

## Forgive the Intrusion, UMC Friends

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

August 2, 2016

I would love to rant about Donald Trump. The whole GOP is like a fiery car crash right now—everything stops so we can gawk at the latest collision. We feel horrible for those involved, and a little terrified about how it all affects us.

But, eventually, we have to keep driving along the highway. And as I focus on the pavement ahead, my mind drifts toward the United Methodist Church. The intricacies of particular ecclesial polity are difficult to master, even when a person has been serving that denomination for decades. That's why religion journalists often get *everything wrong*. So, I'm intruding with humility, as an outsider, realizing there are so many things that I don't understand.

But let me barge ahead here, like a nosy neighbor intruding into a family argument, and try to cover what I understand, as an outsider:

- The UMC is a global denomination, who takes unity very seriously (thus, the UNITED Methodist Church).
- In US history, UMCs have been able to be one of the most diverse denominations, because they have been careful not to force African Americans to assimilate into white culture. Instead, they have allowed autonomy and separate bodies, not as a divisive segregationist policy, but as a means of solidarity and empowerment. Thus, underrepresented racial ethnic minorities have been able to flourish more in the UMC church than they have in other denominations.
- Much of the global church is not accepting of LGBTQ relationships and same sex marriage. The official stance of the UMC church does not bless LGBTQ relationships.
- Much of the US church accepts and celebrates LGBTQ relationships and same sex marriage. The feelings are so strong that there might be a split in the global

denomination.

- Because many African Methodists are practicing polygamists, UMC allows for marriage to more than one spouse.
- Polygamy is abhorrent to most people in the US, but to keep unity in the midst of different cultures, Methodists in the US tolerate it.

So, I'm asking as an outsider, if the denomination is already pliable around the definition of marriage, and polygamy is accepted, why can't same sex marriage be accepted as well? Why can't LGBTQ relationships be given the same respect as polygamists? I understand the need to uphold voices who are less powerful, but could the LGBTQ community also be understood as a group that has been historically oppressed? What am I missing here? It just seems like an obvious way forward.