

A Litany of Confession

By Rev. Dr. Deborah Stoker Stevens
written for the West Ohio Annual Conference - 2025

John Wesley's first general rule is "Do no harm." Today, we are called to confess that in the struggles of our church over the past decades, the actions of this body have harmed siblings in Christ.

When one part of the body suffers, all suffer. Therefore, let us confess our sin in the presence of the One who hears us and heals us.

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church.

- We have hidden behind the habits of old processes and missed the fresh breath of a new Spirit.
- We have mis-used rules that were made to serve the church, serving instead only the rules themselves.
- We have confused secrecy with confidentiality, creating barriers for LGBTQ+ candidates for ministry.
- We have clung to a polity of power and failed to see the power of people rising up in a faithful community advocating for justice.

Merciful God, forgive us that we have not done your will. In clinging to our rules, we have broken your law of love. In failing to treat those who see as "other" as beloved siblings, we have rebelled against your love.

- Forgive us that we have loved power more than we have loved people.
- Forgive us that we have loved polity more than we have seen people.
- Forgive us that we have loved processes more than we have embraced people.
- Forgive us that we have loved rules more than we have listened to people.
- Forgive us that we have preferred easy answers to honest wrestling with the words of Scripture.
- Forgive us for mistaking the silencing of dissenting voices as peace.

Merciful God, your church has always struggled with obedience to love.

- We failed indigenous people.
- We failed people of color.
- We failed women.
- We failed Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people.
- We failed to hear the cry of those on the margins.
- We are still failing.

We lament those lost because of our rejection of their very lives.

We give thanks for those who faithfully persisted, offering their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness to the church in joyful obedience, refusing to let the injustice of the church deny their humanity, their gifts, or their call.

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Silence

Together, we repent:

- We repent of our failure to give equal opportunity of appointment and compensation to people of color and women, and especially to women of color.
- We repent of our denial of credentialing to countless faithful, gifted, qualified disciples who were called to ministry in the United Methodist Church.
- We repent of our denial of the United Methodist Service of Christian Marriage to faithful same sex couples.
- We repent of using Disciplinary charges as a tool of oppression against those who sought to live authentic lives as LGBTQ+ clergy.

Silence

Today, let the West Ohio Annual Conference reclaim the way of Jesus – loving all, rejecting none. Let us claim the fresh spirit that moved Paul to declare that there are no divisions, that all are one in Christ Jesus.

Today, let us see one another's hearts, hear one another's stories, embrace one another's differences, and rise up together as beloved community.

Today, let us resolve to make amends in our policies, our rules, our behaviors, and our lives that reflect this commitment.

Merciful God, from the ashes of our repentance, clothe us with garments of praise, bless us with your righteousness, raise us up, and free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ, our ever-loving Savior.

Amen.