

Order of the Community Federation in The United Methodist Church in Germany

I. Preview

The Community Federation was founded by The United Methodist Church in Germany to provide a spiritual home in church for people who are in trouble of conscience with changed sexual ethical guidelines of the church. Such convictions of faith include statements on various theological issues even beyond the sexual-ethical statements.

The following statements are a particular interpretation of the common doctrinal principles of The United Methodist Church.

II. Theological Foundations

1. The Word of God

We believe that the Word of God is the foundation, source and norm of all Christian life and faith. It has happened once and for all in Jesus Christ, who is therefore the Word of God par excellence (John 1:1, 14; Heb 1:1f.), and is testified to by the apostles and the other biblical authors (Rom 1:2; Heb 1:1). On this basis, the Word of God continues in the proclamation and witness of the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Bible

We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are God's Word – prior to and independent of all human hearing of this word. As such, it is written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16). It is thus God's word in human words (cf. Lk 1:1-4). With the reformers and fathers and mothers of the Methodist movement, we therefore believe that the Bible, must and wants to be interpreted primarily by itself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20f.). The inclusion of tradition, experience and reason is a valuable aid to understanding, as long as the primacy of Scripture is maintained.

3. God the Father

We believe that the God of the Bible is the one and only God (Deut 6:4; Ps 86:10; Isa 45:5; 1 Cor 8:4, 6). He is the almighty creator and finisher of the visible and the invisible world (cf. Nicani creed) and in Jesus Christ our merciful heavenly Father (Matt 6:6-9; Rom 8:15). The "gods", of whose reality the Bible speaks alongside God (Ps 86:8; 135:5; 1 Cor 8:5; 1 Thess 1:9), are, according to our conviction, beings of the invisible world, and differ fundamentally from the one and only true God and not be equal to him (Rom 8:38f.; 1 Cor 8:4-6; 10:20f.; Eph 6:12). The main criterion for speaking of God's being God is his self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

4. Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God and as such is true God and true man (John 1:1, 14). God bound salvation for all people to his person (John 3:16; 14:16; Acts 4:12; Rom 1:16). Through his vicarious atoning death and bodily resurrection, Jesus obtained the forgiveness and disempowerment of sin and death and opened up new, eternal life in fellowship with God (Rom 4:24f.; 8:1-4; 1 Cor 15:54f.; 2 Cor 5:14-15,21). This is the core of the salvation that God created through him. According to the Gospels testimony, Jesus Christ is the person who truly lives according to God's word and will. His justice benefits us human beings and is a lasting role model and power for our way of life following him.

5. The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is God himself in his spiritual presence and powerful effectiveness in the world and especially in humankind. As such, the Holy Spirit primarily reveals Jesus Christ as the one word of God that creates salvation (1 Cor 2:10f.; 12:3; Eph 1:17ff. and 3:4f.) and awakens faith in Jesus (Acts 10:44ff.; Rom 15:18f.). He enables to follow Jesus and to testify of him in word and deed (Acts 1:8) and with his gifts equips the believers even today building the church and

serving the world (1 Cor 12-14). He works the life in us in the inner connection with Jesus and in harmony with the word and will of God (Rom 8). His work can therefore never contradict the word of God.

6. The salvation of man

We believe that the salvation of man lies in his new relationship with God believing in Jesus Christ (John 20:31; Rom 5:1f.; 6:3-11; 1 John 5:11f.). It is life before and with the living God in being filled with the wealth of his spiritual gifts (especially peace, joy, certainty of salvation, charisms), in forgiveness and freedom from the power of sin (as man's self-assertion against God with all their evil effects) and death (Acts 26:18; Rom 8:1f.) as well as in the salvation of the soul and body life (Mark 1:34; 3:14f.; Rom 15:18f.). In this world, salvation is a reality tied to faith. It is therefore exposed to temptation and endangered by human inadequacy and weakness (1 Cor 10:6-12). Its security lies solely in the gracious work of God, to which we must therefore turn and expose ourselves again and again (Phil 2:12f.; Col.2:6f.).

7. Salvation and sanctification

We believe that salvation of man is based on God's justifying love (Rom 3:23f.), which is unconditional for us as sinners (Rom 5:8ff.). Through his Spirit, God awakens in us faith in Jesus Christ as repentance (1 Thess 1:9f.) and renewal of the heart (Rom 5:5), so that we become new creatures (2 Cor 5:17) or born-again people (John 3:3-8; Tit 3:4-7; 1 Pet 1:3). In our life, this occurs as a conversion or a decision to live with and for Jesus from now on—that includes the ever-new turning to him. In baptism, which is either received in faith or later accepted in faith, this salvation is symbolically awarded to us (Rom 6:3-11) and we are incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).

Our sanctification consists in the ability through the Holy Spirit to live in harmony with God's word and will (Rom 8:4; Col 1:30) so that the new life takes a concrete form in our way of life (Rom 12:1f.; Gal 5:25; Eph 2:10; 1 Thess 4:3-7). On the path of sanctification, we grow in faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13) with the goal of being completely connected to Christ and being shaped by his love (Eph 4:13-15).

8. Prayer

We believe that—according to salvation as a living relationship with God—prayer to the Triune God is the most important source of strength and inspiration for a Christian life. In prayer, we experience the reality of being adopted as his children (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6) and the work of the Holy Spirit, who pleads our case with unexpressed groans into praying consistent with God's will (Rom 8:26f.). Jesus' prayer serves as a model for our prayers: his prayer life (Mark 1:35; 14:35f.) in adoration (Matt 11:25f.), thanksgiving (John 11:41), petition (Mark 14:36), and intercession (Luke 22:32) as well as

the "Lord's Prayer" (Matt 6:9-13) and its instructions on invocation (Matt 6:7f.; 7:7-11) and prayer for the enemies (Matt 5:44f.).

9. Human Sexuality, marriage

We believe that God created human beings in the mutual assignment of the two genders, male and female (Gen 1:27f.) and, as the Creator, located the sexual community in the holistic, lifelong connection of man and woman (Gen 2:24; Mark 10:6-9). Therefore, sexual relations "are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage" (Social Principles ¶161 G, BOD 2016). Therefore, we do not believe that homosexuality is a "good gift" from the Creator, and we cannot agree to the blessing or marriage of same-sex couples (¶341, BOD 2016). Likewise, the often-intended reinterpretation of marriage as a union of two people does not find our approval, since here the relationship between man and woman given by the Creator is no longer constitutive for the understanding of marriage. We cannot accept the ordination of people who openly live their homosexuality either.

[BOD: The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church]

10. The Church and the local church

We believe that the Church is the community of saints who believe in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:1) and are connected to one another through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). As a spiritual dimension, the true Church is invisible. However, it appears visibly as a community of people who follow Jesus, stand in his mission (John 20:21; Acts 1:8), and fulfill his mission (Matt 28:19f.). The basic form of this community is the local church. It is part of the worldwide body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22f.), in which people experience the healing fullness of this body in mind, soul, and body (1 Cor 12:24-28; Eph 1:23 and 4:12-16) and allow themselves to be ruled gratefully by the peace of Jesus Christ and his word (Col 3:15-17). Here earthly-human differences are no longer valid (Gal 3:26-28), since everyone invokes the name of the Lord with one another (Rom 10:12f.). It is the mission of the church to visibly and publicly realize the New Testament vision of community and reconciliation (Ephesians 2:14ff.) and thereby incorporate the contextual cultural life (1 Cor 9:19-22).

11. Religions

We believe that God as the Creator of the world wants the salvation of all humankind (Gen 12:3; Isa 49:6; 1 Tim 2:4)—regardless of their religion (1 Thess 1:9f.) and position towards him (Rom 5:8-10). As the one and only God (see above Art. 3), who revealed himself comprehensively in Jesus Christ, he alone can give humankind salvation and life. Therefore, there is no salvation beyond Jesus Christ (Joh 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 11:26f.; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Phil 2:10f.; Col 1:19f.) and the Religions are no ways that each share God's salvation for humankind in their own way. That is why we are called to a

worldwide witness for Jesus (Matt 28:19f.; Acts 1:8)—in the hope that the Holy Spirit will awaken people to believe in him as the truth of the Gospel (1 Cor 12:2f.; 1 Thess 1:2-5). With Romans 9-11 we believe in God's promises for Israel, which have their beginning and their goal in Jesus Christ. As God's beloved creatures, we treat people of other religions with respect and stand up for religious freedom—in the hope that God will complete his plan with the religions.

12. Mission and evangelism

We believe that the public witness of Jesus Christ in word and deed is an elementary characteristic of Christian life (Mt 5:13f.; 28:19f.; Acts 1:8; 4:20). The church is mission with the aim of fulfilling Jesus' call for global mission—through active transmission of the Gospel, introduction to discipleship, integration into the Christian community, instruction in faith and in a life of total love for God and people (Matt 22:37-40) in the horizon of the kingdom of God. The call to repentance and the acceptance of the forgiveness of sins have a special status, since salvation of man primarily consists in his new relationship with God (see above art. 6).

III. Organization

1. The name "Community Federation"

The word "community" describes something connexional, which applies both within the federation as well as to the whole connexion which is our church. It is a community of local churches, charges, and individual members of our church. In many areas of Germany, the name "Community Federation" also has a positive traditional (conservative) connotation. This name, which is rather theologically neutral, does not polarize because it does not deny other people's goods of faith. The word "federation" describes the organizational form of this community. The addition "of the UMC in Germany" makes it clear that the federation sees itself as part of The United Methodist Church in Germany.

2. Membership

2.1 The Community Federation is open to all who wish to belong to it and affirm its Theological Foundations: individuals (and thus church circles), congregations and districts can belong to the federation.

For participation within the Community Federation, the regular rules of The United Methodist Church apply (e.g., voting rights).

2.2 Local churches and charges are recommended to deal with the possibility of joining the Community Federation and the related issues. Local churches and charges are not forced to vote on whether or not to join the Community Federation.

A vote on the possible accession of a local church

or charge takes place if at least 20 percent of the members of a local church or charge wish to vote on.

A properly convened church conference under the authority of the district superintendent decides on the accession of a local church to the Community Federation.

A properly convened charge conference under the authority of the district superintendent decides on the accession of a charge to the Community Federation.

Voting takes place in writing. In order to join the Community Federation a clear majority of the members who are present and entitled to vote necessary. The result should be valid for at least four years.

Agreement to the Theological Foundations of the Community Federation is to be understood as a majority expression of the congregation's/district's beliefs, not as a confessional text binding on individuals in belief and speech.

If a local church or charge wants to leave the Community Federation, the same procedure applies.

2.3 Persons who are not members of the UMC may also join the Community Federation. However, they have neither active nor passive voting rights and cannot represent the Community Federation in UMC bodies.

3. Networking

The Community Federation organizes its own events and retreats to meet the needs of the like-minded people. This also applies to meetings for groups by age or social background as well as for clergy. This means support and encouragement as well as networking with one another and with the whole Church. Such meetings can also take place at regional level to reach all members. Here the color of faith can be lived and developed.

Through these meetings, through training, publications, Community Federation letters and its own website, information from the Community Federation can be passed on and feedback can be obtained. A prayer network serves for personal strengthening and to strengthen the Community Federation.

4. Leadership

The Community Federation forms a member conference. This can consist of representatives from local churches and charges and other groups within the Community Federation as well as individuals. The member conference elects a board and a chair. The board prays and, in cooperation with the bishop's cabinets, ensures appropriate spiritual support for the individual members and the churches. The Community Federation can form management structures at regional level.

5. Operational work

The Community Federation needs human resources to build up the network, and furthermore a secretariat, a financial administration, and an office for communications for its own events and its content-related concerns.

6. Integration into the general church

- 6.1 The Community Federation stands to strengthen the unity of the Church by actively bringing its color of faith to the UMC in Germany.
- 6.2 The Community Federation does not see itself as a separate church, but as part of The United Methodist Church in Germany.
- 6.3 The Community Federation will participate at all levels of the life and ministry of the Church: central conference, annual conferences, districts, and possibly charges and local churches. Information on the events of the Community Federation and of the general Church will be communicated mutually.
- 6.4 At least for the duration of the establishment of the Community Federation, representation on the Central Conference's Executive Committee and permanently in the Commission on the Annual Conference should be guaranteed.
- 6.5 The Community Federation may use the media of the church in the same manner as other agencies of the Church do.
- 6.6 The three Germany Annual Conferences support the establishment of the Community Federation by helping to develop human resources. Once the Community Federation is established, mixed financing (Community Federation capital; support from Annual Conferences) will be discussed.

- 6.7 The Community Federation can offer its own events for children and young people, which are networked with the children's and youth agencies of the Church. The Community Federation can also take part in the events organized by the children's and youth agencies.
- 6.8 All Germany Annual Conferences promote and ensure that conference members being members of the Community Federation also stand for election in the Germany Central Conference. The Committees on Nominations of the Annual Conferences promote this and ensure that members of the Community Federation also stand for election of the Germany Annual Conference's Boards of Ordained Ministry.
- 6.9 The Community Federation is obliged to report to the Germany Annual Conferences and to the Germany Central Conference.
- 6.10 The Community Federation can propose people for full-time ministry, especially in the Community Federation. The voice of the federation's leadership can be brought into the respective Board of Ordained Ministry in personnel matters.
- 6.11 Appointments are made by the bishop and the cabinet. The Theological Foundation of the Community Federation is considered. The leadership of the Community Federation shall be involved in planned appointments to local churches in the Community Federation.

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The United Methodist Church
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