBT individuals by refusing to acknowledge that the UMC was divided over homosexuality (United Methodist Church, 2012). 2012 also saw the Minnesota Conference send a resolution opposing a proposed marriage equality amendment to the Minnesota state constitution (United Methodist Church, 2012). These debates are still difficult at the State Conference level, but the conversations about culture and social change appear to be less difficult on a state-by-state basis than on a global one. Kuipers (2000) argues that groups that become more accepting of homosexuality do so by reexamining their moral vocabulary and

questioning their cultural norms (p. 180). This concern (that of LGBT acceptance) then becomes more than simply a religious issue, but also one of questioning church members' cultural understanding of what constitutes as normative moral behavior.

*The Book of Discipline* prohibits many acts of inclusion, yet some United Methodists are still moving forward with the cause. Phillips (2000) describes how many Methodists are choosing to use contemporary social problems to encourage new understandings of scripture, as well as to highlight the contradictory teachings within *The Book of Discipline* (p. 88). In other words, many present day UMC clergy and laity are using current events (i.e. LGBT rights, climate change, mental illness) to reconfigure traditional interpretations of scripture and the UMC's governing documents. Pastor Adams is one such clergy member.

What is perhaps most interesting about the UMC's current situation is that there is little to no literature about clergy members who choose to disobey the laws within *The Book of Discipline* regarding the "celebration" (i.e., performance of) same-sex marriages. This may be due to the charges that may be laid out against such individuals. Waldrep (2012) confronts this problem from a legal perspective, questioning the legitimacy of the UMC's legal process and the way the organization penalizes clergy members who violate denominational legislature by performing same-sex marriages. In fact, Waldrep (2012) argues that these "trials" symbolize a resurgence of conservatism in response to the growing acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage in society at large.

#### *Inclusion and Same-Sex Marriage in the United Methodist Church*

The UMC, as an organization, is struggling with how to move forward on the issue of same-sex marriage (Udis-Kessler, 2008). Ellison (2004) argues that the divide over same-sex marriage itself is also a dilemma in the larger Christian community, and that "where same-

sex marriage advocates and marriage traditionalists part company is not over marriage, but over homosexuality” (p. 78).

Mainline American Protestant denominations have been on the forefront of the discussion of homosexuality and same-sex marriage in American policy and public opinion since they first began addressing the topic in the 1970s (Olson and Cadge, 2002). The views of individual denominations are scattered, but mainline Protestantism appears to be moving toward feelings of inclusion and acceptance of same-sex marriage.

According to the 2008 Public Religion Research Mainline Protestant Clergy Voices Survey, 79% of mainline Protestant clergy agree that “homosexuals should have all the same rights and privileges as other American citizens” (p. 25).<sup>9</sup> When the same survey asked about same-sex relationships, 35% of mainline clergy supported same-sex marriage (33%), while 32% supported civil unions (32%) (p. 25). However, in a more detailed breakdown of the data, this survey shows that of 100 respondents from the UMC, 25 stated that “Gay couples should be allowed to marry”; 26 stated that “Gay couples should be allowed civil unions”; and 49 stated that there should be “No legal recognition” (Public Religion Research, 2008, p. 25). While it is difficult to generalize from such a small sample, these numbers suggest that UMC clergy may be more conservative on this issue than mainline Protestant clergy as a whole.

What is different about the UMC that their clergy, questioned in this survey, would have such a radically higher rate of respondents opposed to the recognition of same-sex relationships than other mainline Protestant churches? Other respondents included clergy from the United Church of Christ (UCC), the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), the

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<sup>9</sup> Mainline Protestant churches defined as: The United Methodist Church; The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the American Baptist Churches USA; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the Episcopal Church; the United Church of Christ; and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (Public Religion Research, 2008, p. 7).

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). In this survey, UMC clergy are only rivaled in the rate of their opposition by the American Baptists Churches USA, with 52 out of 100 respondents stating that there should be “No legal recognition.” (Public Religion Research, 2008, p. 25)

### **Current UMC language and interpretations**

While *The Book of Discipline* and the *Book of Resolutions* are seen in the UMC as living documents, very little has changed in the UMC over the last three decades regarding their overall stances on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The two issues are most certainly related, but are governed by different, at times contradictory passages. The 2012 *Book of Discipline* lists the following governances regarding homosexuality. Listed here are the most relevant passages:

- “¶ 4.: The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection
- ¶304.3: The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church
- ¶ 806.9: [The General Council on Finance and Administration] shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The United Methodist Church not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.”

*The Book of Discipline* (The United Methodist Church, 2012) also lists a small number of laws specifically addressing same-sex unions:

- ¶ 341.6: Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

- ¶ 2702.1. A bishop, clergy member of an Annual Conference (¶ 370), local pastor,<sup>14</sup> clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶ 2702.4)\* with one or more of the following offenses: (a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage;\*\* (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings,<sup>15</sup> including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies;\*\* (c) crime; (d) disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church; (e) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (f) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor;<sup>16</sup> (g) child abuse;\*\*\* (h) sexual abuse;<sup>17</sup> (i) sexual misconduct\*\*\* or (j) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; or (k) racial or gender discrimination.

Chargeable offenses for clergy are offenses that may result in charges from the State or General Conference, including but not limited to: being brought to trial, suspension, and involuntary termination (The United Methodist Church, 2012, p. 656) and (Tuell, 2009).

Despite seemingly clear language in *The Book of Discipline*, *The Book of Resolutions* offers contradictory advice. The dilemma of this pluralism is apparent in a document opposing both homophobia and heterosexism found in *The Book of Discipline*'s sister document, the *Book of Resolutions*. That resolution reads,

“WHEREAS, homophobia is the discrimination of people perceived to be nonheterosexual, regardless of the victim's actual sexual orientation or sexual identity; and

WHEREAS, heterosexism is a self-justifying system of homophobia that:

- 1) perpetuates stereotypical categories of what is essentially "masculine" and what is essentially "feminine";
- 2) provides a privileged status for people who identify as culturally defined heterosexuals; and
- 3) discriminates against persons who, regardless of their sexual orientation or sexual identity, do not appear to fit within the particular category defined as appropriate for their gender; and

WHEREAS, actions rooted in homophobia and heterosexism, including violence, threats, ridicule, humiliation, discrimination, isolation, and rejection, are damaging to persons of all sexual orientations and identities; and

WHEREAS, homophobia and heterosexism are manifestations of sexism in general in that they foster stereotypes based on arbitrary distinctions of gender categories; and

WHEREAS, the United Methodist Church is committed to the eradication of sexism (#3444, 2008 Book of Resolutions); *Therefore, be it resolved*, that The United Methodist Church strengthen its advocacy of the eradication of sexism by opposing all forms of violence or discrimination based on gender, gender identity, sexual practice, or sexual orientation; and

*Be it further resolved*, that the General Board of Church and Society provide resources and materials aimed at educating members of the local churches about the reality, issues, and effects of homophobia and heterosexism and the need for Christian witness against these facets of marginalization” (The United Methodist Church, 2008).

Inconsistency in legislative documents is never preferable, but it is especially troubling in an organization which requires a strict adherence to its governing principles. Homophobia (the discrimination of non-heterosexuals) and heterosexism (discrimination based on masculine or feminine gender presentation) are described in *The Book of Discipline* as incompatible with Christian teachings. In other words, such behavior simply does not fit with the UMC’s interpretations of scripture. And yet, this passage from the *Book of Resolutions* calls for United Methodists to eradicate discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and educate themselves about the harms of homophobia and heterosexism. While clergy are expected to combat homophobia and heterosexism, that is, they are also barred from performing marriages for LGBT members, under threat of charges being brought against them. However, unlike performing same-sex marriage ceremonies, engaging in homophobia or heterosexism are not listed as chargeable offenses. This may reflect the denomination’s priorities in regard to sexual orientation and the discrimination of LGBT individuals.

The 2000 edition of *The Book of Discipline* included a new chargeable offense for pastors who “[conduct] ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or [perform] same-sex wedding ceremonies” (The United Methodist Church, 2012, p. 657). Thus, while Methodists continue to grow further and further divided on the topic, their governing language has only gotten more stringent in the disallowance of same-sex marriage and LGBT

inclusion. Udis-Kessler (2000) writes that inclusionists continue to struggle with the fact that the “world is becoming more inclusive while the church is not,” while opponents think it is perfectly appropriate for the church not to follow the lead of the rest of the world (p. 140). I suggest a disconnect between these groups over the role of the church itself.

### Actively resisting change

As discussed previously, upon being surveyed, 49 out of 100 UMC cleric respondents stated that there should be “No legal recognition” for same-sex couples (Public Religion Research, 2008, p. 25)<sup>10</sup>. This response can be tied to *The Book of Discipline*’s language about homosexuality’s incompatibility with Christian teachings as well as the language included in the chargeable offense section barring clergy from performing marriages for same-sex couples. There are pastors such as Pastor Adams, a subject of this study, who seek to have that language removed. However, here are many pastors who would see the UMC maintain its current position on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Maxie Dunnam is one of the most vocal opponents of changing the exclusionary language regarding homosexuality and same-sex unions in the United Methodist denomination. A retired UMC pastor, he has acted as a vocal opponent to any shift toward more inclusionary language. His book on the topic, *Staying the Course: Supporting the Church’s Position on Homosexuality* celebrates the status quo, calls for a more literal interpretation of scripture, and tells stories of ex-homosexuals who argue that changing one’s sexual orientation is possible. Dunnam actively seeks to deter social change within the UMC by maintaining and celebrating the legislative system -or Wuthnow’s (1989) institution- the General Conference, which has been shown to be a significant roadblock in adjusting the denomination’s polity (Dunnam, 2003). He has chosen to use his social power to dissuade his peers from changing their current situation.

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<sup>10</sup> Survey was exclusive to clergy in the United States.

### **Gay and lesbian visibility**

LGBT individuals have become increasingly visible in American public life since the 1960s. This trend also exists in religious communities. Frank (2006) notes that while homosexual individuals have always been a part of church life, in recent years they have become more vocal regarding their lives and desire for full acceptance within their given church communities. It is therefore possible that the concern over same-sex marriage in the UMC is becoming even more prominent in 2015 because social acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals has become more prevalent (Pew Research Center, 2015) and therefore LGBT individuals and their allies are beginning to feel more comfortable questioning social and religious policies on the topic. Kuipers (2000) claims that quite simply, the American homosexual community has become so visible that their claims can no longer be ignored (p. 170).

Gorsline (1999) describes how many denominations are moving past the ‘tolerance’ called upon by those like John McNeil, a Jesuit Priest and prominent theologian, and how queer religious scholars are now calling for a “...distinctly queer sensibility,” which would constitute a fundamental change to the church (p. 114). “Tolerance” insinuates that there is something undesirable about the behavior being tolerated, which is why in recent years many civil rights activists (both African American activists and LGBT activists) have made a terminology shift to “acceptance”. Yet even if its clergy were enthusiastic about the idea, the UMC faces a challenging situation with regard to adopting such a view on LGBT individuals, given its law regarding the incompatibility of homosexuality with Christian teachings. The United States is moving toward a culture of acceptance, while the UMC is still battling over tolerance.

### **Current activism and allyship**

Allied UMC clergy and laity are organizing. Dissenters (i.e. the Reconciling Ministries Network) are choosing to forgo the institutionalized mechanisms for change that are championed by the UMC's leadership and are choosing instead to use their positions to assert power and change in the organization (Fuist, Stoll, & Kniss 2011). Yet this work is not new. In 1983, a group of concerned UMC clergy met to “[develop] a program in which local churches will declare their support for the concerns of lesbians and gay men” and today, the Reconciling Ministries Network, an organization made up of congregations and regional organizers across the United States consists of over 650 Reconciling communities and over 29,000 individuals (Reconciling Ministries network 2015). Olson and Cadge (2002) cite an incident in the early 2000s that saw more than 100 UMC clergy officiate a lesbian couple's commitment ceremony despite the ban. Activism and allyship on behalf of LGBT individuals is not uncharted territory for the UMC, and yet it does appear that the incidents are increasing.

Current and former clergy members are being put on trial by regional Conference cabinets and the Judicial Council. Some, like Rev. Frank Schaefer, have been “defrocked”, or stripped of their credentials by the UMC (Margolin 2014). Rev. Schaefer performed a marriage in 2007 for his son and son-in-law in Massachusetts. An appeals panel eventually overturned the decision, and Schaefer was reinstated, stating “...today's decision by the committee is a hopeful sign for our LGBTQ community. They recognized that I was wrongfully punished for standing with those who are discriminated against” (Margolin 2014).

2013 saw 36 UMC pastors perform the marriage of two men in Philadelphia. The 36 clergy members made no attempt to hide their intentions or actions, and in fact they posed for pictures with the couple and welcomed the complaint brought against them (Gilbert 2014). Following the ceremony, a complaint was brought against the participating clergy members, who said that they did so “in a ‘spirit of civil disobedience’ — knowing they opened themselves to certain consequences” (Gilbert 2014). Charges were not brought against these clergy members, however. Instead, an agreement (which eliminates the possibility of a church trial, as had happened with Rev. Schaefer) was reached to pass what is known as a “just resolution”. In this case “...the resolution calls for the pastors to acknowledge that they violated rules of the United Methodist Book of Discipline. In return, the complaint will be withdrawn” (Gilbert 2014). In this instance, the Philadelphia area Bishop chose not to bring charges, but to resolve the matter through discussion and a just resolution. When asked about the resolution, Bishop Johnson stated, “Though I may sympathize with the pastoral concerns of the respondents, it is unacceptable to disregard and disobey *The Book of Discipline*” (as cited in Bailey, 2014). Bishop Johnson chose to resolve the issue with a just resolution rather than a trial. Consequences for clerical dissent, then, appear to be subject to the will of the Conference Bishop.

However, some of the denomination’s activists are still dissatisfied with resolving incidents of dissent with just resolutions. Chett Pritchett, the Executive Director of the Methodist Federation for Social Action, for example, writes that,

“While it is important to celebrate this just resolution as a way forward, both the complaint and the need for just resolution in complaints regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons and those in ministry with these persons, are inherently unjust from their genesis. Bishop Talbert, drawing from Martin Luther King, Jr. and Augustine, has made this abundantly clear in his articulation of the concept of Biblical Obedience: “an unjust law is no law at all.” I

hold the same to be true: that an unjust resolution is really no resolution either because the unjust law – anti-LGBTQ language in *The Book of Discipline* – still exists” (2015).

To summarize, Pritchett alludes to the notion that “just resolutions” are just another way of promulgating the UMC’s institutionalization of inaction, which is exacerbated by their cyclical legislative process. Such institutionalized discourse allows for discussion without necessarily allowing change.

### **Current state of the denomination**

Some argue that the UMC’s current disagreement over homosexuality is merely a foreshadowing of the denomination’s imminent demise (Wood, 200, p. 10), due at least in part to theory ever-growing global membership. Should the impasse continue, this assessment might be an accurate prognostication. Individual UMC pastors and parishioners are viewing the denomination’s laws about homosexuality and same-sex marriage to be incompatible with current American social norms and morals. Indeed, Frank (2006) claims that the polity of the UMC is in a state of crisis and that,

“denominations are so badly divided over homosexuality- along with other gender, sexuality, and family issues –that there is little choice but ‘amicable separation’ or some kind of ‘exit fee’ to enable like-minded congregations to leave the current denomination and form their own associations” (Pp. 21-22).

This requires further study, as the disintegration of the second largest Protestant denomination in North America would substantially affect the American Protestant community politically, socially, and certainly financially.

CHAPTER III  
METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to gather the richest data possible and analyze trends through emergent, grounded theory. Researchers bring their personal and political background into their study. One's history shapes the scope through which they view and interpret the data. Thus, it is imperative that researchers acknowledge his/her background and use it to "enhance, rather than constrain, theory development" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998. p. 49). As the principle researcher, I recognize my personal biases and theoretical preferences in the choice of framework for this study.

*Qualitative Research Design*

This study utilizes qualitative research methods for the purposes of gathering in-depth, rich data from participants by collecting information regarding the personal beliefs and motivations of churchgoers, clergy, and church leaders. Geertz (1973) argued that qualitative data analysis provides "thick descriptions" that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has a strong impact on the reader. Through data analysis, I seek to understand what meaning the UMC's decisions have for its members and clergy. These interviews also assess what, if any, impact Pastor Adams' public dissent from the UMC on the topics of queer inclusion and same-sex marriage has had on his relationship with his congregation. Given that qualitative data has a unique emphasis on people's lived experiences (Miles 2013), it is well-suited to address the outlined research questions, which are as follows:

- (1) Why is the UMC resisting change when American society at large is altering its views on same-sex marriage?
- (2) What is the experience of a dissenting (one who diverges from the denomination's bylaws regarding sexual identity and the performance of same-sex marriage) clergy member?
- (3) How does that dissension affect the relationship with his/her parishioners?
- (4) What effect does clerical dissension have on a pastor's ability to perform his job?

### **Use of grounded theory**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend the use of grounded theory methods in research design because it is more likely to resemble the reality under study than a theory based upon one's own conceptions, experience or speculation (p. 12). Participants' opinions and voices are ascribed great value in a theory that employs grounded theory methods. I suggest that grounded theory is also valuable to feminist methodology, which affirms the notion that what women choose to say about their lives create "valid and knowable empirical data" which assist in the construction of knowledge (Bloom, 1998, p. 150). This methodology is not only inclusive of the voices of women, but also of queer individuals and allies. Grounded theory methods allowed me to draw emergent themes from the data while valuing each participant's unique contribution and forming a theory to best understand their lived reality.

### **Positionality of the researcher**

In order to collect qualitative data effectively and credibly, the researcher must act as an "...instrument of data collection and the center of the analytic process" (Patton, 1990, p. 461). Thus, it is imperative that I be reflexive about my own beliefs and willing to share and

reflect upon my experiences throughout the research process. As the lead researcher in this study, I identify as a 25-year-old, White, queer female with no religious affiliation.

### Reflexivity

As Charmaz (2014) has argued, scholars should be reflexive about their position in research, as it affects what they are capable of seeing. My position is rooted in my position as a woman, a member of the queer community, and someone who approaches projects from a social justice standpoint. I strove to be cognizant of how my own beliefs were affecting the data collection and analysis throughout this project. As a queer woman, I cannot remove myself entirely from the experiences of LGBT individuals being denied access to marriage within the UMC. And so it is necessary to recognize that the methods and techniques used throughout this study come from a position of solidarity with the individuals the UMC is discriminating against, and with Pastor Adams, who is attempting to combat those discriminatory policies.

In qualitative scholarship, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009). My values, rooted in feminist and queer epistemology, will undoubtedly influence how this study is structured and how I have responded to subjects throughout the course of this research. Hammers and Brown (2007), write that joining feminist social science and queer theory can allow for a more inclusive methodology. Feminist and queer-inclusive techniques in social science are focused on gathering the unique experience of the subjects (typically underrepresented groups, such as women and LGBT individuals). Such techniques are extremely important in creating pluralistic scholarship which celebrates diversity and self-definition. That is a goal of this work.

### **Case study methodology**

Case studies involve an in-depth exploration of a particular individual, group, organization, or process. Neuman (2003) describes case study research as a method that raises questions about the boundaries and defining characteristics of a particular case- these questions have the potential to generate new thinking and theory. The case in question is a dissenting UMC particular pastor in a small, predominantly rural Midwestern town. Yin (2009) named five components in designing effective case study research: (1) research questions; (2) clear purpose of the study; (3) unit analysis; (4) logic linking data to the study's purpose; and (5) criteria for interpreting findings. The review of relevant literature and in-depth interviews enabled the formation of the previously listed research questions. As for the study's purpose, it is to examine the repercussions of Pastor Adams' dissension from the UMC's governing documents and to discuss the possibility of wider implications. The units of analysis in this study are the recorded views of the participants, as well as the emergent themes that arise from the use of grounded theory. Linking the emergent data to the study's propositions occurs through data collection and recognition of the patterns that emerge through the coding process. Criteria for interpreting the findings were also emergent through data collection and analysis, with In Vivo coding allowing for participant's individual voices to remain.

#### *Why the UMC?*

The UMC does not have a central leader, but is instead governed by many different groups, each with their own purview. The General Conference is the main legislative body of the UMC. This group consists of elected clergy and laity who meet once each four years to propose and vote on denominational legislation and define or change the language found in

the UMC's primary guiding document, *The Book of Discipline*. The General Conference is the only Conference empowered to speak for the church. The Council of Bishops is made up of elected officials who preside over individual regions, territories, and states. These bishops oversee district superintendents and individual clergy members. The Judicial Council is the final governing body of the UMC with the task of determining whether bodies and members of the denomination are conforming to *The Book of Discipline* (The United Methodist Church 2012).

The General Conference consists of between 600 and 1000 attendees each four years (*The Book of Discipline*). There are attendees from all over the globe speaking a multitude of languages, and in order for any substantial deliberation to occur, attendees are expected to lobby and work collectively. The UMC General Conference is the epitome of institutionalized discourse.

#### *Pastor Adams*

The clergy member in question is a United Methodist pastor who shall be referred by the pseudonym "Pastor Adams". For the purposes of this study, his name and a number of other identifying information will remain confidential. He attended seminary, was appointed as an elder<sup>11</sup>, and eventually gained full ordination as a Pastor. His first placement lasted four years. His most recent placement was in a city referred to here as "Littletown", a small community in a predominately rural Midwestern state. At the time of his placement at this congregation in 2011, he was 29 years old. It was his second placement, roughly two hours away from the church he served previously. At this study's completion in 2015, he was no longer serving in Littletown.

Pastor Adams has attended his State Conference every year since his ordination,

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<sup>11</sup> Those called to ministries of service, or UMC ministers (United Methodist Church, 2012).

and has attended every General Conference (either as laity, observer, or clergy) from 2004 to 2012. As I will discuss further in the Results and Discussion section, Pastor Adams considers himself an ally to the LGBT community, and has spoken out against his denomination's position on homosexuality and same-sex marriage since before his ordination.

He is co-chair of a group of UMC clergy and laity within his state working toward queer inclusion in UMC life. This organization combats the ban on openly queer clergy serving in UMC churches, the denomination's prohibition on marriage for same-sex couples, and the language within the "incompatibility clause" found in *The Book of Discipline*. They do so through membership meetings, educational events, and demonstrations at larger UMC gatherings (such as the annual State Conference.) Membership is driven by a desire to right what they perceive to be wrongs committed by the UMC in the denomination's continued discrimination against LGBT clergy and laity. Both clergy and laity commit themselves to acting as allies. Clergy commit themselves to performing marriages without discrimination. All members state their commitment to supporting one another in their commitments to inclusion by signing documents drafted by the organization. They have been active in their State, at and outside of the Annual Conference. Pastor Adams has been involved with this organization since it was founded in 2012, and stated in his interview that he often uses meetings to discuss how to infuse the organization's beliefs and messages into his sermons and outreach.

### **A young pastor**

Pastor Adams is a young UMC elder in a time when the median age of elders is rising. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership writes in their 2014 Report *Clergy Age Trends in the United Methodist Church* found that elders between the ages of 55 and 75

comprise of 55% of all active elders, and that the median age of elders has increased from 56 years in 2014 from 50 years in 2000. Pastor Adams is 33 years of age. It would be relevant to explore what effect, if any, his youth has upon his relationship with his congregation and the denomination as a whole.

### **Role as an ally**

Pastor Adams does not directly identify as LGBT but considers himself an ally. Pastor Adams has chosen to use his position as a clergy member of the UMC to speak out against what he deems to be “unjust practices” and un-Christian doctrine. He recognizes sexual expression and marriage to be rights to which every individual is entitled, and has felt a “spiritual calling” to further these causes.

This study expands on the work of Washington and Evans by recognizing that an ally is also someone who uses their position of power and influence to change the circumstances of a group with less power and influence than the ally. Bierstadt (1950) argues that power stems from three sources: “(1) numbers of people, (2) social organization, (3) and resources” (p. 737). Pastor Adams has (1) a captive audience in his congregation and 12.8 million UMC members worldwide, (2) his religious institution, (3) the capital (social and otherwise) given him as a UMC clergy member. Pastor Adams has measurable social power, and he has chosen to use it to act as an ally to the LGBT community. However, just because Pastor Adams uses his power and position to promote the issue, it this does not guarantee that his congregation will become more inclusive.

As an ally, Pastor Adams is limited. While his dissension from the UMC’s policies may cause him some significant consequences, he still holds a position of white, male, heterosexual privilege. Reynolds (2003) writes that “the hardships of the positions of ally

aren't the same as the consequences and real harms to the queer, two-spirit and transgender people experiencing this backlash" (p. 15). An ally can choose to cease acting on behalf of the oppressed group at any time, whether the concessions are large or small. Is Pastor Adams an ally every minute of each day? If not, he may be at a risk for replicating oppression. Reynolds (2010) calls this "imperfect" allyship, indicating the difficulty for allies to maintain constant responsibility and vigilant solidarity (p. 15). Yet Reynolds (2010) describes the need for these imperfect allies, arguing that an ally's job is not to be perfect, but to be useful (p. 16). However imperfect activism in an institution like the UMC, which drowns out dissent with its mechanized systems of discourse (Wuthnow, 1989) has the potential to do more harm than good. McIntyre (2002) warns that we should be suspicious of all resistance within and against institutions of domination, as they often end up reinforcing normalized systematic inequalities (p. 50). She goes on to write, "imperfect activism is more system legitimating or more demobilizing than theoretical critiques dictating inaction" (p. 50). Thus, theoretically, if Pastor Adams fails to use his position as an ally productively and completely, he could be more damaging to the LGBT movement within the UMC than anti-LGBT activists such as Maxie Dunnam.

#### *Research Site*

The research site for this study is located in a small community (between 25,000 and 30,000 people) in a predominantly rural Midwestern state. The community is overwhelmingly White, with 25,538 community members identifying themselves as "White alone, not Hispanic or Latino" (United States Census Bureau, 2013). The median age of community members is approximately 42 years of age. The median household income was

reported as \$41,332 with a reported 14.7% of individuals living below the poverty level.<sup>12</sup> A breakdown on religious affiliation is not available for this specific community, but the Pew Research Center cites that the state is 77% Christian,<sup>13</sup> 1% Non-Christian Faiths, and 21% Unaffiliated (2015, p. 144).

According to Pastor Adams and an internal church report he conducted from the congregation's membership software, the median age of the laity in his congregation is 71 years of age. Specific descriptions of the congregation will be given during the Results and Discussion section of this study from the interview data, but in describing the church's population, laity used phrases such as "grey-haired" and "white heads" to indicate that there were a number of older congregation members.

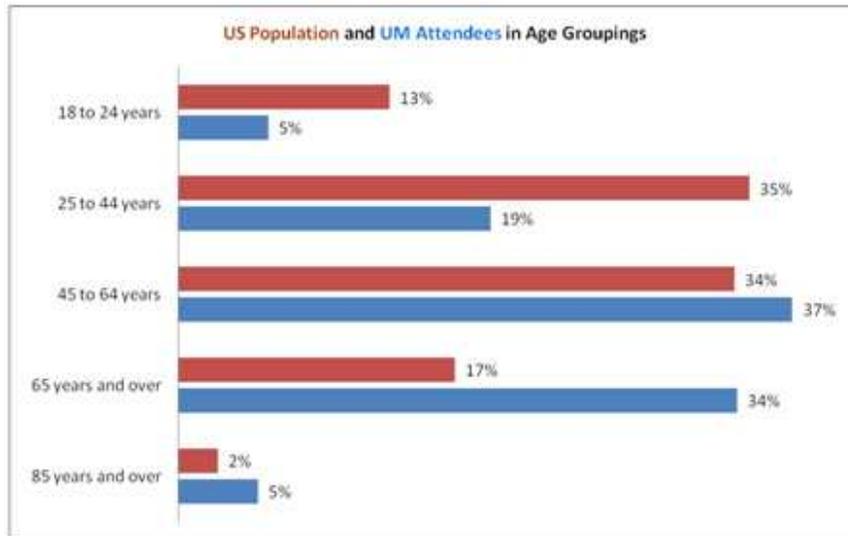


Figure 1. US Population and UM Attendees in Age Groupings

<sup>12</sup> According to the US Census Bureau.

<sup>13</sup> Broken down as: 28% Evangelical Protestant, 30% Mainline Protestant, 2% Historically Black Protestant, 18% Catholic, 1% Mormon, 1% Orthodox Christian, >1% Jehovah's Witness; 1% Other Christian (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 144).

This is in comparison to the United Methodist Church's 2010 State of the Church Congregational Life Survey, which places the Median age of attendees across the denomination at 57 years of age. The breakdown of those numbers can be seen in Figure 1.<sup>14</sup>

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership at the Wesley Theological Seminary writes in their 2009 report, *Comparison of Membership and General Population Death Rates within United Methodist Annual Conferences* that "...the aging membership of mainline denominations has been a continuing concern for many years... since at least the 1970s, the trend has been toward serving a membership older than the general population." This appears especially germane the situation in Pastor Adams' congregation, where the typical churchgoer has an average age 29 years older than that of a member of the larger community. It is also important to consider the difference in age between Pastor Adams and the average lay member of his congregation.

#### *Data Collection*

I made every effort to ensure the welfare of the participants who took part in this study. The procedures for this study were reviewed by my Program of Study Committee and approved by the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board with the Office for Responsible Research.

#### **Intensive interviews**

This study utilizes semi-structured interviews in the interest of collecting rich data while still maintaining adequate structure. A completely structured interview might not allow for interviewees to delve as deeply into their beliefs or experiences, which could hinder opportunities for data collection. Unstructured interviews allow for very rich data collection,

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<sup>14</sup> Survey Results. (2010) [Graph illustration, The United Methodist Church]. *State of the Church: Congregational Life Survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/2010-state-of-the-church-congregational-life-survey>

but much of the data may not be pertinent to the study itself. Semi-structured, yet intensive, interviews are thus the most appropriate method of data collection for this study.

I chose to utilize intensive interview techniques in the interview protocol. Intensive interviews are a "...gently guided, one-sided conversation that explores research participants' perspective on their personal experience with the research topic" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56). Intensive interviews rely heavily on open-ended questions, allowing the interviewer to uncover as much about the participants and their experiences as possible (Jacob and Ferguson, 2012). In discussing something as sensitive as religious beliefs, it is important to allow the subject enough time and space to ensure they can articulate their thoughts fully. I employed active listening- engaging with questions and responding to cues if necessary - though it is important that I recognized how reactions and prompts affected the data the subject was sharing.

### Pilot interviews

Prior to conducting this study, I conducted two pilot interviews, which assisted in paring down my questions and refining the interview protocol. This was done to ensure the interview protocol was structured to gather the best, richest, and most pertinent data to the subject of the study. These pilot interviews have also allowed me to build different prompts into the interview protocol, as every interviewee will respond in ways unique to their position and comfort level. Charmaz (2014) writes that,

"...interviews take place within a culture at a specific historical time and social context. Your approach to interviewing, questions, specific word choice, and interactional style during the interview need to respect the traditions and situations of your interview participants" (p. 57).

Because each interview is specific to each participant and the context in which the interview is performed, as Charmaz argues, three separate sets of questions were built into the

interview protocol for three individual types of interviewees. These are: laity, clergy, and church leadership. This is due to the unique position of each group, and the different types of information each would have access to. An individual parishioner may have specific information regarding the inaction of the 2012 UMC General Conference, but we can infer that they likely will not have access to the same type of first-hand information that a UMC Pastor, or UMC Bishop, who was present at the General Conference, would have. Thus, it seems prudent to have an interview protocol tooled to gather the richest data possible, (and thus the information best available) from each group. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A, while the interview questions are in Appendix E.

### Sampling

This particular community was chosen as the subject of this case study because of Pastor Adams and the unique narrative that his parishioners and affiliated church leaders can provide regarding his positions on queer inclusion and same-sex marriage within the UMC. I also chose to study the UMC specifically given that there is a unique opportunity to study the social climate and dissenting action within the denomination before the next Conference in 2016, to examine how popular opinion in the United States and dissenting clergy members are affecting this particular religious institution.

This target population was chosen because of a previous relationship between Pastor Adams and myself. It is this relationship that will allow me entry into the community and church, and therefore access to the data necessary to complete the study. I have worked with Pastor Adams on building relationships with churchgoers and engaging them in the study. The language of these encounters is laid out in the interview protocol.

This study began with targeted sampling (Watters and Biernacki 1989) of lay members and State Conference leadership. Targeted sampling as defined by Heckathorn (1997) is a method which allows researchers to map a target population to meet the needs of their study (and avoid under sampling) and recruit a pre-specified number of subjects to appear in the final sample (p. 175).

Rather than targeting participants from different geographic areas, the targeted sampling employed in recruiting participants for this study was aimed toward targeting individuals with different beliefs about Pastor Adams and same-sex marriage. However, those individuals most opposed to Pastor Adams' stance on homosexuality and same-sex marriage did not respond to recruitment efforts. Thus snowball sampling was used to find participants willing to engage in the research process.

The sample consisted of 10 participants. This size highlights the importance of individual experience and belief while still providing some variety of sources and enhancing dialectic inherent in the search for depth of meaning (Crouch and Mackenzie, 2006). 10 out of 20 contacted individuals consented to interviews, affording this study a 50% response rate. After first interviewing Pastor Adams, an announcement was placed in the church newsletter (available in Appendix A) to recruit potential participants. I also received a church phone directory. Pastor Adams then read this announcement following a Sunday service, encouraging congregation members to contact me or meet with me if I were to contact them. These efforts yielded phone calls from four participants, who agreed to meet and be interviewed (phone script and laity interview questions available in Appendix A and Appendix E, respectively). At the conclusion of these interviews, all five respondents were asked whom I should reach out to next. In total, I received 13 names from these five

respondents. I reached out to all 13 individuals by phone, and four more lay members agreed to meet and speak with me. Superintendent F, Pastor Adams' regional superintendent, also spoke with me, to provide perspective from a State Conference leader, after I reached out to him through email (Email script and Conference leadership interview questions available in Appendix A and Appendix E, respectively). Attempts were made to arrange an interview with the State Conference Bishop via email to his Conference email address, but these emails were never returned.

### Member checking

At the behest of the Institutional Review Board, I employed a participant-cognizant tool developed by feminist scholars called member checking (Miles, 2014). Email and physical addresses were collected so that the transcripts of their interviews may be sent to each participant. This addition to protocol gave respondents the opportunity to redact or edit statements. Member checking was also employed to ensure that all participants were given the opportunity to remain active partners in the research process. This tool is also used to ensure that all statements included in the study are as true to the voice of each individual participant as possible. These transcriptions were sent out to participants within 30 days of each interview, at the time of publication, no respondents requested changes to their statements.

### Interview tools, transcriptions, and coding

All interviews were recorded with two voice recording devices in the interest of accuracy, and ensuring validity of what each interviewee has said. Recordings were saved in both an encrypted folder on a computer and backed up in a secure online storage system

within 24 hours and then deleted from both recording devices. All transcriptions were completed by the principal researcher, through use of the program ExpressScribe.

Upon completion of transcripts, I utilized NVivo, a data analysis program, to code and analyze the data collected. I first employed one of the most well-known qualitative coding methods, In Vivo coding, collecting phrases from the participant's own language in the interest of prioritizing and honoring the participant's voice. This type of coding is in line with my desire to work from a feminist and queer theory epistemology, relying on the unique voice of the subject to guide the data. This allowed opportunities to uncover similar phrases and categories (or, a lack thereof) within different interviews, allowing for analysis and inference later on. A second round of coding was then completed, seeking patterns with which to make assertions.

I did not rely solely on interview transcripts, but also took extensive notes highlighting patterns and statements of note within each interview. This further assisted in the coding and analysis, though it also certainly highlights my own agenda and biases. Thus, I continue to remain cognizant of my position in the data collection process and continue to reflect throughout the study on how the collection and analysis of the data is being affected.

### **Protection of privacy and confidentiality**

All possible efforts have been made to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants, but because of the nature of the study, all interviewees were informed of the possibility that their identities may become known. Because of this risk, I am very explicit about the risks of participation in the informed consent documents (see Appendices B-D), and member checking was included in the protocol so participants may choose to alter or redact their statements at any time.

The interviews were recorded by me, the principal researcher. All transcriptions were completed by me, the principal researcher. These recordings were made on two separate digital recording devices, downloaded to an encrypted computer, and then deleted from the recording devices within 24 hours of each interview.

Throughout this study, the congregation is described as "a United Methodist congregation in a small town within a predominantly rural Midwestern state" or Littletown in order to provide anonymity to the community. Participants have each been given a letter of the alphabet (ex. Pastor Adams, Ms. B, Mr. C) in order to avoid using their names or even initials. Descriptors such as race and marital status will not be used in the paper to protect the privacy of participants.

#### *Summary*

The purpose of this study is to better understand clerical dissension on same-sex marriage within the UMC by examining the unique experience of Pastor Adams and members of his congregation. This chapter included details of the research design, the researcher's positionality, methodological approaches, sampling justification, and the methods data collection. Chapter four will focus on the results of the interviews and discussion of significant data.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive case study research is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon within a real-life context with a distinct emphasis on detail and rich data collection (Yin, 2009). This method was selected for this study due to a desire to extract rich primary data from interview respondents. This study was conducted to answer the research questions: Why is the UMC resisting change when American society at large is altering its views on same-sex marriage? What is the experience of a dissenting UMC clergy member? How does that dissension affect their relationship with their parishioners? What effect does clerical dissension have on a pastor's ability to perform his job? These questions were explored through in-depth interviews with ten participants in a small congregation in a predominantly Midwestern state. Quotes have been slightly edited for grammar and clarity.

#### *Participant Descriptions*

Ten respondents participated in this study (eight subjects were interviewed individually, two subjects were interviewed together) ranging in age from 33 to 84 years old. Five men and five women were interviewed. All participants self-identified as United Methodists, and (excluding Pastor Adams and Superintendent F) are lay members at Pastor Adams' church. Among these participants were one pastor (Pastor Adams), his wife and lay member of the church (Ms. B), seven additional lay members of the congregation, (Mr. C, Ms. D, Mr. E, Mr. G, Ms. H, Ms. I, and Ms. J) and the Conference superintendent of Pastor Adams' region (Superintendent F). Data collection began by interviewing Pastor Adams,

who acted as a gatekeeper to the community. Snowball sampling was implemented in order to locate the following respondents, who all participated voluntarily.

### **Pastor Adams**

As previously discussed, Pastor Adams is a UMC pastor who has chosen to denounce the denomination's exclusionary language about queer individuals and defy the ban on UMC clergy performing same-sex marriages. He has belonged to the UMC since he was a child, he attended seminary directly out of college, and was ordained as an elder in 2007. In regard to same-sex marriage, he says, "for me marriage is that structure where love is committed to and best nurtured and I just think it's horrendous that would be denied to anyone who's seeking it. I don't care who you are. Marriage is great and it should be available to all people". He assists in running an organization of UMC laity and clergy dedicated to queer inclusion in all aspects of church life.

### **Ms. B**

Ms. B is a lay member of the congregation, and also Pastor Adams' wife. She worked as a music director for the State Conference that houses this congregation. The UMC is newer to her; she was baptized in 2005. She has very strong feelings about *The Book of Discipline's* exclusionary language and how it affects LGBT individuals. She describes her admiration for Pastor Adams and his work as an ally, but also recognizes that the experiences of allies and the experiences of the oppressed are fundamentally different. Her distinction is clear when she states, "We can feel the feels, but that doesn't mean we've experienced the real hardship of having to navigate the world that doesn't understand who you are". She also speaks about the possibility of leaving the UMC to "pioneer a new ministry".

**Mr. C**

Mr. C is a lay member in Pastor Adams' congregation. He is 75 years old, and has been a member of this particular church since 1962. He was an SPRC member until Pastor Adams' statement in 2012, at which time he resigned his position. Despite leaving the committee, he states "But I've been working with [Pastor Adams]. [Pastor Adams] is a great guy." Mr. C speaks repeatedly about local church agency. He describes his concern with how individual pastors represent themselves and their views at both annual State Conferences and General Conference. When Conference attendees vote on language additions or changes to the denomination's governing documents, Mr. C asks "Should the pastor vote his or her preference, or should they visit with the church members and vote the majority decision of the membership?" He returns to this topic repeatedly throughout the interview.

**Ms. D**

Ms. D is another lay member in the congregation. She described how she was very nervous to meet and be interviewed, though did not indicate a particular cause of her anxiety. She approximates her entry into the church community to be between 10 and 12 years previous, and describes how coming into the church "of course I had to join everything". She describes how she has sat on multiple committees and how doing so is a good way to meet and interact with other members. She describes the congregation as "set in their ways" and unwilling to change. She attributes much of that reluctance to age.

**Mr. E**

Mr. E is a 79-year-old lay member of Pastor Adams' church. He was raised in the Evangelical Church and became a UMC member after the merger in 1968. He states that his background is in "The Evangelical side of the merger." He disagrees with Pastor Adams'

stances on sexuality and same-sex marriage, stating “I believe according to the Bible it’s wrong.”

### **Superintendent F**

Superintendent F is the Conference Superintendent for Pastor Adams’ region. He both supervises clergy in the region and acts as “the Pastor’s Pastor”. He describes his sympathy for LGBT individuals due to the exclusionary language, but also recognizes his role as Conference Leadership. Though he was not Superintendent of the region in 2012 (the year of Pastor Adams’ “Re: Covenant of Conscience” speech), he says lay members of the congregation contacted him after he took the post. He explains, “when they found out who I am and what I do now- I didn’t bring it up but they brought it up.” He does not object to Pastor Adams’ dissenting discourse, but describes how he would be forced to report any disclosed dissenting action (i.e. performing a same-sex marriage) to the Bishop immediately.

### **Mr. G**

Mr. G is a lay member of the church, is 60 years old, and is married to Ms. H. He was raised Methodist and has been a member of the church community for 28 years. He describes a generational divide between Pastor Adams and the congregation. In describing his experience, he says “I told him when he first got here, I go like, ‘I never had a Pastor that was younger than me’ and I never have.” He does not display any animosity toward Pastor Adams throughout the interview.

### **Ms. H**

Ms. H is a 54-year-old member of Pastor Adams’ church. She was raised in the Lutheran tradition, but joined the UMC when she and her husband (Mr. G) joined this church 28 years ago. She is in the process of becoming an ordained UMC minister. Ms. H does not

share Pastor Adams' views toward homosexuality and marriage equality. She says "I have a hard time- I'll use an analogy..., 'if God didn't create Adam and [pause], he created Adam and Eve'. I just feel it should be a man and a woman together." However, she does not admonish Pastor Adams for his stance. In talking about his 2012 statement and his current stance, she said, "I think it was a hard thing to do. I don't know that everybody is feeling comfortable standing up and saying 'Hey, I believe this way but the church doesn't'. I mean he's taking a risk... I respect him for it a lot."

### **Ms. I**

Ms. I is 81 years old and she is a lay member of this congregation. She is also a PFLAG<sup>15</sup> member in the larger community. Born into a Methodist family, Ms. I has been attending this church on and off for most of her life. She is an advocate of LGBT rights, but states "Well, I try not to talk about it because I always end up in the minority in my talking." Ms. I describes that after the lack of action to change the exclusionary language in *The Book of Discipline* at the 2012 General Conference, she cancelled her pledge<sup>16</sup> to the Conference. She says "You got to get more hurt than words. I think they care more about the dollars more than they care about anything else."

### **Ms. J**

Ms. J is 79, and she is the retired Christian Education Director for the congregation. She describes her history of dissent within the UMC through her experience as an anti-war activist in the Vietnam era. She states that "when [Pastor] opened this up to the congregation, I admired him totally because it was an issue that needed to come, whose time had come and

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<sup>15</sup> Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, the United States' largest family and ally organization (PFLAG, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Yearly monetary contribution to the Conference.

the church was not prepared.” Ms. J portrays herself as very supportive of Pastor Adams and his views.

### *2012 Statement*

Following the lack of action at the 2012 General Conference, and the lack of action at the 2012 Annual Conference for his state, Pastor Adams drafted and read a speech to his congregation about his disappointment in the denomination and his intent to dissent from the UMC’s *Book of Discipline*. In the interest of separating his personal views from that of the denomination, he stepped down from the pulpit and read his statement in front of the podium. The full text of his statement, included with his permission, can be found in Appendix A. It is entitled “Re: Covenant of Conscience” and below are a few of the key points Pastor Adams makes:

By now, many of you have heard about an action taken, and a pair of documents presented at the [state] Annual Conference in [city] These documents call for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in the life of the United Methodist Church, even when that is not allowed by our denomination’s Book of Discipline.

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I want you to know that because of my reading of scripture, my identity as a Christian and as a pastor, and my understanding of sexuality, I have signed both of these documents.

The documents Pastor Adams refers to are attached in Appendix G and Appendix H. They reiterate the UMC’s commitment to “do no harm”. They also indicate clerical signatories’ commitment to performing same-sex marriages, despite violations to denominational law.

Were a clergy member charged, much like Rev. Schaefer of Massachusetts, it would be possible for them to lose their credentials, their church, and their UMC pension. It is important to recognize that Pastor Adams is not at risk of being charged merely by signing these documents. It is only if he actually performs a same-sex marriage ceremony that he may be charged. He addresses these concerns here:

Some of you have wondered whether signing these documents puts me at risk of disciplinary action from the denomination. Several of our church leaders have been clear that statements like these are simply dialogue, and that our church encourages dialogue in those areas in which we disagree. If, however, I do perform a wedding for a gay or lesbian couple I could face a penalty, possibly losing my credentials as a United Methodist Elder.

There is also reference to the UMC's legislative process, which seems to be structured to allow dissent; Pastor Adams refers to this as "simply dialogue", while still maintaining the status quo. The institution was built to withstand dissenting dialogue; it is only when that dialogue turns into dissenting action- performing a same-sex marriage -that the institution becomes weakened. As such, it appears that it is only when dissent turns to action that clergy members are punished. He continues:

I have not come to this position quickly or easily, but through a long process of prayer, scripture study, and conversation with friends and family, both clergy and laity. For me, this is the path of integrity – aligning my actions with my beliefs. I recognize that I am declaring my opposition to the rules of the United Methodist Church while continuing to live and work within its fellowship, for I believe it is (as our Bishop says) "the best of all Protestant possibilities.

I am not trying to make a decision for our congregation, but simply to live with integrity from my own understanding of Christian discipleship and human sexuality.

This document declares Pastor Adams' intention to violate church law in response to what he deems to be unjust language and practice within his denomination. His intention behind the statement was reiterated in his interview for this study.

*Use of Grounded Theory to Develop Overarching Themes and Subthemes*

By implementing first In Vivo coding, using participants' terms as codes to uncover meaning and to understand emergent actions (Charmaz, 2014), I recognize implicit meanings within each respondent's interview. Upon identifying emergent themes from individual interviews, I implemented pattern coding to discern six overarching themes across the entire case: (1) dialogue, (2) generational concerns, (3) ideology, (4) denominational concerns, (5) outcomes of dissension, and (6) an uncertain future. These categories also contain subthemes, found in Table 4. Analysis of these emergent themes assists in describing the unique phenomenon of Pastor Adams' dissension and the circumstance of his particular congregation.

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Table 3. Overarching Themes and Subthemes

<b>Overarching Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
(1) Dialogue	"Culture of silence"
	Education / miseducation
	Exposure
	Forced Discourse
	Congregational response to Pastor Adams

Table 3. Continued

(2) Generational Concerns		Aging Population
		Pastoral youth
		Generational disparity
(3) Ideology		Upbringing
		Theology
		Denominational ideology
(4) Denominational concerns		Local agency
		Discourse -Vs- action
(5) Outcomes of dissension		Capital
		Cooperation
		Loss of Members and Pastoral Reassignment
		- Congregational departure
		- Pastoral departure
(6) An Uncertain Future		
		Livelihood
		Potential charges

### *Data Analysis*

As shown in Table 4, six main themes emerged from the data collected during in-depth interviews to describe the case of Pastor Adams, his dissension, and the effects thereafter. A primary emergent phenomenon was that of what my interviewees described as a “culture of silence” and the effects of Pastor Adams’ refusal to adhere to such norms. Emergent themes and subthemes are presented in this section, primarily in the respondents’ own language. These themes will be used to answer the guiding research questions of this study.

### **Dialogue**

As an institution, the UMC is organized to promote collective discussion, and even dissent. As in Wuthnow’s Community of Discourse, I recognize that dissension on

controversial topics can exist within the UMC's stream of dialogue without necessarily doing harm to the indoctrinated norms. In fact, in the case of Pastor Adams, that dissension appears to have the potential to do more harm to the dissenter, possibly even causing a decline in the dissenter's social power. This would seem to indicate that the rules of discourse are not uniform at the local and Conference levels.

A "culture of silence"

Participants indicated that same-sex marriage and sexuality itself are topics rarely broached by their community, their church, or their past clergy. This view was echoed by Pastor Adams, who stated that:

there's other folks certainly who are advocates of marriage equality here in [Littletown] and . . . I think part of the thing we struggle with is really the culture of silence that I can't know where people are and then sometimes we'll assume the worst. [Littletown's] ELCA pastors seem to be well aligned with the ELCA denomination which has allowed for equality and ordination, I think, so that's positive. So I think they're kind of along but just you know over here we've got a Baptist Church up the road, and Missouri Lutheran, Wisconsin Lutheran, some ELCA congregations that I would assume are not supporting because their dominations are not supporting. I think that the other United Methodist clergy in the town are split also.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Pastor Adams:** But I'm not certain actually. I've only had a conversation with one.

**Interviewer:** Well that's interesting that you say that, you know, so it sounds like to me what you're saying is the only voices that you're hearing are the ones in favor of, because the ones who are not, are not speaking.

**Pastor Adams:** Yeah and I think that they take some status quo of their side at this point. You know the folks who oppose marriage equality have the weight of the church behind them; they don't need to speak up for the most part.

Pastor Adams' reference to a "culture of silence", or a reluctance to engage in discourse at the community level, is echoed in nearly each respondent's remarks about same-sex marriage and sexuality. Mr. C states, "it's difficult to get people together, to seriously talk about significant changes in the doctrine of the church." Ms. I describes a specific instance when she recognized how even congregation members who support Pastor Adams have remained silent:

I must tell you I went to a prior meeting about a month ago and I said across the lady... And I honestly thought she was one of these people who had been trying to get [Pastor] out of the church... you think but you don't say [anything] because you don't want to get involved with these folks. And she said to me at this meeting "Did you hear that our Pastor was leaving?" And I said "Yes, I heard at a church last Saturday night." And she said, "I was so sorry to hear that." And I said, "So was I." And she said, "He had some good ideas. He was just too soon for his time." And boy, I shouldn't judge so quickly.

The "culture of silence" is not only reinforced by opponents to maintain the UMC's current policies and attitudes, but also to allies of Pastor Adams and the overall movement.

When asked about his views on dialogue surrounding same-sex marriage, Pastor Adams' regional superintendent saw the issue rooted in concern about the moral issues surrounding homosexuality. He argued that "the issue of homosexuality in church, it's really a larger issue of sexuality in the church. We have had a hard time talking about that." Perhaps then, a resistance to the idea of same-sex marriage is as Ellison (2004) argues, that the divide over same-sex marriage itself is a larger dilemma about discussion and expression of sexuality itself. Pastor Adams addressed this:

**Interviewer:** Do you think some of that resistance comes more from a place of just reluctance to talk about sexuality in general?

**Pastor Adams:** Oh yeah. I mean there's a culture of silence around sex. I'm not really excited to talk sex you know, myself- though I'm open to people that don't want to hear about it, it's private and we respect people's privacy and that's stronger in other places around the world... [There's] stronger discourse around discussing sexuality openly and sex openly actually in other places and around the world, but the silence is pretty strong in [state].

According to both lay members and Pastor Adams, the latter holds very different views on sex, sexuality, and same-sex marriage than prior clergy at his current church have ever held. According to congregational lay members, the "culture of silence" was deeply engrained. When asked if there had ever been any discussion of LGBT individuals or same-sex marriage, Ms. D responded "Not with me. I mean in another church it was that I belonged to but not here." Responses like this were common among respondents, indicating that Pastor Adams' desire to openly discuss his views on sexuality and marriage equality strayed from the accepted cultural norm.

Some respondents didn't consider the "culture of silence" to be problematic for the acceptance of LGBT individuals into church life. One such lay member was Mr. E:

**Interviewer:** How accepting do you think the church is of not even same sex couples, just individuals who are homosexual?

**Mr. E:** I think on the whole, the church's accepting of all the homosexuals and the lesbians and probably most gays, we don't even know who they are.

**Interviewer:** But - again there's just not a - there's not a lot of conversation about that?

**Mr. E:** No, there's not much conversation.

Unlike Pastor Adams, respondents such as Mr. E did not recognize the UMC's "culture of silence" around sexuality to be harmful toward LGBT individuals. They deem the status quo as acceptable- thus rendering Pastor Adams' attempts to combat that status quo as potentially disruptive. And yet, with silence as the norm, little information is available to educate congregation members about sexuality and the lives of LGBT people.

#### Education / miseducation

Silence can create lost opportunities for education, often leading to misinformation. Pastor Adams described an encounter with a lay member of his congregation following his 2012 statement. In conversation, Pastor Adams realized that the individual's concern really was not with homosexuality but with bisexuality, and particularly the notion that this entailed having sex with multiple partners at once. As Pastor Adams described, he took this as "an opportunity to do some education" by explaining that this was not what he understood the term to mean. Here we can recognize a distinct lack of education regarding sexuality and the

understanding of what some might deem to be a basic queer-descriptive word. This incident was so evocative, that during her interview, his wife recalled the same conversation:

**Ms. B:** ...Somebody thought when he said something about bisexual people that it means a man's having a three way, like they don't know--

**Interviewer:** Yes

**Ms. B:** Yeah, they don't know what those words mean. I mean, that's kind of how uneducated they are, but then they're so closed to the idea that you can't- I don't know if you could actually probably offer a class, but I don't know who would come. They'd be afraid to show up to learn what do these terms mean, what are people talking about when they say these words?

Ms. B indicates that not only is there miseducation occurring as a result of the community's normative silence on the topic of sexuality, but that attempts to encourage proper education would be met with resistance- or perhaps evens a complete absence of attendees, as Ms. B describes. And yet, what other options exist? One participant described how she once tried to broach the topic of homosexuality in a Bible Study class, only to be met with hostility and outright rage by other lay members. I inquired about her thoughts regarding the congregation's willingness to discuss same-sex marriage:

**Interviewer:** Do you think that people want to talk about this here? Will they be willing?

**Ms. D:** Well some people would be. But I think it would get very heated. I don't know. I know what I went through in my Bible studies so...

**Interviewer:** I'm sorry that sounds like it was hard for you.

**Ms. D:** But we all have our ideas, I don't know what the answer is except for education.

Ms. D seems to echo previous statements, in that open discussion can be contentious, which can lead to a great deal of difficulty in disseminating accurate information. This study unwittingly acted as a tool for promoting that open discussion. Many respondents remarked on how they had never spoken about these topics before participating. Of her views on allowing a same-sex couple to be married within the church, Ms. D stated “that one question thrilled me. I had to think a lot about that which is good, which is okay. That’s what I said, that we need to be exposed to some of this stuff.” Simply engaging in discourse with me, (who has no UMC affiliation, but is a self-identified queer woman and feminist) was enough to cause some participants to closely examine their views on sexuality and same-sex marriage. Not change, but examine. However, this openness may not have persisted through interviews with more vocal opponents to Pastor Adams and his positions. Those lay members did not return requests for interviews; they refused to engage with me. This allows for the recognition of another factor contributing to the possible reluctance of lay members in accepting the change Pastor Adams has attempted to champion- their community appears to experience a basic lack of exposure to cultural diversity (as seen in the community’s demographic breakdown, found in Chapter three).

### Exposure

Excusing the mention of one or two “possible” individuals (as indicated by lay member respondents) the congregation in question does not currently have any “out” LGBT members. This could explain the lack of community investment in changing

the circumstances of queer UMC members, as the community has no “out” individuals to encourage such advocacy. Ms. B recognizes this fact when she states that the church is,

a very loving congregation and it has a lot of skill for helping people that are really struggling, and I think they would, I mean I think they would be surprised of themselves, if they actually got to know somebody in lesbian, transgender, bisexual queer people. I think they’d be like, ‘Oh, they’re not all that different.’ I mean, if I had to guess I would just think it’s a lack of exposure.

Much like Ms. D in response to concerns about education, Ms. B believed that simple exposure to queer-identified congregation members would foster a greater sense of acceptance and community. However, that is made difficult by the fact that this congregation does not have any members who are “out”. Again, we see the culture of silence at work, dictating a lack of exposure. Pastor Adams addressed this further:

**Interviewer:** So you don’t have any “out” parishioners right now?

**Pastor Adams:** That’s right, yeah. Yup, I know of others around the state, folks who have “out” parishioners.

**Interviewer:** But as far as this congregation specifically?

**Pastor Adams:** Yeah, not here. There are folks who have “come out” to me-

**Interviewer:** But who aren’t “out” to everyone?

**Pastor Adams:** Right but who weren’t out publicly and there’s kind of open secrets in our past. Well, before I was here we had an organist who died of AIDS. I understand and I think there was an awareness that that person was gay but it’s not something everybody has talked about it. It took me a long to find out.

**Interviewer:** Sure, that kind of silence again?

**Pastor Adams:** Yeah, that culture of silence is not helping.

The church community's culture of silence influences the inability of the congregation to gain exposure. This appears to have fostered an environment where LGBT individuals do not feel comfortable "outing" themselves. Pastor Adams explains that he has sought to act as an ally for these closeted<sup>17</sup> lay members, using his position to counsel them privately and advocate for the entire LGBT community in public. He is not the first pastor to use his social power to force discourse within the UMC, but his congregation still appears to be struggling with his particular disruption of the status quo.

#### Forced discourse

Pastor Adams claims that he wants to upset the UMC's normal state of affairs. He recognizes his position as one with influence and power, and expressed a desire to use that position to force his State Conference and the UMC as a whole into engaging in more meaningful conversation about same-sex marriage and queer inclusion. He sees the continuation of institutionalized policies as perpetuating existing inequalities. He expressed his desire to force that meaningful discourse not only by rejecting the expectation of silence but also in his decision to perform same-sex marriages. On his desire to perform a same-sex wedding, he said,

Oh it makes me sad to not have been invited to do a wedding... I think I'm positioned well to make a strong move in the politics of the United Methodist Church. I think it would make a very different statement if a complaint was brought against me than was brought about by [another pastor].

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<sup>17</sup> The act of hiding one's sexual identity, typically same-sex attraction.

It is crucial to recognize how Pastor Adams is using his understanding of his own social power (Bierstedt 1950) as a “a young and recognized leader in active ministry” to force denominational discourse encourage change. His congregation has had varied responses to that forced discourse.

#### Congregational response to Pastor Adams

Several respondents have disclosed that prior to the arrival of Pastor Adams and the reading of his “Re: Covenant of Conscience” statement in 2012, this congregation had virtually no discussion about sexuality or same-sex marriage. Interviews revealed that discussion has increased, but it has been primarily negative:

**Interviewer:** Is there much discussion, or has there been since [Pastor]’s statements?

**Ms. D:** Since [Pastor]’s statements yes there has been and a lot of the people here in the congregation, at least the ones that I have talked to are not open for it. In fact I said something about him, the minister going like the city hall or something to be married out there on open field and they were not comfortable with that. I don’t see anything wrong with it as long as it’s not in the church.

Ms. D alludes to the notion of limited acceptance, a trend found in many of this data’s themes. She describes how resistant most lay members of the congregation are to the idea of same-sex marriage. Ms. D herself, while sympathetic to many LGBT individuals’ desire to marry, struggles with the notion of allowing them to marry within the church itself. For her, marriage in a church is a hard line that LGBT individuals and their marrying clergy members cannot cross. She could not explain

why this was a hard line. Mr. E also spoke about his response to Pastor Adams' 2012 statement and his subsequent discussion forum, where he provided bible verses as support for his positions:

**Mr. E:** Oh the main thing I remember about it [the 2012 statement] was my sister who attends collegiate in [city] was at the church that day, she approved of it and after the service I told [pastor] that I totally disagreed with everything he said.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that there were many other folks who had that same reaction?

**Mr. E:** I don't know how many but there were others. We held a session explaining his side of it and gave I think lousy bible references to it. They are just, like misinterpreting the bible and I started to go off it.

**Interviewer:** Were there other folks who had that same sort of reaction that you can think of, that you spoke with?

**Mr. E:** Oh I know several people within the congregation that grit their teeth to even come to church. They're United Methodist and they maintain the same feeling I had when we had a pastor who was an alcoholic. I told them, 'I'm a member of United Methodist Church I don't believe in what you believe, and you're not my pastor'.

Mr. E had a strong negative reaction to Pastor Adams' position on same-sex marriage, which appears to have affected his assessment of Pastor Adams overall. He rejected the Pastor himself, not just his views. Nevertheless, Mr. E never displayed any open hostility or animosity toward Pastor Adams; he simply disagreed with his position on sexuality and marriage. As he states, he was not alone in that disagreement- according to a number of respondents other opponents have not necessarily been so civil. I discussed Pastor Adams' most vocal opponents within the congregation with Ms. J:

**Interviewer:** [Regarding] the folks who oppose him [Pastor Adams], do you think they have been very vocal?

**Ms I:** I guess, yeah. Because you know that, they probably always think they are right. And us, liberal-democrats don't speak up loud enough to overcome them. But they always speak louder than we do. So we just let him take it and run with it... We have to deal with it. He has been here [four] years, now we're going to talk about some of the issues, you know. He did it gently. He laid it out-- We need to be aware. We're a congregation, aren't we? We are caring people, we follow Jesus. And so, that's the same thing that happened to Jesus during the Holy Week. By the end of the week they crucified him.

**Interviewer:** You think [Pastor Adams] is being crucified?

**Ms. J:** When he gave that sermon, I said to him "I just see so many similarities," and he only looked at me. But I did, I just felt it. I felt it in every word he said. That I thought he is experiencing it, it's from his heart. He knows and I knew then, he was going. I just knew it. So, I can only say, I'm happy for him as to where he is going. I'm sad for us that he is leaving because we need consciousness raising and that was ... I can't imagine how frustrated he has been, not being able to. And so, yeah, I do think that's what happened.

Ms. J paints a powerful image of Pastor Adams crucified for his stance on marriage equality and queer inclusion in the church. Her statement appears to allude to conflict between Pastor Adams and the larger congregation as a result of that stance. None of these most vocal opponents responded to opportunities to be interviewed for this case study, which would seem to indicate their comfort with perpetuating the congregation's culture of silence.

Two interviewees, Mr. G and Ms. H remarked that even if they're still uncertain about same-sex marriage, they respect Pastor Adams for using his position and speaking out about the issue:

**Ms. H:** I think it was a hard thing to do. I don't know that everybody is feeling comfortable standing up and saying "Hey, I believe this way but the church doesn't" I mean he's taking a risk.

**Mr. G:** Absolutely.

**Ms. H:** Yeah, I respect him for it a lot.

These lay members recognize that Pastor Adams was dissenting from the larger UMC, and they commend him for it. They are not the only respondents to do so, and yet most lay members who were interviewed still cited Pastor Adams' 2012 statement as a defining moment of conflict between him and the congregation at large.

Following Pastor Adams' 2012 statement, an unknown number of lay members went so far as to contact his district superintendent to inform him of the pastor's stance- possibly in attempts to garner disciplinary action against him. The superintendent for his region at that time has since retired from his position, but once the position was filled the new superintendent also received complaints from certain members of the congregation. As Pastor Adams said in his 2012 statement "Several of our church leaders have been clear that statements like these are simply dialogue, and that our church encourages dialogue in those areas in which we disagree", we can infer that complaints to the superintendent in response to such a statement would not result in any disciplinary action. Such was the case with the complaints filed to both the former and present Conference superintendent regarding the

statement. Still, this reaction alludes once again to the strong negative reaction Pastor Adams' dissent has elicited among an indeterminate number of members of his congregation.

### **Generational concerns**

As seen in the congregation's demographic breakdown, the generational gap between laity in this congregation and Pastor Adams is significant. This gap may indicate a difference in social priorities. This disparity becomes more evident as we examine the congregation's resistance to the pastor's attempts to promote social change, which stems from a lack of understanding (Lauer 1973) fueled by a culture of silence and miseducation highlighted by the respondents. Some participants cite the differences between Pastor Adams and the congregation as political, using the term "liberal" as a descriptor for Pastor Adams. A liberal/conservative dichotomy between Pastor Adams and his lay members may indicate that the congregation associates "liberal" with "young" and "conservative" with "older". Regardless, most respondents describe generational concerns as a major contributor to the difference in social priorities. Wuthnow (2003) describes this dichotomy as one that promotes an environment of deep hostility and misgiving (p. 361). This perceived dichotomy contributed to the Littletown UMC's animosity toward Pastor Adams. However, it is important to recognize that generational difference is a subjective category, which may be used by the congregation as a crutch to create an impasse to avoid addressing deep-seeded views of heterosexism and other forms of discrimination.

The generational gap between Pastor Adams and his congregation is cited by a number of respondents as divisive. Pastor Adams is 33 while many of his lay members self-identify as "white heads". He discusses the aging congregation (and the denomination as a whole) in his interview:

**Pastor Adams:** ... We have 900 or so members on the books and we see about 180 at worship on a weekend. Our median worshipping age is 71. Yeah, I did that analysis last fall and was a little bit of surprise, I would have guessed in the lower 60s-

**Interviewer:** Oh my gosh.

**Pastor Adams:** -which is still high for the United Methodist Church. Median by the way, median clergy age in the United Methodist Church has just risen to 56 after staying steady at 55 for a long time.

According to Pastor Adams, the national average age difference between laity and clergy in the UMC is 15 years. Within this congregation, the average age difference between laity and clergy is nearly 40 years. That gap may demonstrate significant social and political differences, a claim substantiated by the fact that all ten respondents cited generational difficulties throughout the course of their interviews. Even further, respondents described a crisis of attendance at the church. They mentioned that with so many aging members, the church is experiencing a shortage of younger laity and Sunday school attendees. Many respondents described this as a congregational frustration with Pastor Adams.

### Aging population

The UMC has a high age for the average lay person (57 years) to begin with, but the congregation under study here has an even higher average (71 years). Respondents indicated that the SPRC described to their former Conference superintendent the congregation's need for a young pastor to revitalize the church- which is how Pastor Adams was placed there. All interviewed laity expressed concern over the aging population of the church, and the church's desire to attract younger members. Mr. C stated that:

**Mr. C:** Well, let's see. We are a grey-haired church and what happened several years ago, we had an associate minister that actually pulled out and took a significant number of members and started their own church. That took out the 35-45 age group which we don't have now. So, we got us some gray-haired people and some younger people, but we don't have a strong 45-50 which is eventually going to be a problem.

**Interviewer:** None of the folks have children?

**Mr. C:** Nope. There was also discussion about that we need to attract more young people. So, my discussion with [Pastor Adams] and somebody in the church, they are not here in Littletown. They are not there to be attracted. Therefore, you should serve your clientele, which are the gray-haired people.

Mr. C states that Littletown does not attract young community members. Both the town and the congregation are aging. Not only is Mr. C describing the dilemma of the aging church population, but he also appears to be indicating that Pastor Adams has not been "serving" his current congregation. This may be a point of further conflict for Pastor Adams, as he is preaching what he believes parishioners need to hear to grow as Christians, (a goal of UMC clergy) rather than what parishioners presumably want to hear. Mr. C's statement also alluded to the notion that older and younger congregations are served differently. Ms. D also describes the congregation by their lightening hair and increasing age:

**Ms. D:** Well you know there's a lot of white heads here in this congregation.

**Interviewer:** You know what? You are the third person to say that to me.

Grey hairs or white heads. What do you mean by that?

**Ms. D:** A lot of people are set in their ways, they are not willing to ... I was going to say to listen, not willing to change, so I don't know.

She recognizes the congregation's rising median age as an indication that they are reluctant to change. She's not alone. Many respondents cited the generational gap between Pastor Adams and the rest of the congregation as a source of disagreement with his opinions on sexuality and same-sex marriage. One participant, Ms. J, claims that the generational gap applies to the whole denomination and that so long as the generational difference exists, conflict over these topics will exist. She states:

**Ms. J:** ...They just have to die-off.

**Interviewer:** You're not the first person who has said that to me.

**Ms. J:** Really? I'm glad to hear people are talking about it.

**Interviewer:** There are lots of people who have said that. It surprised me because most folks seem think that people aren't going to change about this.

**Ms. J:** I don't think they are.

Ms. J argues that opponents of LGBT inclusion in the UMC need to die off in order for the change to occur. Ms. I argues the same point:

**Interviewer:** Do you think [THE UMC's language] is going to change?

**Ms I:** I don't know. It depends on if any of these old pastors died before them.

**Interviewer:** Oh, my goodness.

**Ms I:** But we do need to change. And the only change we get is death. And the change of attitude because people don't change, you know, they've got their feet set in concrete up to their knees.

### Pastoral youth

Respondents describe the congregation's desire to hire a young pastor following the retirement of their last congregational leader. However, participants also describe their

difficulty in adjusting to Pastor Adams' leadership style. By his own admission, he is young, radical, and vocal. It appears that the lay members were unprepared for such a dramatic shift to their previous pastoral experience. During the course of the study, I learned that Pastor Adams has been reassigned to a new church in his State Conference. In his interview, Mr. C linked Pastor Adams' youth and his exit from the church:

**Interviewer:** Do you think the congregation will be happier with a different pastor?

**Mr. C:** Yeah. Actually, [Pastor Adams] gives great sermons, but he came here without any experience in running the church, and so that was a big negative, you know the practical part of any church... Take my friend [name], a minister in [city]. [The SPRC] asked him what days you want. How many days you want to take off? He said 'Take off? I don't take any days off. Ministers are 24 hour position.' That's what we were used to here. So, then the new minister, the new pastors, they are more ... It is important to have more time for him off. So, that was a big change and that would have happened probably, regardless of who we would have been assigned, if that person was younger out of seminary.

According to Mr. C, this church sought out a young pastor but was not prepared for the generational differences between that Pastor Adams and the laity. He does not attribute blame, but rather argues that the congregation wasn't ready for everything that comes with a young cleric. In this case, two of the things that came with their new young pastor were dissenting views on queer inclusion and marriage. Ms. H discusses this:

**Ms. H:** We wanted somebody younger so when [previous Pastor] was, going to be reappointed ... we looked to find somebody younger and that's when [Pastor Adams]

came about and we like him, both of us do, but he got some views that don't sit well with some other people and-

**Interviewer:** Like what?

**Ms. H:** Same-sex marriage one- for the biggest one I think - but he was very open about it and he gave people opportunities to talk to him about it and he held meetings to let people know why he felt the way he did and, allowed people to give their feelings back. And I think that's really an open and good thing to do instead of just saying "It's my way or the highway" so to speak, but it's ruffled a few feathers, for better or worse, I don't know.

Again, most laity respondents cite the "marriage division" between the congregation and Pastor Adams as a generational divide. However, it's unclear if this divide has actually formed an insurmountable ideological impasse, or if respondents are simply using the generation gap as an excuse to avoid checking their own prejudice and privilege. Ms. I makes reference to the fact that Pastor Adams' public dissension from the denomination's bylaws regarding sexual orientation and marriage was not the origin of the congregation's concern:

**Interviewer:** Even before his statement, were folks uncertain about him?

**Ms I:** Yes he was too young and too hippie and you know crazy. Probably young enough to be my grandson.

Ms. I describes how Pastor Adams came to the church with a long beard and ponytail, challenging lay members' images of church leadership.

#### Generational disparity

As stated previously, every respondent cited generational concerns as a factor in disagreements between Pastor Adams and congregational laity over the issues of sexuality

and marriage. Also consistent across interviews was the belief that older generations are naturally more socially conservative. Such was the case with Ms. I:

**Interviewer:** So you think this is a generational issue?

**Ms I:** Very much.

**Interviewer:** But you don't seem to have a problem with it?

**Ms I:** No, but I was raised in a liberal family. And that was unusual in those days

**Interviewer:** You don't feel a lot of folks of your generation were raised in liberal families?

**Ms I:** No.

**Interviewer:** And now do you think it has to do about upbringing about how people feel about this?

**Ms I:** Yeah.

Also on the self-identified-liberal end of the political spectrum is Ms. J, who links the current debate over marriage to the historical debate over war in Vietnam. When asked if she believed the current topic to be a generational issue, she stated,

Yes, I do. I do. I think it is. I was an anti-war, beatnik and all the things anti-Vietnam and everything. My husband experienced ... we had bought a pharmacy, he was in pharmacy at [college], we bought a pharmacy in [city] and of course, we owed our soul to the bank. And so, here's his wife and the minister's wife starting a peace group and the banker said to my husband 'You know, you shouldn't have your wife participating in that. I have a son in Vietnam.' That was the first time I felt, like there is a power, going stabbing at my husband's heart, who would not come back to me and that makes you strong though, because you know that somebody has to speak out.

We also have some youth in the church who wanted to ... the church does embrace conscientious objection and you probably know that and so, they wanted us ... and that as the first person there because we worked with youth, they came to us to find a way. And so, that was also my first experience of a minister being afraid to do that, to sign that letter<sup>18</sup>. I had to sign it and so does he. And he did it but he didn't want anybody to know. It is a generational thing. People see now that that war was bad.

Comparing the current debate over sexuality and marriage equality to the anti-war movement places this moment on a timeline of significant United Methodist moments: slavery, the civil rights era, the anti-war movement, and now LGBT rights. Ms. J recognizes this as a significant moment of dissension, and one being championed by the next generation- much like the anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s. However, this does not align with the notion that the liberal/conservative dichotomy is generational. The liberal/conservative dichotomy within the UMC existed during the Vietnam War as much as it does today during the debate over queer inclusion and same-sex marriage. Citing the generational gap as a reason for varied social priorities is an oversimplified assessment of the struggle between Pastor Adams and the congregation, as the liberal/conservative dichotomy has been at work during many other eras in the UMC's history.

Another topic of discussion across interviews was that the generational gap contributed to a lack of awareness regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Ms. B talks about this phenomenon within the community this church resides:

**Ms. B:** I don't know exactly the demographics of Littletown, but it's a little bit older I think. And like part of the folks that we've met in [Pastor Adams'] church, some of

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<sup>18</sup> A letter from a conscientious objector, defined in the *Book of Discipline* as "...those persons who conscientiously oppose all war, or a particular war, and who therefore refuse to serve in the armed forces or to cooperate with systems of military conscription" (United Methodist Church 2012).

them are so ... they're old enough that they didn't know that gay was an option. So, folks that got married and then 10 or 15 years and then they hear about this possibility that's the first they've ever heard of it. So, there's a lot of that in the Littletown area too.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Ms. B:** So, folks who just aren't even aware of their own identity and that they can explore that which is kind of an interesting thing too. And I think we have ... the younger generations are doing, so the high schools and stuff like that, I think that's a much more ... I don't want to say accepting, but I think they're aware, there's much more awareness of difference in gender.

This speaks again to the evolution of social and cultural norms across generations. Given the prevalence of LGBT individuals in mainstream culture and the advancements in social media, the level of ignorance alluded to by Ms. B is interesting. Ideologies are changing, and exposure is evolving as a result.

### **Ideology**

The ideologies at work within this case study are not entirely representative of those at work within the UMC at large. But the belief systems of the participants, collected through interviews and coded throughout the course of the study, provide unique insight into the philosophies of understanding in this particular case.

### Upbringing

As described in the previous section, the generation and circumstances within which people come of age can have substantial impact on their relationship to social problems. Ms. B describes her childhood, which was removed from religion, with fondness. She says

“...because I didn’t grow up in the church, my whole relationship with human sexuality is very, very different because I didn’t get all the goofy weird religious messages around it growing up.” She goes on to say,

“I got social messages, but not religious messages. So, I’ve come to terms of the lot of that stuff before I joined the church and I don’t find that joining the church has changed any of that. That’s one of the places that just doesn’t... there aren’t arguments and scripture that push back on my humanistic sense of what’s going on. So, I find I really don’t have much patience for the whole thing...”

According to Ms. B, her relationship to sexuality in a social and not religious context is what offers her an “un-goofy” perspective. To put it another way, she was not raised to recognize any form of sexuality as “incompatible with Christian teaching”, as others in this study were. She was raised with a secular discussion of sexuality. Other participants with a theological perspective on sexuality and marriage appear to have different ideological positions than Ms. B.

### Theology

The UMC is not an evangelical<sup>19</sup> denomination; as such they have a different relationship to the Bible than other Christian denominations. The majority of the UMC’s teachings come from *The Book of Discipline*. Yet several respondents refer to scripture (in varying degrees) in response to defining and understanding marriage equality. Mr. E even goes so far as to criticize Pastor Adams’ interpretation of sympathetic biblical passages. He argues:

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<sup>19</sup> A denomination with four primary characteristics: conversionism, or a born-again experience; activism, or expression of the gospel in social reform efforts; Biblicism, or a high regard for obedience to the word of the Bible; and crucicentrism, or a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the redeemer of humanity (Bebbington, 1989).

**Mr. E:** I think a lot of people interpret the bible how they want to interpret [it]. It can be done, and I had a statement there that, chocolate comes from cocoa. Cocoa comes from a tree. Then, chocolate is a plant. And so chocolate is a salad.

**Interviewer:** Do you think [Pastor] has done that about this? About this topic?

**Mr. E:** I honestly feel, yes. Because, when he had that class or that meeting with fellows who kind of wanted to talk to about it. That, he gave references in the bible. The references he gave in the bible did not say the way he interpreted it. I absolutely could not find any way that the bible says, that God accepts same-sex marriage. I am fully in agreement with same-sex union, but not in marriage. Marriage is between a man and a woman.

For this respondent, the term “marriage” has theological ramifications that are irreconcilable with same-sex relationships. Wuthnow describes a common conservative, or fundamental Christian, argument against religious liberalism as “[scorning] the fuzziness, the marshmallow convictions, the inclusiveness that makes membership meaningless- the ‘anything goes’ attitude that views even Scripture as relative” (2003, p. 361). Mr. E shows distaste for Pastor Adams’ “liberal” interpretation of Scripture. Despite the UMC’s reliance on *The Book of Discipline* rather than the Bible, other respondents cite these same theological ramifications. A UMC lay member’s closer relationship to scripture could also be generational, as Ms. J states:

**Interviewer:** So, you think the younger generations are looking more critically at the Bible and looking more critically at these passages...?

**Ms. J:** I don’t know if they’re looking critically at the Bible because I am not sure they know the Bible. We hope that in Sunday school, but if I sit here and say, they’re

studying the Bible, I don't think so. I think that they just are learning to love one another.

**Interviewer:** It's just becoming more socially acceptable?

**Ms. J:** Socially acceptable. The other thing is our world is smaller... And so, I do believe there's hope.

Mr. E is concerned about what he believes to be an inclination toward haphazard interpretation of scripture, which he described as "[interpreting] it how you want to", allowing the interpreter can skew the meaning of the passage. He believes this has happened with Pastor Adams' interpretation of scripture pertaining to marriage. Ms. J muses that perhaps the new theological inclination is not to learn scripture, but to just learn to love. It is worth recognizing, however, that as a denomination, the UMC does have a very strict set of ideologies (including how to interpret scripture) laid out in both *The Book of Discipline* and *The Book of Resolutions*.

#### Denominational ideology

The most exclusionary language on homosexuality and same-sex marriage can be found in *The Book of Discipline*. However, this is also where you find information on how to be welcoming to persons, regardless of race, class, sexual orientation, etc. As previous scholars and current participants of this study have remarked, the language in *The Book of Discipline* is extremely discordant. Superintendent F spoke about the passage prohibiting clergy from performing same-sex unions:

**Interviewer:** So let's talk a little bit about what is in *The Book of Discipline* regarding homosexuality, what about the language specifically relating to same-sex or same-gender weddings? What is in *The Book of Discipline* about that?

**Superintendent F:** That language was added not long ago... maybe three General Conferences ago, something like that- [It said] that no pastor could perform a same-sex wedding or same-sex union, either one, union or weddings, it's pretty clear, it's pretty exclusive, there's not much way around it.

In other words, within the past fifteen years, the UMC has added more exclusionary language into *The Book of Discipline* regarding homosexuality and the performance of same-sex marriages, while other religious institutions (Metropolitan Community Church, Unitarian Universalist, the United Church of Christ, Conservative Judaism, etc.) Protestant and otherwise have adopted more inclusive language. Mr. G and Ms. H discuss the UMC's exclusionary policies:

**Mr. G:** Well, that's way it supposed to be-- the Methodist Church is supposed to be open arms, open doors, open minds.

**Ms. H:** Open hearts.

**Mr. G:** Hearts.

**Ms. H:** Yeah, well.

**Mr. G:** Should be open minds.

**Ms. H:** It is, open hearts, minds and doors.

**Mr. G:** Well, now you're back to that, it depends on who we talk to unfortunately 'cause people can be open-minded, only they can say they are but if you hit the wrong subject or the wrong person, the door go shut.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that happens around this topic?

**Mr. G:** Yes, I do. I can't put a number on the frequency but, yes, I know it does-- and names that come to mind.

Mr. G and Ms. H seem to recognize a disconnect between the UMC's welcoming ideology and the exclusionary language and practice of United Methodists in discussing sexuality and marriage. Pastor Adams speaks of the same disconnect. These may speak to larger denominational concerns related to the organization and governance of the institution.

### **Denominational concerns**

The sprawling global presence of the UMC juxtaposed with its institutionalized policies of universality and essentialism<sup>20</sup> call into question the sustainability of the denomination. Pastor Adams calls for a broader set of epistemological guidelines, which would allow the denomination to continue growing globally while encouraging culturally specific, -rather than essentialist- interpretations of scripture and discipline. Such guidelines would allow State Conferences, or even local churches, to decide themselves whether or not they should perform same-sex marriages.

### Local agency

The institutionalized bureaucracy of the UMC does not lend itself well to change at the local level. Wuthnow (1989) describes how the organization promotes discourse while still protecting itself from change. First, the structure of the UMC maintains itself so long as routinized mechanisms assist in protecting and disseminating the status quo. An example of a routinized mechanism would be the cyclical debate at General Conference. Second, we see that universality and essentialism are indoctrinated through the institution's governmental structure and political processes. This universality is apparent in the UMC's singular model of interpreting scripture, with no allowances for cultural diversity. And finally, the UMC governmental system discourages individual pastors from promoting social change by

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<sup>20</sup> The idea that there is something which transcends cultural and experiential difference, that there are essential characteristics we are able to ascribe to individuals or situations.

making the General Conference the only body with the power to create or alter governing documents. And yet, Pastor Adams is choosing to work both inside and outside the UMC's established routes. In his interview, he stated,

I think we shouldn't put all of our investment in legislative change. I think that the most important change will come to both legislative change and cultural change at the local level. It's a lot easier to carry the flag of you know "eliminate the incompatibility clause" but if that were out, you know, Littleton will still be Littleton. I might have the legal ability to conduct the wedding but there would be the same resistance among the individuals who resist. A policy change wouldn't change a lot there so we need to both be working on that legislative change which might happen in 2016 or 2020 or 2024 whenever, but also in establishing communities that both support that change and actually embrace people.

Pastor Adams has engaged in the UMC's institutionalized mechanisms of dialogue. He has also used his individual resources to address the topics of queer inclusion and marriage equality within the context of his own congregation, where he should hold a great deal of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). And yet, through examining the data collected through interviews with lay members of his congregation and his superintendent, it becomes clear that Pastor Adams has actually lost a great deal of his social capital and power (at the local level) since his 2012 statement. This will be discussed in the "Outcomes of Dissension" section.

Given the near imperviousness of the UMC's overall legislative process, is it possible that local efforts for change will have any impact? Pastor Adams believes so. He argues that

such forums may be the only way voices can actually be heard, and possibly the only way minds and hearts can be changed:

**Pastor Adams:** My superintendent is hosting a series of conversations around this and over the next month and a half in our district. So this will be chances that the people of [state], Clergy and Laity can come together and have some conversation and hear from one another and that's more possible in [state] and even more possible within a local church or a community than it is for the church as a whole denomination worldwide and when we can't hear from each other, when we can't sit down and understand where we're coming from, it makes it harder to come to any kind of consensus understanding.

**Interviewer:** Sure.

**Pastor Adams:** So that's one of the difficulties at General Conference.

#### Discourse -Vs- action

As the existing literature indicates, the UMC has a high threshold for entertaining dissenting lines of discourse. The statements of participants of this case study corroborate this argument. These dissensions may question church bylaws, even seeking to change those bylaws through the organization's legislative boss, the General Conference. Such dissension is acceptable, expected even. The institution is meant to withstand such attempts at change, while lasting change rarely comes to fruition. It is dissenting action that cannot be tolerated. The UMC's governmental system is such that conversation cycles routinely, making the implementation of change difficult. Mr. G and Ms. H discuss this cycle:

**Interviewer:** So do you think in 2016 when the General Conference gets back together that they're going to change the language about same-sex marriage?

**Ms. H:** We can only hope. I don't know.

**Mr. G:** See, [you bring] up the subject of homosexuality within the church, and same-sex- that all runs into one thing and you've got two definite thoughts on it.

**Ms. H:** And nothing gets-

**Mr. G:** And nothing really happens and it gets-

**Ms. H:** That's going to, how, what is happening in 2016...

**Mr. G:** Push it in the back and we'll talk about it next year.

**Ms. H:** Well, that's what happened in 2012.

**Mr. G:** Well, I understand that and it'll come up again this year, I know it will.

**Ms. H:** Yeah, so now we got four– We've been four years in the making and it would be nice if they did make some changes, I think.

These lay members recognize the UMC's mechanized systems of maintaining the status quo, just as Pastor Adams does. They would see this issue change, though it is not clear if that is possible through the current legislative process. Action, such as Pastor Adams' desire to perform a same-sex marriage and engage in a dissenting action, likely bearing a just resolution, may be the only way.

### **Outcomes of dissension**

There is no doubt that Pastor Adams' dissension from the UMC on the matters of human sexuality and marriage equality has had measurable consequences. Since his 2012 statement, lay members cite his continued decline in social and political capital within the congregation. Many churchgoers refused to work with him, which has weakened his position of power. Lay members no longer value their relationship with Pastor Adams in the same way, indicating a loss of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Interviews have revealed a loss in

church members. Responses have also revealed that lay members of the church cite a strong correlation between Pastor Adams' stance on sexuality and marriage equality and his departure from the congregation. While he has not yet performed a same-sex marriage, if the opportunity arises and he does so, he would be endangering his livelihood. Charges may be brought against him for violating *The Book of Discipline*, and he could lose his credentials as a United Methodist elder.

### Loss of social capital

As discussed previously, possession of social capital is predicated on the recognition and value of a relationship. Social capital, and the capacity for social power, is embedded within networks of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 249). When Pastor Adams' congregation stopped valuing their relationship with him, he began to lose his influence. Many lay members made reference to Pastor Adams' loss of social and political capital following his 2012 statement. They stated:

**Ms. B:** if [Pastor Adams] has an idea, it's not a good idea, clearly he wants to destroy the church ... and it's just gotten stronger and stronger. So he's lost all his leadership capital, in terms of the folks who actually will participate leadership, right?

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**Mr. C:** And I did a sort of SPRC committee and that was prior to [Pastor], I was going to the Conference. I went to the explicit demonstration for gay-lesbian, whatever. I talked to [Pastor] quite a bit after that. My term was "[Pastor], you should have talked to us before your time is on." So, I excused myself from SPRC committee.

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**Ms I:** I know when [Pastor] came here he was not here very long and he talked in front of his service about the homosexual community that we need to be more welcoming or, you know, I guess welcoming is the word. And then as we found at the sanctuary I said to him "This is the first time I've ever heard the word homosexuality coming from the pulpit and I want to thank you." And he said, "You're going to hear more of that." Well, we did. And as we did I noticed that the esteem for him was going down.

Even more than capital, these respondents appear to be making reference to Pastor Adams' loss of social power. His decision to act as an ally for LGBT individuals produced a decline in his influence over his congregation. Whatever their reasons for disagreeing with his stance, be they generational, theological, or otherwise, a number of his congregation simply stopped viewing him as their pastor, seemingly stripping him of the ability to lead.

#### Loss of cooperation

Even more than a lack of influence, following "outing" himself as an ally and making his dissent public, Ms. B describes an environment where certain lay members actively seek to derail Pastor Adams' leadership. Thus he was losing his social power, and being actively antagonized. He did not allude to this consequence in his interview, but his wife, Ms. B spoke about the alienation here:

**Interviewer:** And you think [Pastor Adams] has received pushback from his attempts to talk about this [same-sex marriage]?

**Ms. B:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. I do--

**Interviewer:** Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

**Ms. B:** Well, one of the reasons we're leaving is because the church stopped working with [Pastor] and a huge part of that was one church member who agrees with [Pastor] on full inclusion of GLBTQ people in the life of the church and the life of the world, and all of that, and he felt like it was a poor political decision and leadership decision on [Pastor]'s part to make the statement [Pastor] made. And he has done nothing, but try to stop everything [Pastor] does since that point, like because he feels like it might split the church, or divide people, or it makes people in the community talk about me. I don't know what they mean by that, but like it sounds like there's rumors that go flying around, like you got a gay pastor that's one of the rumors apparently turned out that [Pastor]'s gay because he likes gay people and then I'm his beard<sup>21</sup>.

Ms. B describes how the conflict went so far as to insinuate that Pastor Adams was in fact a gay man, and she was merely a decoy to hide his sexuality. This accusation implies that being gay man is something one must hide, seeming to reflect a community belief that being gay is inherently negative. This distrust in the motivation of allies is not uncommon, though many would consider it hurtful. According to Ms. B, her husband doesn't give these rumors a second thought. He's too concerned with trying to serve his congregation and promote lasting social change, made all the more difficult by attempts of individual lay members determined to derail all his efforts (be they related to his dissension or not).

#### Loss of members and pastoral reassignment

Participants of this study have cited Pastor Adams' views on sexuality and marriage as a factor in the departure of both laity and clergy from this congregation. This section will

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<sup>21</sup> Term used to describe a companion who is used to hide one's sexuality.

not seek to determine causation for those departures, but instead to highlight explanations offered by the statements of interview participants.

*Congregational departure*

Throughout the course of this case study, laity referenced the loss of other church members as a result of Pastor Adams' 2012 statement and his clerical dissension on the topics of sexuality and marriage equality. Mr. E describes the situation in his interview:

**Mr. E:** We're an older congregation and I know some people I would classify as very religious people won't be...they left their church because of the pastor's stand.

**Interviewer:** So there are some folks who left after?

**Mr. E:** Oh definitely.

Mr. G and Ms. H also remark on this exodus, including an estimation of how many members have been lost as a result of Pastor Adams' stance:

**Interviewer:** Have you lost any members as a result of [Pastor]'s stance on this issue that you can think of?

**Ms. H:** Yes.

**Mr. G:** Yeah.

**Ms. H:** Maybe what, half a dozen, maybe...

**Mr. G:** That'd be a fair number.

If we infer that these six members belong to Pastor Adams' estimation of 180 member average weekend worshippers, then the loss doesn't appear to be terribly significant. If we pull those six members from the church's roughly 800 members, it becomes even less significant. Yet, the respondents deemed the loss significant enough to report, so it must have made some type of an impact on the congregation. Pastor Adams stated that the church has

seen a decline in membership in recent years, so it's possible that even a small number of departures could indicate a serious concern.

### *Pastor's departure*

Throughout the course of this study, I learned that Pastor Adams was reassigned to a new church, which happens to be a member of the Reconciling Ministries Network. This was disclosed by Pastor Adams in his interview, and discussed by many lay members in their statements. Superintendent F also contributed to this study's understanding of that departure. The opinions are varied as to how much of the reassignment can be attributed to his 2012 statement and clerical dissension. However, all respondents cited this as at least partially responsible for the move, including Pastor Adams:

**Interviewer:** Do you think that your willingness to go out on this topic is one of the reasons why you're leaving this church?

**Pastor Adams:** It may be a minor contributor. I know that I lost a lot of leadership capital among some people when I made my statement that I would do weddings, and I know that there's folks who are not still present and real. I know there's other though, for whom that's only one point among a whole handful of liberal, social and political economic views that I have. So I think that, but I don't think that's a major driver of why I might leave this place.

Pastor Adams cites his dissension as only a minor contributor to his move in churches. He appears to downplay what lay members have reported in their interviews- opponents within the congregation stripped him of his capital. This says nothing about Pastor Adams' ability to lead a congregation; instead it would seem to speak to the congregation's unwillingness to follow him. He displayed a desire to lead the laity to a new understanding of sexuality and

marriage, but they refused to follow him. He described that breakdown in leadership as a minor contributor to his departure; this despite the fact that his own wife describes how the church members simply “stopped working with [him]”. This may be a moment of imperfect allyship (Reynolds, 2010) in which Pastor Adams is choosing to maintain the “culture of silence” he alluded to previously by deemphasizing the strain his dissension placed on his relationship with the congregation. Pastor Adams’ opinions about the reason for his departure were discussed in other interviews, with his permission. His wife, Ms. B, appeared to have similar views about the reasons behind their leaving. When asked further about her opinion on their departure from the congregation, despite her previous statements, she responded:

**Interviewer:** When I asked [Pastor] about how you thought you were going to be moving churches, I asked, “Do you think that it has to do with this issue?” He thought about it and he said “You know what, maybe partially, but I don’t think that’s the main reason.” Do you agree with that?

**Ms. B:** I do actually agree with him because I think the main issue is not so much that the leadership on the committees are the people who are most opposed to him being here. It’s that we don’t have enough diverse, I mean we don’t have other leaders to call. The church is dying and there are no leaders. So it’s a combination of an inability to find new leaders and to raise new leaders to fill out enough leadership skill that and so then, our strong leaders are people that have decided not to work with [Pastor] I think on this particular issue...

Ms. B also deemphasizes the role Pastor Adams’ dissension played in his difficulty with the congregation. Unfortunately, I cannot state definitively if they are both assisting in maintaining the oppressive system (McIntyre, 2002) by downplaying the significance of this

breakdown, or if they genuinely recognize it as minor factor in their departure from the congregation. Ms. B agrees with lay respondents that the Littletown Church's lay leaders have refused to work with Pastor Adams, but she claims that a lack of new lay leadership is the largest contributor to their departure. Despite her argument that Pastor's stances on homosexuality and marriage inclusion are not a major factor in their withdrawal, from her description I recognize the following: (1) The lay leaders of the church have decided (due in part, if not primarily in response to his clerical dissension) not to work with Pastor Adams, effectively barring him from acting as leader of the congregation. (2) Pastor Adams struggles in serving his congregation, possibly becoming unhappy in his placement. (3) Both the church lay leaders and Pastor Adams agree it is time for a change.

Superintendent F also contributed to the discussion about Pastor Adams' departure, but his responses were limited due to the confidential nature of his work with the church's SPRC. I recognize him as an imperfect ally because of the circumstances of his position and privilege within the UMC. He has similar views to that of both Pastor Adams and Ms. B regarding their departure. In fact, despite his claim that numerous congregational opponents of Pastor Adams following his 2012 statement contacted him, Superintendent F claims that Pastor Adams' views on sexuality and marriage have little to nothing to do with his exit from the church. Instead, he recognizes the denomination's trends in reassignment as the primary reason for the departure:

**Interviewer:** [Pastor] is leaving [church]. Does that have anything to do with his stance on his issue?

**Superintendent F:** That is a good question, there are some things about that process that I can't share that is all confidential between me and the committee and [Pastor],

but at this point I wouldn't say that is a driving factor in it at all. I think it's more a matter of our way of making pastoral appointments and pastors serving churches. Our long-standing practice was that every pastor moves every year not in every other year. A lot of churches show that history in their pastoral record.

So most Methodists are fairly used to having pastors who move frequently. We have had four successful Bishops which is now over twenty years because all of them served at least two terms, so one of them close to 30 years actually now in which the encouragement for pastors seat longer has always been there like five to twelve years [Pastor Adams] has been there now, let's see, this is his fourth year.

This indicates that trends in UMC pastoral appointments may also have contributed to Pastor Adams' departure from this congregation, though how significant that contribution may have been remains unclear.

Despite Superintendent F's claim that Pastor Adams' dissension was not a deciding factor in his reappointment, interviews with laity have revealed that the church's SPRC was involved (how involved remains unclear) in communication with Superintendent F in order to remove Pastor Adams from service at the church. The status of that request still remains unclear, but Ms. H describes the SPRC's involvement briefly in her interview:

**Ms. H:** Well, a few people had gone above [Pastor Adams] to our district superintendent to voice their opinions on how they felt. He should be removed from the church.

**Interviewer:** As a result of his stance on this issue? Do you think his stance on this issue has to do with him leaving?

**Ms. H:** Not completely. I'm on the Staff Parish Relations Committee that was involved with that so I can't say, but I can say it's not-- that's not the majority of the reason why [he's leaving]. I don't like to get our committee in trouble.

**Interviewer:** No, that's not my intention. I just – When I heard that he was going to be leaving it sort of put up a flag for me, I was wondering, why.

**Ms. H:** The mutual agreement between our committee supporting the church and his wishes. He felt that he's done a lot of good here, and I think he has, and he just feels that he can do a lot more good in another place.

The circumstances of the events as described by Ms. H certainly have the potential to be related, though the extent of the relationship is unclear from her statement. Another respondent, Mr. E goes a bit further, claiming that the SPRC did in fact directly request that Pastor Adams be removed from service, though he appears to cite a different reason for the complaint:

**Mr. E:** ...I have no idea what they did [the SPRC] - they requested a leave [for Pastor Adams]–

**Interviewer:** If you had to guess what would you say? If you're not comfortable that's-

**Mr. E:** I'm not real sure. He wasn't what we hoped for when he came here.

**Interviewer:** What does that mean?

**Mr. E:** We were looking for a younger pastor that would relate to the young people, [Pastor] does not relate to the young people.

**Interviewer:** You're looking for a pastor who would bring young people into the congregation?

**Mr. E:** Yeah, and work with them. He is aloof I think to the young people. I honestly think probably where he's going, but I don't know that, the church, and I always said that he would be more liberal for, but I don't know that 'cause I don't know that church.

Rather than his views on sexuality and marriage, Mr. E initially struggles to name the nature of the SPRC complaint against Pastor Adams, settling on a failure to recruit and retain young church members. He was not the only respondent to describe this perceived failure, but he is the only respondent who claimed it as grounds for removal from service. In fact, he seems uncertain describing the nature of the SPRC's complaint, only confident in the fact that Pastor Adams "wasn't what we hoped for when he came here". Whatever reason cited by the SPRC for their correspondence with Superintendent F, both Ms. H and Mr. E make appear to indicate that Pastor Adams and the SPRC parted amicably, with both parties looking to end the relationship.

Ms. J describes a clear relationship to Pastor Adams' 2012 statement and his looming departure from the congregation. She claims that his exit is a direct result of the congregation's response:

**Interviewer:** Well, is far as [Pastor] leaving, why do you think that that is?

**Ms. J:** Because he experienced hate.

**Interviewer:** As a result of talking about this issue?

**Ms. J:** I do. The day he did that, two men stood right up. I always sit in the back and the guys sit in the back when I worked here, I was always late because it would be teaching, after Sunday school and everything and so, I'm sitting about the 4<sup>th</sup> row from the back and I saw 2 people stand right away. I know the one, yeah, that don't

surprise me. The other, no, but what are they going to do? Are they going to shout out? They stood for a long time and then, they walked out and then, the little woman ... the woman didn't stand up. She just laughed afterwards and was very angry and she goes down to the [church] now. The [church] in the south part of town. The two men stayed away for a long time.

**Interviewer:** Are they back now?

**Ms. J:** Yeah. They're back, but for a while ... listen to this, if they knew he's going to be gone they'd be here. So he experienced very deep hatred.

Ms. J's read of the situation goes far beyond the notion that lay members took away Pastor Adams' leadership capital. She goes on to insinuate that opponents of his views actively hated him, and treated him accordingly. Hatred is a strong force, and if Pastor Adams was met with that force it certainly could have contributed to his leaving the church.

A few respondents were silent in regard in their feelings about Pastor Adams and Ms. B's departure from the community, but despite any other remarks, most indicated that he was an excellent preacher, and they would miss them both. Mr. E appeared to sum up the congregation's feeling on the subject, saying, "All I know is that I know those who are extremely sad he's leaving and those who are happy he is going."

### **An uncertain future**

Pastor Adams is leaving this congregation, but he says his work as a dissenting UMC pastor isn't over. He is heading to a church that belongs to the Reconciling Ministries Network. This may indicate an increase in LGBT-identified lay members, which may present him with the opportunity to perform a same-sex marriage. That action would still have consequences for him within the denomination.

### Livelihood

Pastor Adams has described his “call” to ministry, as well as his call to act as an ally for LGBT individuals and all disenfranchised peoples through his role as a Pastor. However, his position within the UMC is still a job. We can recognize through the interviews that Pastor Adams’ dissension relates to his ability to function in his position. It is arguable that this dissension has had a negative effect on that very ability. Furthermore, should he ever actually perform a same-sex marriage, he will be placing his livelihood on the line. He describes his feelings about that here:

**Pastor Adams:** So yeah I’m open to that but I’m also thinking another clergy, so one of the questions comes up if I am invited to do a wedding, would I tell the Bishop, would I allow the Bishop to find out you know? Telling the Bishop makes it a lot harder to deny you’ve done it later you know if that’s an angle you want to take. I push forward to go to trial because that brings greater awareness and pressure across the denomination. So all of these are also questions I have to ask of the couple’s wedding I’m doing. How public do you want this to be, there could be pressures from the denomination, if something will go to trial, you could be called as a witness, that wouldn’t be a fun experience.

**Interviewer:** Well this is your livelihood. This is your job.

**Pastor Adams:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** In addition to being you know your spiritual calling, this is how you-

**Pastor Adams:** Right.

**Interviewer:** -support, or at least partially support your family?

**Pastor Adams:** Yeah, I take that seriously... But it's not worth working in a system that's doing harm to people that I'm not working to change. At this point I don't think I could stay in the United Methodist Church if I weren't working to change it.

Despite the dangers associated with his dissent, Pastor Adams claims he cannot ignore the UMC's exclusionary language and practices. He is willing to stake his livelihood on the future he hopes to shape, even if it means the UMC brings charges against him.

### Potential charges

UMC clergy members are not permitted to perform any same-sex union (whether it is defined as marriage or not) under threat of having charges being brought against them. As stated previously, chargeable offenses for clergy are offenses which may result in charges from the State or General Conference, including but not limited to: being brought to trial, suspension, and involuntary termination (The United Methodist Church, 2012, p. 656; Tuell, 2009). In his 2012 statement "Re: Covenant of Conscience", in his interview for this case study, and in numerous other statements, Pastor Adams has expressed his desire to defy the UMC's governing language regarding same-sex marriage in spite of the threat of charges. He discusses this desire:

**Interviewer:** Would you be comfortable performing a same-sex marriage?

**Pastor Adams:** I would, I'm eager to. I recognize that I would have some apprehension recognizing that it would be in violation and I would share that with the couple that was interested in being married but I'm eager to. I tried to make that known to folks who may know folks who need a pastor.

He added later "I would have a little anxiety because of the provision of the United Methodist Church but aside from that [I would be comfortable]." Pastor Adams hopes not

only to perform the marriage of a same-sex couple, but also to use his position (social power) in that event as an opportunity to force his UMC Conference into a new, more productive line of dialogue.

Pastor Adams is not alone in his decision to defy the UMC and have potential charges brought against him. He and his wife, Ms. B, have had many conversations about his call to dissension. They both appear to be aligned ideologically with the meaning of these actions. Though she expresses her pride and love for him, she also expressed some concern during her interview:

**Interviewer:** Tell me about being married to this guy who is doing something that he is really passionate about, something he feels called to do?

**Ms. B:** ... It is frightening in the sense that there could be, I mean I'm not okay. So, out in [state] I know pastors who've received death threats because if they say things in the pulpit that somebody disagrees with, we've never received something like that, here in [state], it's less like they'll send you death threats when you say things that are not very ... that are controversial... I'm not too worried about you know, going up on charges or whatever. I am actually worried about as I think about it, because people who've gone through [say] it's a really horrifyingly, difficult experience because of the lawyers and all that and it's really long-term and you're in the news and various other things.

And so, I'm not really excited about that. If it were to happen... I don't know what our stand would be for something like that, but we're totally willing to do it. I mean because it needs to be done and we're tough enough to get through it. So you know and-- I think one of the things is, I'm very proud of [Pastor Adams], very, very, very

proud of him, I mean I just love him deeply, so as long as he's not harming himself, I'm happy that he's doing this.

Ms. B is also looking forward to their move to a new city and the Reconciling congregation that awaits them there. From her interview, she appears very supportive of Pastor Adams' ministry and his dissension, even if she still harbors fears about some of the unknown consequences.

I also spoke with Superintendent F in regard to Pastor Adams' 2012 statement, and what possible consequences would be, should his dissent evolve from discourse (i.e. statements) to action (i.e. performing a marriage). He was very open to discussing the events that would follow:

**Interviewer:** So from what I understand- [Pastor Adams], when he made the statement he told his previous superintendent as well as the Bishop and informed both of them, that he was open and willing to perform same-sex marriages. What are your thoughts on that?

**Superintendent F:** On that my thoughts are 'I understand where you are coming from . . . but, however, you know *The Book of Discipline* and the possible ramifications from that and just know that of you did perform the same-sex marriage and I was a part of it, if I was aware of it then there would be some investigations, there will be a time in which charges could be filed against you. What the results of those charges would be I can't tell you.'

I don't know that has been asked versus the [name] situation, would that apply again, would the same things happen? My response is, probably not. As the Bishop would say, 'every case is handled individually', that sort of thing.

The “[name] situation” was a recent instance when charges were brought against a UMC clergy member who performed a same-sex marriage. He did not lose his credentials but was rebuked by a just resolution filed by his State Conference’s Bishop and cabinet.

Superintendent F is very clear to indicate that he would be required to take action against Pastor Adams, stating, “if I was a part of it, if I was aware of it” indicating that possibly charges could be avoided if Pastor Adams were discrete about the performance of these marriages. However, discretion seems unlikely given Pastor Adams’ desire to force discussion through performing such marriage.

### *Returning to the Research Questions*

In this section, I describe the findings of the study as they relate to the original set of four research questions.

#### **Why is the UMC resisting change when American society at large is altering its views on same-sex marriage?**

Despite its reputation in the United States as a liberal Protestant denomination (Joyner, 2007) the UMC is still resisting queer inclusion and same-sex marriage. The UMC’s resistance to changing the exclusionary policies in *The Book of Discipline* in regard to homosexuality and same-sex marriages can be recognized both at the global and the local levels, though the motivation for resistance differs. Globally, the UMC resists change because of the institution’s method of discourse and ability to withstand dissent (Wuthnow, 1989). Locally, resistance appears motivated by a lack of understanding and an opposition to having views forced upon individuals or a community (Lauer, 1973).

Globally, the UMC employs routinized mechanisms of discourse to guide General Conference debates back toward the status quo (Wuthnow, 1989). These mechanisms of discourse are compounded with the UMC’s global membership, leading to cultural and social

disparities. Homosexuality and the inclusion of queer individuals in social and religious life has become increasingly more acceptable in American culture in recent years, but the UMC is a global denomination, and this shift toward acceptance is not happening everywhere. Such is the case in the continent of Africa, where the UMC is growing in record numbers. The United States Supreme Court ruling striking down same-sex marriage bans in each American state (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015) has the potential to draw further attention to the cultural disparity within the UMC's global membership. The current governmental model may be deemed incapable of satisfying the cultural demands of the denomination's members, and thus declared unsustainable as the global UMC population grows. As the UMC adds members from States where discrimination against LGBT individuals is deemed more acceptable than in America, and thus continues to support exclusionary policies, the UMC may lose its reputation as a progressive Protestant denomination within the United States. Resistance to changing the language about queer inclusion and same-sex marriage also occurs at the local level, as seen in Littletown.

Locally, in this congregation, resistance to change stems from a lack of understanding for the need for the change and a resentment of Pastor Adams forcing his views upon the community (Lauer, 1973). Respondents included in this study cite a number of reasons for the congregation's resistance, including but not limited to: the UMC's "culture of silence", generational differences between Pastor Adams and the congregation (perceived as a liberal/conservative difference), and a lack of education and exposure. The most prominent theme across all interviews was that of the age difference between Pastor Adams and the Littletown UMC laity. Several participants indicated an inherent dichotomy between his young, "liberal" views and the congregation's old, "conservative" views. They described this

as a cause of conflict, describing many lay members' strong negative reactions to Pastor Adams breaking the accepted "culture of silence" and forcing the congregation to engage with his views about queer inclusion. However, the argument that this conflict between Pastor Adams and the congregation can be reduced to a generational gap is over-simplistic, possibly used as a crutch to avoid doing the work of unpacking other sources of discord. The notion that different generations produce specific political views (i.e. liberal, conservative, etc.) is an over-simplified explanation of this congregation's resistance to Pastor Adams' leadership and his views on queer inclusion and same-sex marriage. The liberal/conservative divide is not specific to this topic, nor is it specific to this moment in time. Wuthnow writes that,

"the battle between religious conservatives and religious liberals is subject to its environment. A deep cultural ravine appears to separate the two communities. Whether this ravine can be bridged depends on raising it from obscurity, bringing it into consciousness, and recognizing the surrounding contours on which these efforts must rest" (2003, p. 371).

This congregation used liberal/conservative and young/old dichotomies to create a perceived insurmountable divide between Pastor Adams and laity. This divide was used along with the threat of trauma (Lauer 1973) to resist Pastor Adams' opinions on inclusion and marriage equality. However, through Wuthnow (2003), I argue that the issue need not have been as divisive as the congregation's laity suggest.

While the UMC as an institution has exclusionary language toward homosexual individuals and does not allow clergy to perform same-sex marriages, it is important to recognize that not all UMC congregations are opposed to queer inclusion and same-sex marriage. I recognize the Reconciling Ministries Network as a collection of UMC churches in open opposition to the denomination's exclusionary policies. Why doesn't the Littletown

UMC ascribe to these same views? According to several respondents, the Littletown UMC congregation is in agreement with *The Book of Discipline*'s policies, but this could have as much to do with the culture of the town as it does with the UMC's language. Littletown is a small Midwestern community with an aging population. Ms. I described how when she moved back after living in a larger city, she was told by her sister to "Keep your liberal views to yourself because they won't like it if you don't." Once again, we recognize the implication of a liberal/conservative dichotomy in the community as a perceived cause of conflict. Ms. I indicated that liberal views (such as support for the inclusion of LGBT individuals and same-sex marriage) were unpopular in Littletown, and could lead to her being ostracized. I suggest that Pastor Adams was thus ostracized due to the congregation's resistance to his views and resistance to his desire to promote change (Lauer, 1973). I recognize that the congregation's reaction to Pastor Adams was likely affected not only by the UMC's language but also the culture of Littletown.

### **What is the experience of a dissenting clergy member?**

For the purposes of this case study, a dissenting clergy member is an ordained elder in the UMC who diverges from the denominational bylaws regarding homosexuality and the performance of same-sex marriage. These clergy members use their positions and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to express their beliefs. This case study focused on Pastor Adams, a dissenting UMC cleric looking to force meaningful dialogue to eradicate the denomination's exclusionary policies toward homosexual-identified individuals. He is an ally to the LGBT community and demonstrates his allyship in his willingness to violate the UMC's bylaw barring clergy from performing same-sex unions. He performs this dissent under the threat of charges from the UMC, which could end in the loss of his church, credentials as an elder, and

pension. This threat extends to all UMC clergy who seek to, or have already violated the denomination's bylaws on same-sex marriage. Pastor Adams' experience speaks to the experience of all UMC clergy members who share his dissenting views.

Pastor Adams also demonstrates his dissent by refusing to accept the UMC's "culture of silence" around topics of human sexuality. While this dissent does not exist under the threat of charges, it does have other social and political ramifications.

### **How does that dissension affect the relationship with Pastor Adams' parishioners?**

Dissension from the UMC's written (and unwritten) policies regarding human sexuality elicit various responses from a pastor's congregation. In the case of Pastor Adams, those responses appear to have been predominantly negative, thus straining his relationship with the congregation. Due to generational, theological, and social differences to Pastor Adams' stances on sexuality and marriage equality to the majority of his congregation's laity, Pastor Adams lost a significant amount of his leadership capital, which may have contributed to his departure from the congregation under study to a more progressive church.

### **What effect does clerical dissension have on a pastor's ability to perform his/her job?**

This study sought to recognize what effect Pastor Adams' dissention had on his ability to perform his job, rather than his leadership capability. Data analysis found that lay members' views on Pastor Adams' ability to perform his job was a subjective category. Some participants critical of Pastor Adams' views on sexuality and marriage still made remarks about his extraordinary oratory skills. However, it appears the lack of cooperation and approval from the congregation affected Pastor Adams' ability to perform his job. Most respondents remarked that his relationship with parishioners was strained, which, at times,

can be linked to his activities of dissension. This finding does not insinuate blame or judgment on the part of any involved parties.

### *Summary of Findings*

10 individuals associated with a particular congregation of the UMC participated in this descriptive case study. In analyzing their in-depth interview responses, six emergent themes were identified: (1) dialogue, (2) generational concerns, (3) ideology, (4) denominational concerns, (5) outcomes of dissension, and (6) an uncertain future. These themes form a framework to analyze the results of this study within the parameters of the established research questions.

Data in the first section was devoted to the category of dialogue, and the lack of dialogue within the UMC concerning the topics of sexuality and marriage equality. This section utilized Wuthnow's (1989) theory of institutionalization to examine how mechanisms within the UMC make ideology-altering discourse difficult. Major findings include: (a) the recognition of the UMC's "culture of silence"; (b) the recognition that concerns about homosexuality pertain to larger concerns of sexuality as a broader concept; (c) the pastor in question is using his position as a prominent dissenting Conference clergy member to force meaningful change; and (d) the case's congregation has predominantly negative reactions to Pastor Adams' views on sexuality and marriage.

The second section of findings described emergent generational concerns and disparate social priorities, supporting Lauer's (1973) argument that resistance to change often stems from a lack of understanding for the need of the change. These include: (a) a 38-year age disparity between Pastor Adams and the average lay member; the generation gap was cited by every lay member as a source for disagreement with opinions on sexuality and same-

sex marriage; and (b) parallels can be made between previously held UMC views on slavery, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the current debate over sexuality and marriage. However, a lack of understanding alone does not explain the denominational and congregational resistance to change. I also recognize resistance in the Littletown congregation stemming from a feeling that Pastor Adams' desire for change was being forced upon the congregation (Lauer, 1973) causing backlash from a standpoint of values (like Ms. D and Mr. E). I suggest that the generational concerns discussed by respondents may be a predominately perceived divide rather than a static reality.

Data found in the third section focused on ideological positions. The UMC has a universal doctrine found in *The Book of Discipline*, and it is very specific about restrictions on the performance of same-sex marriage ceremonies. Significant discoveries are: (a) significance of upbringing in understanding of human sexuality; (b) while the UMC is not an evangelical denomination, some laity justify their objections to same-sex marriage by appealing to biblical definitions of marriage; and (c) some respondents believe that the Methodist saying "open heart, open minds, open doors" and the sentiment behind it are going out of fashion.

The fourth section of data centered on denominational concerns. These subthemes called into question the policies of universality and essentialism which allow the UMC to exist "uniformly" across the globe. Wuthnow's (1989) theory of discourse was used to examine how the UMC institution maintains itself by encouraging systems of discourse that really seek to maintain the status quo. Topics include: (a) a concern over lack of local agency; (b) the supposed imperviousness of the General Conference legislative process; and (c) discourse versus action.

The fifth theme outlined current and potential outcomes of Pastor Adams' dissent. The pastor's use and loss of his own influence and power supports both Bierstadt (1950) and Bourdieu (1986). This section also describes how the pastor's foray into allyship through his position as a religious leader may be stripping him of that very power. Finally, this section reveals Pastor Adams' exit from the congregation. Including: (a) Pastor Adams' loss of leadership capital; (b) a breakdown in cooperation from important lay leaders; and (c) the departure of laity and clergy from the congregation.

The sixth and final section addresses future concerns for Pastor Adams. Themes include (1) possible loss of job opportunities and livelihood and (2) the threat of future charges for dissenting action.

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this case study was to examine the responses of a group of UMC clergy, laity, and church leadership when there is a dissenting pastor. Research was conducted through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the dissenting pastor, his wife (also a congregational lay member), seven lay members of his congregation, and the Conference superintendent for the region in which the church is located. Four main research questions guided the study: Why is the UMC resisting change when American society at large is altering its views on same-sex marriage? What is the experience of a dissenting (one who diverges from the denomination's bylaws regarding sexual identity and the performance same-sex marriage) clergy member? How does that dissension affect the relationship with his/her parishioners? What effect does clerical dissension have on a pastor's ability to perform his job? Grounded theory supplied a conceptual framework for interpreting the data. This study was guided by Wuthnow's (1989) theory of institutionalization, Lauer's (1973) work on resistance to social change, and Bierstedt's (1950) recognition of social power and Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital.

*Study Significance*

While recent scholarship has focused heavily on queer spirituality and identity, little has been written regarding the advocacy of allied clergy on behalf of LGBT individuals. Less still is research focused on dissenting clergy members within the context of their own religious laws. This study provides an in-depth examination of a congregation with an allied, dissenting Pastor, using his power and position to force meaningful discourse around

sexuality and exclusionary marriage policies within the UMC. This study highlights the outcomes of that dissent and provides insights into the costs associated. The experience of Pastor Adams can be used to add to the collective experiences of other dissenting clergy members, as well as those of all LGBT allies.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

To further understand the outcomes of clerical dissension in Protestant denominations, there are several recommendations of future study. Another descriptive case study could be performed on a different UMC congregation. Also, expansion of this case study by including multiple research sites and including quantitative measures such as surveys would be beneficial in comparing Pastor Adam's experience to that of other dissenting UMC clergy members. This could lead to a more generalizable theory for understanding clerical dissent. Analysis of all "just resolutions" in response to charges brought against UMC clergy members who have performed same-sex marriage ceremonies could determine patterns in institutional response to clerical dissent. Tracking additions to the Reconciling Ministries Network following the United States Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide would add to continuing conversations about the relationship between American social norms and UMC dissension on queer inclusion and same-sex marriage. A historical-critical analysis of changing UMC language regarding sexuality and marriage may provide a timeline of the denomination's evolution (or lack of) in discourse over time. A large scale comparative case study of similar instances in several mainline Protestant denominations could be utilized to recognize where individual denominations overlap and diverge in their responses to dissension. An even larger study could seek to

describe how the experiences of UMC clergy members, and Protestant clergy in general, relate to dissenting clergy in non-Christian religious institutions.

### *Study Limitations*

While the grounded theory approach provided a breadth of “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) and case study research raises questions about the boundaries and defining characteristics of a particular case, with the potential to generate new thinking and theory (Neuman 2003) the findings of this case study are not generalizable to the entire UMC population. However, effective qualitative research acknowledges limits to generalizability while recognizing the research’s potential to understand phenomena from participants’ unique perspectives (Marshall and Rossman, 2014, p. 85). The purpose of this case study was to provide an in-depth snapshot of a particular congregation with a pastor who dissents from the denomination’s beliefs on queer inclusion and same-sex marriage. This was achieved by recognizing the context of Pastor Adams’ dissension and gleaning a deeper understanding of members of the congregation’s views. While this research is inherently valuable to this particular case, the emergent theory cannot be used to understand the experiences of all dissenting UMC pastors and their congregations. However, this study can act as foundation for the formation of other case studies about dissenting clergy within the UMC.

### *Conclusions*

Pastor Adams chose to dissent from the UMC’s *Book of Discipline* in regard to the bylaws on sexuality and marriage because he felt a calling to combat what he perceives to be an injustice. He also claims that were he not combating this injustice, he could no longer act as a pastor within the denomination. For him, the choice to dissent wasn’t necessarily simple, but absolutely necessary.

With the exception of a few lay members (many of whom were interviewed for this study) the response to Pastor Adams' dissension has been either negative or nonexistent. Responses have also been made behind closed doors, with some laity even reaching out to the district superintendent in an attempt to get the pastor removed from service.

This study had a 50% response rate. The pastor's most vocal opponents (from what I learned through interviews with other lay members) did not respond to interview attempts. But that reticence itself speaks to the "culture of silence" within the UMC that discouraged discussion not only of concerns over marriage equality and LGBT issues, but of sexuality in general.

The interviews from this case study have generated a great deal of rich data. This data suggests a number of topics for scholarly discussion, including the relationship of education and miseducation to religious discourse on sexuality; the role of generational (perceived or otherwise) difference in pastoral relationships; how different ideological bases shape responses to dissent; questions of how the UMC's institutional structure explains the denomination's tolerance for dissenting discourse, but not their intolerance for dissenting action; and finally, possible consequences for dissenting clergy. However, while lay members described their reluctance toward change as a product of their generational identity or a lack of education and exposure, it seemed to me that most use these as excuses to avoid doing the real work of addressing their uncomfortability with homosexuality.

During the research process, Pastor Adams was reassigned to a new congregation. He claims it was not in response to his dissension, while most of the lay members I interviewed disagreed. Whatever the primary reason for the move, it is clear from the data that Pastor Adams' 2012 statement, describing his call work toward changing *The Book of Discipline's*

language pertaining to homosexuality and his willingness to perform same-sex marriages in violation of the denomination's bylaws, contributed to a loss of capital and the disintegration of cooperation from his congregation.

This research contributes to scholars' understanding of how religious leaders use their positions to institute social change, as well as how large organizations manage dissenting members. Religious institutions such as the UMC are currently struggling with how to address LGBT rights and inclusion. Pastor Adams' story provides an in-depth study of the micro-level consequences of that struggle. The UMC is the largest mainline Protestant denomination and the second-largest Protestant denomination in America<sup>22</sup>. Their prohibition of LGBT members from church life by use of the "incompatibility clause" and exclusionary marriage practices suggest a larger trend of segregation between queer-identified individuals and American religious institutions.

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<sup>22</sup> In North America.

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## APPENDIX A

## RECRUITMENT MATERIAL AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Opening Script (On phone or email)*

Hello, my name is Erin Meek, and I'm a graduate student at Iowa State University. Currently I'm working on a project examining the topic of same-sex marriage in the United Methodist Church. This is meant to be a study of attitudes within the United Methodist Church regarding same-sex marriage and the inclusion of queer individuals in church life. I'd love to speak with you about this, and if you'd be willing, interview you to gather your thoughts on the subject. You can reach me by email at [eemeek@iastate.edu](mailto:eemeek@iastate.edu) or by phone at (214) 215-7147. I hope to speak with you soon!

*Opening Script (In person, proceeding interview)*

Thank you for taking the time to meet/speak with me again today. This interview is for my project examining the topic of same-sex marriage in the United Methodist Church. This is meant to be a study of attitudes within the United Methodist Church, specifically your church, regarding same-sex marriage and the inclusion of queer individuals in church life. This is a sociological study aimed at understanding the current situation regarding same-sex marriage within this denomination, as well as gaining a better understanding of the attitudes of specific clergy members and parishioners. I am extremely interested in hearing your views around same-sex marriage within your congregation, along with the views of other individuals within your faith community. I should only need to take up about an hour of your time today. With your permission, I will be recording this interview to ensure that I can get a complete transcript of our interaction. Because of the nature of this study, I will need a signed consent form from you before we begin. Please read it over and let me know if you

have any questions. You can contact me at any time following this interview for further clarification, or for any reason pertaining to this study. Also, feel free to stop the interview at any time for further clarification, or if you simply wish to stop altogether. I'm also happy to read through the consent document with you, should you like. I will be sure to send a copy to the transcription to you electronically so that you can read over what we discussed and clarify anything. Does that make sense? Do you have any other questions before we begin?

*Newsletter Language*

Erin Meek, a graduate student at Iowa State University, is looking to include the congregation in a project examining the topic of same-sex marriage in the United Methodist Church. This is meant to be a study of attitudes within the UMC regarding same-sex marriage and marriage equality. She is looking to learn about the different perspectives of those associated with the Church on this matter in order to better understand the organization's diverse and changing attitudes. Erin hopes to interview 5-10 members of our church as part of her research. If you are contacted for an interview please consider participating in this project. She can be reached at: (214) 215-7147 and [eemeek@iastate.edu](mailto:eemeek@iastate.edu).

## APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT:  
Parishioners or Church Members

**Investigator:** Erin Meek

This form describes the research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation regarding same-sex marriage within the United Methodist Church, particularly in this congregation, as well as gaining a better understanding of the attitudes of specific clergy members and parishioners.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a parishioner in this congregation. You should not participate if you are not a member of this church.

**Description of Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete one interview in which you will discuss your views regarding same sex marriage, your church, your denomination, and your personal faith. Your answers will be recorded with the use of two audio recorders to ensure an accurate transcription of answers. This interview may last as long as 90 minutes.

**Risks or Discomforts**

While participating in this study you may find it difficult or uncomfortable to share or discuss your personal beliefs, religious doctrines which you subscribe to, your voting record regarding legalizing same-sex marriage within your state, discussion of your church's pastor, and your denomination as a whole. Of course there may be other emergent topics that might cause you discomfort as well. This study is not attended to cause discomfort, but the topics at hand are contentious and at times, controversial. The researcher will strive to make the process as least stressful as possible.

You have the choice to either address those topics which cause you discomfort or not. It is your right to pause or stop this interview at any time. It is also your right to skip any questions you would prefer not to answer.

Due to the sensitive and possibly contentious nature of the subject matter, informational risks of participation in this study include possible embarrassment, stigmatization, and the disruption of relationships.

All possible steps will be made to ensure your privacy and confidentiality in regard to your statements, but because of the nature of the study, you need to be aware that your identity may become known. Upon completion of the interview transcription, you will be sent a copy of the interview to review and edit or redact, should you so choose.

### **Benefits**

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you. However, this case study is structured with open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their unique perspectives with little leading from the researcher. You will be given the opportunity to discuss your personal beliefs, weigh in on the climate of your congregation, and share your opinions about the direction of the denomination as a whole.

It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by better understanding United Methodist Church members' attitudes toward same-sex marriage and queer inclusion in religious life.

### **Costs and Compensation**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

### **Participant Rights**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

This project is also employing a research method called "member checking" in which a transcript of each interview will be sent electronically to each interviewee within 30 days, allowing them to redact or expand upon any of their recorded statements.

If you have any questions *about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury*, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

### **Confidentiality**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

All possible steps will be made to ensure your privacy and confidentiality in regard to your statements, but because of the nature of the study, you need to be aware that your identity may become known. Within the final paper, the congregation will be described as "a United Methodist congregation in a small town within a predominantly rural MidWestern state" in order to provide anonymity to the community. Participants will each be given a letter of the alphabet (ex. A, B, C) in order to avoid use of their names or even initials. Descriptors such as age, race, marital status etc. will not be used in the paper in an attempt to protect the privacy of participants. However, there is still a possibility that because of your statements, your identity will become known. Please consider this risk before taking part in this study.

### **Questions**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information *about the study*, contact Erin Meek at (515)-294-2506 or [eemeek@isu.edu](mailto:eemeek@isu.edu); or Dr. Adam Foley at (515)-294-0578 or [adamf@iastate.edu](mailto:adamf@iastate.edu).

### **Provisions**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT:  
Clergy

**Investigator:** Erin Meek

This form describes the research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation regarding same-sex marriage within the United Methodist Church, particularly in this congregation, as well as gaining a better understanding of the attitudes of specific clergy members and parishioners.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a Clergy Member either at or associated with the This congregation. You should not participate if you are not associated with this church..

**Description of Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete one interview in which you will discuss your views regarding same sex marriage, your church, your denomination, and your personal faith. Your answers will be recorded with the use of two audio recorders to ensure an accurate transcription of answers. This interview may last as long as 90 minutes.

**Risks or Discomforts**

While participating in this study you may find it difficult or uncomfortable to share or discuss your personal beliefs, religious doctrines which you subscribe to, your voting record regarding legalizing same-sex marriage within your state, discussion of your church's pastor, and your denomination as a whole. Of course there may be other emergent topics that might cause you discomfort as well. This study is not attended to cause discomfort, but the topics at hand are contentious and at times, controversial. The researcher will strive to make the process as least stressful as possible.

You have the choice to either address those topics which cause you discomfort or not. It is your right to pause or stop this interview at any time. It is also your right to skip any questions you would prefer not to answer.

Due to the sensitive and possibly contentious nature of the subject matter, informational risks of participation in this study include possible embarrassment, stigmatization, and the disruption of relationships.

Given your position as a clergy member, you are also predisposed to other specialized risks. As a clergy member of the United Methodist Church, if you are quoted admitting to performing a same-sex marriage, and this information reaches your Conference officials, you could lose your credentials. Participating in this study could be damaging to your career within the United Methodist Church. As such, it is imperative that you recognize that while every effort will be made to protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed, and there could be real social and economic risks to participating in this study.

All possible steps will be made to ensure your privacy and confidentiality in regard to your statements, but because of the nature of the study, you need to be aware that your identity may become known. Upon completion of the interview transcription, you will be sent a copy of the interview to review and edit or redact, should you so choose.

### **Benefits**

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you. However, this case study is structured with open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their unique perspectives with little leading from the researcher. You will be given the opportunity to discuss your personal beliefs, weigh in on the climate of your congregation, and share your opinions about the direction of the denomination as a whole.

It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by better understanding United Methodist Church members' attitudes toward same-sex marriage and queer inclusion in religious life.

### **Costs and Compensation**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

### **Participant Rights**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

This project is also employing a research method called "member checking" in which a transcript of each interview will be sent electronically to each interviewee within 30 days, allowing them to redact or expand upon any of their recorded statements.

If you have any questions *about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury*, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

## Confidentiality

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

All possible steps will be made to ensure your privacy and confidentiality in regard to your statements, but because of the nature of the study, you need to be aware that your identity may become known. Within the final paper, the congregation will be described as “a United Methodist congregation in a small town within a predominantly rural MidWestern state” in order to provide anonymity to the community. Participants will each be given a letter of the alphabet (ex. A, B, C) in order to avoid use of their names or even initials. Descriptors such as age, race, marital status etc. will not be used in the paper in an attempt to protect the privacy of participants. However, there is still a possibility that because of your statements, your identity will become known. Please consider this risk before taking part in this study.

## Questions

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information *about the study*, contact Erin Meek at (515)-294-2506 or [eemeek@isu.edu](mailto:eemeek@isu.edu); Dr. Adam Foley at (515)-294-0578 or [adamf@iastate.edu](mailto:adamf@iastate.edu).

## Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT:  
Conference Leadership

**Investigator:** Erin Meek

This form describes the research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation regarding same-sex marriage within the United Methodist Church, particularly in this congregation, as well as gaining a better understanding of the attitudes of specific clergy members and parishioners.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a Conference Leadership Member associated with the This congregation. You should not participate if you are not associated with this church.

**Description of Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete one interview in which you will discuss your views regarding same sex marriage, your church, your denomination, and your personal faith. Your answers will be recorded with the use of two audio recorders to ensure an accurate transcription of answers. This interview may last as long as 90 minutes.

**Risks or Discomforts**

While participating in this study you may find it difficult or uncomfortable to share or discuss your personal beliefs, religious doctrines which you subscribe to, your voting record regarding legalizing same-sex marriage within your state, discussion of your church's pastor, and your denomination as a whole. Of course there may be other emergent topics that might cause you discomfort as well. This study is not attended to cause discomfort, but the topics at hand are contentious and at times, controversial. The researcher will strive to make the process as least stressful as possible.

You have the choice to either address those topics which cause you discomfort or not. It is your right to pause or stop this interview at any time. It is also your right to skip any questions you would prefer not to answer.

Due to the sensitive and possibly contentious nature of the subject matter, informational risks of participation in this study include possible embarrassment, stigmatization, and the disruption of relationships.

Given your Conference Leadership position, you are also predisposed to other specialized risks. As a clergy member of the United Methodist Church, you are subject to the certain rules and expectations of behavior. Participating in this study could be damaging to your career within the United Methodist Church. As such, it is imperative that you recognize that while every effort will be made to protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed, and there could be real social and economic risks to participating in this study.

All possible steps will be made to ensure your privacy and confidentiality in regard to your statements, but because of the nature of the study, you need to be aware that your identity may become known. Upon completion of the interview transcription, you will be sent a copy of the interview to review and edit or redact, should you so choose.

### **Benefits**

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you. However, this case study is structured with open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their unique perspectives with little leading from the researcher. You will be given the opportunity to discuss your personal beliefs, weigh in on the climate of your congregation, and share your opinions about the direction of the denomination as a whole.

It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by better understanding United Methodist Church members' attitudes toward same-sex marriage and queer inclusion in religious life.

### **Costs and Compensation**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

### **Participant Rights**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

This project is also employing a research method called "member checking" in which a transcript of each interview will be sent electronically to each interviewee within 30 days, allowing them to redact or expand upon any of their recorded statements.

If you have any questions *about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury*, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

## Confidentiality

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

All possible steps will be made to ensure your privacy and confidentiality in regard to your statements, but because of the nature of the study, you need to be aware that your identity may become known. Within the final paper, the congregation will be described as “a United Methodist congregation in a small town within a predominantly rural MidWestern state” in order to provide anonymity to the community. Participants will each be given a letter of the alphabet (ex. A, B, C) in order to avoid use of their names or even initials. Descriptors such as age, race, marital status etc. will not be used in the paper in an attempt to protect the privacy of participants. However, there is still a possibility that because of your statements, your identity will become known. Please consider this risk before taking part in this study.

## Questions

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information *about the study*, contact Erin Meek at (515)-294-2506 or [eemeek@isu.edu](mailto:eemeek@isu.edu); Dr. Adam Foley at (515)-294-0578 or [adamf@iastate.edu](mailto:adamf@iastate.edu).

## Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX E:

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

There are three sets of interview questions to gain relevant and available data from three groups of individuals: parishioners or congregation members, clergy members, and Church leadership.

**Parishioners**

## 1. Background questions

- a. What is your name?
- b. Where do you live?
- c. What is your background within the United Methodist Church?
- d. Tell me about your church-
  - i. What is the name of your church? (if needed)
  - ii. What is the name of your pastor? (if needed)
  - iii. In what community is your church located? (if needed)

## 2. Social climate questions

- a. How do you define same-sex marriage?
  - i. How do you feel about civil versus religious marriage?
- b. Is same-sex marriage legal in your state?
  - i. (If not) Do you think it should be?
- c. What are your feelings regarding same-sex marriage?
- d. How do you think your community feels about same-sex marriage?

## 3. Church-specific

- a. How accepting, in general, is your church?
- b. How accepting, in general, is your pastor?
- c. How do you think your church, as a whole, feels about same-sex marriage?
  - i. Tell me about your pastors' views? (if needed)
  - ii. Tell me about the parishioners views? (if needed)
- d. Do any same-sex couples attend your church?
  - i. Why do you think that is? (Can work for yes or no answer)

#### 4. Denomination-specific

- a. What does the United Methodist Church say regarding same-sex marriage?
  - i. Do you know about the General Conference ruling in 2012?
- b. What do you think about that?
- c. Will this ruling change in 2016? Why/why not?

### **Clergy Members**

#### 1. Background questions

- a. What is your name?
- b. Where do you live?
- c. What is your background in the United Methodist Church?
- d. Tell me about your church-
  - i. What is the name of your church?
  - ii. In what community is your church located?

#### 2. Social climate questions

- a. How do you define same-sex marriage?
  - i. How do you feel about civil versus religious marriage?
- b. Is same-sex marriage legal in your state?
  - i. (If not) Do you think it should be?
- c. What are your feelings regarding same-sex marriage?
- d. How do you think your community feels about same-sex marriage?

#### 3. Church-specific

- a. How accepting, in general, is your church?
- b. How do you think your church feels about same-sex marriage?
- c. How do you think other church leaders feel about same-sex marriage?

#### 4. Denomination-specific

- a. What does the United Methodist Church say regarding same-sex marriage?
- c. Will the ruling change in 2016? Why/why not?
- d. How do you respond to parishioners who support same-sex marriage?
- e. Would you feel comfortable performing a same-sex marriage?
  - i. Tell me about why that is?

**Church Authority/Leadership**

## 1. Background questions

- a. What is your name?
- b. Where do you live?
- c. What is your background in the United Methodist Church?

## 2. Social climate questions

- a. How do you define same-sex marriage?
  - i. How do you feel about civil versus religious marriage?
- b. Is same-sex marriage legal in your state?
  - i. (If not) Do you think it should be?
- c. How do you feel about same-sex marriage?
- e. How do you think your faith community feels about same-sex marriage?

## 4. Denomination-specific

- a. What does the United Methodist Church say, specifically, regarding same-sex marriage?
  - i. How do you feel about the General Conference ruling in 2012?
- c. Will this ruling change in 2016? Why/why not?

## 5. Leadership specific

- a. How do you feel about dissenting clergy members and parishioners?
- b. Tell me about the General Conference's deliberations in regard to this ruling
- c. What will happen in the future?

## APPENDIX F

**2012 STATEMENT**

Re: A Covenant of Conscience  
June 18, 2012

By now, many of you have heard about an action taken, and a pair of documents presented at the [state] Annual Conference in [city]. These documents call for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in the life of the United Methodist Church, even when that is not allowed by our denomination's Book of Discipline.

Several people have asked my thoughts on this action and I want to be as open and clear as possible. I know that there are a variety of opinions in both our denomination and our congregation. I know that many people have wrestled with their own understanding and with the message of scripture, and I respect each of the conclusions that people have reached, even those with which I disagree.

I want you to know that because of my reading of scripture, my identity as a Christian and as a pastor, and my understanding of sexuality, I have signed both of these documents. The first document recalls our membership vows to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. I believe that denying the opportunity to unite in marriage to anyone who is prepared is an injustice – and I must resist that injustice, even when it is enforced by church law.

The second document states: “We, United Methodist clergy, in accordance with our ordination vows to “seek peace, justice, and freedom for all people,” commit to marrying without bias or discrimination all people who seek the blessing of the church and are prepared to assume the privileges and responsibilities of a loving, committed, covenant relationship.”

I have not come to this position quickly or easily, but through a long process of prayer, scripture study, and conversation with friends and family, both clergy and laity. For me, this is the path of integrity – aligning my actions with my beliefs. I recognize that I am declaring my opposition to the rules of the United Methodist Church while continuing to live and work within its fellowship, for I believe it is (as our Bishop says) “the best of all Protestant possibilities.”

Some of you have wondered whether signing these documents puts me at risk of disciplinary action from the denomination. Several of our church leaders have been clear that statements like these are simply dialogue, and that our church encourages dialogue in those areas in which we disagree. If, however, I do perform a wedding for a gay or lesbian couple I could face a penalty, possibly losing my credentials as a United Methodist Elder.

While our denomination prohibits pastors from performing ceremonies that celebrate same-sex unions, it also prohibits those ceremonies from taking place in our churches. I don't believe that it is my place to decide that such a ceremony would take place in this church, and want you to know that I will not perform a wedding for a gay or lesbian couple in this building unless or until the congregation gave approval. I expect that that would not happen without a long conversation that involved the entire congregation, and eventually a church-wide decision at a church Conference.

I am not trying to make a decision for our congregation, but simply to live with integrity from my own understanding of Christian discipleship and human sexuality. Over the next few weeks I will speak more completely to the process that brought me to this point – how I see my position to be consistent with the message of the Bible and why I am now willing to violate church law. I also want to hear from you, answer your questions, and to give you a chance to respond with your thoughts. So in the coming weeks I will host conversations and scripture studies following the Saturday service and between services on Sunday as a place where we can talk openly with each other about our understanding of the Bible, God's desire for us, and our response.

I appreciate this congregation's support, and hope that even though at times we disagree, we will be able to continue to live together into the ministry to which God is calling us. Again, I want to say that I have a deep respect for those who disagree with me about homosexuality, as well as those who disagree with my decision about how to act in this case. I hope that you will continue to share your thoughts with me so that we can each grow in the knowledge and love of God.

## APPENDIX G

**DO NO HARM COVENENT**

When asked which commandment in the law is the greatest, Jesus said “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”(Matthew 22:37-39).

In his sermons “The New Birth” and “The Catholic Spirit,” John Wesley taught that as long as we hold in common the essential elements of our faith, and as long as we unite in love—then our hearts are right and we should walk together hand in hand. Wesley further taught that differences of opinion ought not to tear this union of hearts asunder.

The inability of the General Conference to pass a statement acknowledging longstanding disagreement on matters of human sexuality strikes at our union in affection, challenges our ability to live amicably in difference, and violates the sacred command to love our neighbors as ourselves. Further, the continuing denial of full access to all the rights and privileges of church membership in the United Methodist Church is causing deep spiritual harm to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer) sisters and brothers.

Therefore, in accordance with our membership vows to “resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves,” and in obedience to the first of our General Rules “Do no harm,” we, the following laity and clergy of the [state] Annual Conference, covenant to obey the law of God.

When following the Book of Discipline requires us to do harm by discriminating against, diminishing, or demeaning our sisters and brothers in the family of faith, we are in an impossible situation and will be faithful to the law as interpreted by Jesus rather than comply with the Book of Discipline.

While we are deeply saddened that non-compliance with church law has become necessary, we live in hope that the day will not be long in coming when our church will remember its roots and once more be guided by grace, committed to justice, and led by love.

## APPENDIX H

## A COVENANT OF CONSCIENCE

*In his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail “ Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” Nonviolent civil rights movements fight for justice and equality in civil and religious life with compassion, courage, and deep commitment to faithfulness. The recognition of the full humanity, sacred worth, and equal rights of LGBTQ persons is crucial to the civil rights struggles of our time. LGBTQ and straight United Methodist laity and clergy are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.*

*The denial of rights and privileges to LGBTQ persons through provisions in the Book of Discipline shackles pastoral care and ministry, and in their harshly punitive application these provisions of the Discipline are not only a grave injustice; they violate the sacred command to love our neighbors as ourselves. We cannot remain complicit in the Church’s injustice and discrimination any longer and, out of our Christian faith and Wesleyan love, we feel bound to respond and together to make the following declarations:*

Pastoral care and the sacraments and rituals of the church are means of grace by which the lives of all Christians are blessed by God. Therefore we, as congregations and as individual laity and clergy, declare our commitment to offer such means of grace to all persons on an equal basis. We refuse to discriminate against any of God’s children and pledge to make marriage equality a lived reality within the [state] Annual Conference.

We seek to embody the beloved community of hope by openly and joyfully affirming the lives and loves of all United Methodists, regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression.

**We, United Methodist clergy**, in accordance with our ordination vows to “seek peace, justice, and freedom for all people,” commit to marrying without bias or discrimination all people who seek the blessing of the church and are prepared to assume the privileges and responsibilities of a loving, committed, covenant relationship.

**We, United Methodist laity**, in accordance with our membership vows to “resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves,” commit to supporting our clergy in faithfully ministering to all, including through any consequences of their living fully into that duty.

**We, United Methodist congregations**, refuse to discriminate in the sacraments and rituals provided to our members and pledge the full and equal use of our facilities as we welcome and celebrate equally all couples and the families they may choose to create.

**Further, each of us, clergy, laity, and congregations, pledge to one another our spiritual and material support in fulfilling this covenant of conscience.**