

Church policies on homosexuality are mixed

From Wilmington Star - September 09, 2002

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Issues related to homosexuality have sharply divided many Protestant churches in the past decade. For some churches, however, there is no question.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Faith and Mission statement, reflecting many years of resolutions, declares opposition to "all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality and pornography." The SBC's Web page on sexuality states that "Homosexuality is not a 'valid alternative lifestyle,' " and that "The Bible condemns it as sin." It adds, however, that homosexuality is not an unforgivable sin.



Pianist Sean McDonald plays during Sunday service at St. Jude's.

In 1992, the N.C. Baptist State Convention "disfellowshipped" Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill for ordaining a known homosexual, and Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh for blessing the relationship of two gay men.

In 1996, the Southern Baptist Convention voted to boycott Disney movies, products and theme parks, in part because the company had extended benefits to the "domestic partners" of employees as well as spouses.

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church states that "practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" and that homosexuals may not be candidates for ministry. However, a United Methodist policy resolution, "A Nurturing Community," also states that "Homosexual persons, no less than heterosexuals, are individuals of sacred worth" and that "God's grace is available to all."

In 1999, a United Methodist Church court defrocked the Rev. Jimmy Creech, a United Methodist pastor, for officiating at the commitment ceremony of a gay couple in Chapel Hill.

At a tumultuous meeting in 2000, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church voted 628-337 to reaffirm that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching and 646-294 to reaffirm the church's ban on same-sex marriages.

However, the governing body, composed of clergy and lay delegates, also rejected, 705-210, a motion that would require United Methodist pastors to take an oath that they believe that homosexuality is not God's will. A motion that would have ordered the

church's Board of Discipleship to set up a program for aiding individuals who wish to leave a homosexual lifestyle was rejected by a 78 percent margin.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has passed resolutions opposing same sex marriage and maintaining that matrimony or total celibacy are the only states compatible with ministry. The church has also approved language that homosexuals "must be treated with profound respect" as individuals.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America has affirmed that worship is open to all; however, the church does not sanction same-sex marriage and requires either (heterosexual) marriage or celibacy of its clergy.

The national organization of the Assemblies of God, a leading Pentecostal church, has strongly endorsed Exodus International, a ministry devoted to converting homosexuals to heterosexuality. A number of clergy in the denomination identify themselves as "ex-gay."

Conservative clergy point to a number of Bible verses, including Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 as demonstrating that homosexual conduct is sin, against God's will.

The Metropolitan Community Church, at its Web site, argues that such verses are cited out of cultural context. Citing biblical scholars, it describes the sin of Sodom in Genesis 19 as inhospitality to strangers, not sodomy. It notes that the Old Testament laws of Leviticus also banned other behaviors, such as eating pork, oysters and shrimp, that modern Christians tolerate.

MCC commentaries cite other passages, such as Romans 14:14 ("I know and am persuaded of the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself ...") and suggest that some figures of the Bible, such as David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi, may have entered homosexual unions.