

**FLORIDA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
BISHOP KENNETH H. CARTER JR'S STATEMENT
ON SAME GENDER WEDDINGS**

January 06, 2015

LAKELAND - Same-sex marriage became officially legal statewide in Florida after midnight Tuesday, Jan. 6, though Miami-Dade County began issuing licenses Monday afternoon. Florida became the 36th state in which same-sex marriages are legal on a statewide basis.

Observing that there are times when civil law is in conflict with church law, Bishop Carter issued a statement today with guidance for clergy and lay leadership for navigating through this time of change.

A Statement from Bishop Kenneth H. Carter, Jr., resident bishop of the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church

January 6, 2015

"The recent rulings of civil law in the state of Florida have opened the way for the recognition of same-gender weddings. I offer a brief word of guidance that seeks to be pastoral, missional and consistent with the Book of Discipline I have promised to uphold.

There are times when civil law is in conflict with church law. Members of our churches across the political spectrum find themselves supportive of the passage of some civil laws and not others: immigration, Medicaid expansion, the normalization of relations with Cuba and "Stand Your Ground" are four recent examples.

We find ourselves in the present context where Florida civil law and the 2012 Book of Discipline are not in agreement.

Our Book of Discipline does not allow same-gender wedding services in our churches, and these services cannot be officiated by our clergy. Yet our clergy may be asked by members of our churches to conduct a service.

I have taught publicly about my hope that our congregations will be more open and welcoming to our friends in the LGBT community. [Click here](#) to access that teaching presentation. I have also taught our clergy about discerning a way to be in mission with LGBT persons in their own congregations, based upon the model of Acts 15, in our Gathering in Leesburg in November 2014.

If invited, and if your conscience leads you, you may provide pastoral counseling, read scripture, offer a prayer, or give the homily at a same-gender service held in an alternative setting. Whether to do so, or not, is an act of conscience. You can be pastorally present to your people in these ways, and, in my interpretation, these ways of proclaiming the gospel do not compromise the promises made in your ordination.

I further request that clergy be in conversation with your district superintendent about the particulars of any service in which you offer leadership prior to the act of ministry."

The Peace of the Lord,

+Ken Carter
Resident Bishop, Florida Conference
The United Methodist Church