

United Methodists strike down ban on ordination of gay clergy

by [Yonat Shimron](#)

May 1, 2024



Bishop Tracy Malone, president of the United Methodist's Council of Bishops, in purple suit, joins a crowd of LGBTQ people and allies celebrating the striking down of a ban on the ordination of gay clergy at the UMC general conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, on May 1. (RNS photo/Yonat Shimron)

United Methodists meeting for their top legislative assembly May 1 overwhelmingly overturned a measure that barred gay clergy from ordination in the denomination, a historic step for the nation's second-largest Protestant body.

With a simple vote call and without debate, delegates to the general conference removed the ban on the ordination of “self-avowed practicing homosexuals”—a prohibition that dates to 1984.

With that vote, the worldwide denomination of some 11 million members joins the majority of liberal Protestant denominations such as the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, which also ordain LGBTQ clergy.

The morning vote on the motion was part of a larger series of calendar items voted on in bulk. They also included a motion barring superintendents, or overseers, from punishing clergy for performing a same-sex wedding or prohibiting a church from holding a same-sex wedding, though the actual ban on same-sex weddings in churches has yet to be voted on.

The vote on the calendar items was 692-51, or about 93 percent in favor.

After the vote, LGBTQ delegates and their allies gathered on the floor of the Charlotte Convention Center to sing, hug, cheer and shed tears. As they sang liberation songs, *Child of God* and *Draw the Circle Wide*, they were joined by Bishop Tracy S. Malone, the president of the denomination’s Council of Bishops.

The votes reverse prohibitive policies toward LGBTQ people taken on at the denomination’s 2019 general convention, when delegates doubled down and tightened bans on gay clergy and same-sex marriage. Most of those 2019 measures have now been reversed.

After the 2019 General Convention, some 7,600 traditionalist churches across the United States—about 25 percent of the total number of US churches—left the denomination, fearing that the tightening of the bans would not hold.

The absence of delegates from churches that left the denomination accounted for the quick reversal of the policies.

Wednesday’s vote follows several others approved Tuesday that removed mandatory minimum penalties for clergy who officiate same-sex weddings as well as a ban on funding for LGBTQ causes that “promote acceptance of homosexuality.”

Still to be voted on is a larger measure to remove from the rule book, called the Book of Discipline, a 1972 addition that says homosexuality is “incompatible with

Christian teaching.” The Book of Discipline also defines marriage as between one man and one woman. Those are expected to be debated as part of a revision to the denomination’s social principles.

Despite the denomination’s restrictions, a growing group of gay clergy had been ordained over the past decade, including two openly gay bishops. According to the Reconciling Ministries Network, there are 324 gay UMC clergy in the US, including candidates for ordination. Of those, about 160 are in same-sex marriages. —Religion News Service