

## 400 METHODISTS MARCH FOR EQUALITY IN AUSTIN PRIDE PARADE 2014

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**AUSTIN, TEXAS**—How many Methodists does it take to open hearts, minds, and doors around the world? In the largest assembly of a religious denomination in a pride parade anywhere, 400 United Methodist Church (UMC) congregants and clergy showed up representing 8 local United Methodist churches for the second year in a row to march in the Austin Pride Parade on Saturday, September 20. The churchgoers were present with colorful signs, floats, and banners in an attempt to get the attention of their world-wide church before the 2016 global conference, where delegates gather to vote on church law, including the restrictions on same-sex marriage and the ordination of gay and lesbian persons. .

Among the marchers was retired Bishop Melvin Talbert, who officiated a same-sex wedding last spring in Alabama in direct opposition to church law. Church leaders have filed charges against the bishop, which could possibly lead to a church trial. Bishop Talbert also spoke at the dinner organized directly before the parade at First UMC Austin, where he reminded the hundreds gathered “to be Biblically Obedient, we must show love for all of our neighbors.”

Many local Methodists are frustrated by church policies that they consider antiquated and inconsistent with Christian teachings calling pastors and churches to be in ministry to and with all persons.

“We are dedicated LGBTQ and straight allied United Methodists who are unwilling to hand over Christianity and our vibrant Methodist heritage to those within our denomination who would exclude people based on sexual orientation or gender identity,” said Rev. Dr. Sid Hall III, senior pastor at Trinity UMC. “We will keep showing up until we see our society and our very broken church open the doors to all people and extend the same privileges given to LGBTQ people and their families as afforded to straight people. United Methodists have been walking in the Austin Pride Parade for over 20 years, and we are humbled and blessed to be a witness for God’s all-inclusive love once again this year.”

The Methodists in the Austin Pride Parade carried banners from 8 area United Methodist Churches: Trinity, University, Westlake, St. Luke, First, Saint John's, Journey of Faith Round Rock, and Travis Park San Antonio. Members were grouped together wearing a 'Love Your Neighbor' t-shirt in one color of the rainbow. All colors of the rainbow were represented, resulting in a walking human rainbow. The individual participants ranged in age from under one year to 90.

Two advocacy groups joined the churches, Methodist Federation for Social Action and the local chapter of Reconciling Ministries Network, whose mission is to mobilize United Methodists of all sexual orientations and gender identities to transform the church and world into the full expression of Christ’s inclusive love.

“We participated because we are celebrating the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities in our community”, said local Reconciling Ministries lay leader Joy Butler. “We march because we are tired of waiting for our larger church to understand how much our gay and transgender members are hurting when denied leadership positions or church weddings. In addition, the damage done to our young people, who are watching us get this wrong year after year, is simply heartbreaking. There are no other groups of people specifically singled out by our church like this, so Reconciling United Methodists in our area will continue to work until at least some of our home churches can open their doors fully, to truly welcome all. Unfortunately, our church policy as it stands is an all-or-nothing deal, because local churches are not allowed to bypass or tailor church law on homosexuality. We hope that by turning out in large enough numbers, we can send a message to the Bishops and other leaders of the global United Methodist Church that, here in the heart of Texas, United Methodists care a lot about creating safe and inclusive spaces for our gay and transgender brothers and sisters in Christ. We hope to make a world-wide impact.”

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