



Dear Friends,

This past week, I had the privilege of attending the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) Convocation in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was an inspiring several days that reminded me of why I am doing this work. Here at Mainstream UMC, we spend most of our time on strategy, advocacy, and accountability. It is easy to get into a rhythm of doing and doing. And sometimes we can forget the people and the stories. I am grateful that the people and voices at the RMN Convocation have centered me again.

My story begins in 1986 with my dear friend Jim. He and I were co-presidents of the Kansas East Conference Council on Youth Ministries. I went on to college and seminary to be a pastor. Jim left the church because he is gay and unwelcome. Our friendship has thrived these nearly 40 years. But the church still does not feel like home to him.

My story continues with my dear friend Patrick. He grew up in the Wesleyan Church, a preacher's kid like me. When he came out, he lost his church and his dream of being a pastor like his dad. Patrick still loves the church, and he has brought his enormous musical gifts as worship leader every single week for more than 40 years. I had the privilege of sharing 11 of those years at Trinity UMC where I pastored. The church is willing to use the talent of our gay members, as long as they know their place. I thank God that my friendship with Patrick has endured the injustice of our church.

I lift up in my heart my LGBTQ clergy colleagues in Great Plains, whose names, unlike my friends above, I have no permission to print. So many faithful servants who have had to choose between their calling and full openness. Their families were never introduced to the new church. Their spouses were never celebrated during pastor appreciation. Their life partners were sick and died without the pastor even being on the prayer list. These faithful pastors wake up every morning next to their “roommate” wondering if this is the day charges will be filed against them. Generations of LGBTQ clergy have given their heart and soul to this church under the cruel veil of don’t ask, don’t tell.

I repent for the complaint and removal of Rev. Cynthia Meyer. She is my clergy colleague of 25 years in Kansas who could no longer endure the closet and came out for who she is in 2016. She was gleefully run out of the United Methodist Church by Scott Jones. This is the Bishop for whom I personally voted and lobbied to come to our conference. This is the Bishop who has publicly hoped for 100 trials. This is the Bishop who helped found a new denomination while drawing a salary from his (now former) church. Rev. Meyer is simply a rung on Jones’ dysfunctional ladder as he tries to climb to relevance.

This is why I do this work. It is neither dispassionate nor abstract. This work is about real people with real names and real lives. The Reconciling Ministries Network has been doing this work for 40 years by remaining grounded in the stories. Mainstream UMC is honored to work side by side with RMN to bring justice to the United Methodist Church. We have 6 months of work before General Conference 2024. I invite you to reflect on why this work is important to you.

Let’s not forget why.

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