

We Are Building Up A New Worldⁱ

What kind of church do we want to be? What kind of people do we want to be? Can we collectively hear God'sⁱⁱ voice and respond to these questions?

The General Conference may have an opportunity to vote on “[Removal of Same-Sex Marriage Section 1717729790 1717787056](#),” a bill that removes the language currently found in the 2021 *Doctrine & Discipline* which says:

B. Same-Sex Marriage

1. The African Methodist Episcopal Church believes that marriage is ordained by God as set forth in the Holy Scriptures.
2. Further, the AME Church believes that unions of any kind between persons of the same sex or gender are contrary to the will of God.
3. Therefore, the AME Church strictly prohibits and forbids any AME Church clergyperson, licensed and/or ordained, from performing or participating in, or giving any blessing to any ceremony designed to result in any pairing between persons of the same-sex gender, including, but not limited to, marriage or civil unions.
 - a. Any AME Church clergyperson licensed and/or ordained charged with violating this rule shall be referred to the Ministerial Efficiency Committee.
 - b. If the charges are sustained, the bishop shall suspend the clergyperson and shall convene the Trial Committee within forty-five (45) days.
 - c. If the charges are sustained by the Trial Committee, such person's ordination shall be revoked by the Annual Conference and he or she shall be relieved of his or her orders and/or license.

4. Further, the AME Church strictly prohibits and forbids the use of any AME Church property for the performance of and/or the participation in and/or giving of any blessing on the same.” (Part XVI. Section XV. B. (pages 376-377))

A YES vote will remove this language from the Discipline – along with the disproportionate punishments that could be directed toward clergy who violate the current prohibition.

A YES vote will NOT be a vote *for* same-sex marriage.

- **A YES vote will NOT** require AME clergy to perform marriages, civil unions, or any pairing between people of the same sex or gender.
- **A YES vote will NOT** require AME clergy to perform, participate in, or give blessings to *any* couple they have not discerned by Godly judgement to be suitable for marriage. This was the case before the current prohibition of pairing between persons of the same sex or gender was added to *The Doctrine & Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* in 2004.

A YES vote does NOT mean that you will have to marry, unite, pair, or bless any same-sex or same-gender couples. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you will have to attend any same-sex or same-gender marriages, unions, pairings, or blessings. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you approve of same-sex or same-gender marriages, unions, pairings, or blessings. **A YES vote does NOT** mean you affirm or approve of same-sex or same-gender relationships or homogenital intimacies. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you will or must be any more likely to consider an LGBTQ+ person for an appointment or a promotion. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you like any same-sex or same-gender loving people. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you must be loving and kind to LGBTQ+ people – though we *should* all love and be kind to everyone. **A YES vote does NOT** require you to recognize the marriage, union, pairing, or blessing of others any more than the secular government under whose jurisdiction you reside requires.

Passing this bill *will* be an indication that our Church – The African Methodist Episcopal Church – is willing to embrace *a hermeneutics of humility*, a method of interpretation and application of the scripture that honors the authority of the “The Holy Scriptures” without denying scientific knowledge, the development of human sociality, and the limitations of human wisdom and interpretative capacities.

We do not deny God. We do not deny the Word and its authority. We *do* deny that we always understand God as/and the Word and apply our understanding perfectly – even the most learned, the most seasoned, the most pious, and the most certain of us.

A vote in favor of this bill is a vote for *a hermeneutics of humility*.

What does *a hermeneutics of humility* mean for how we handle questions like whether the AME Church affirms its LGBTQ+ members through the ceremony of marriage, union, pairing, or blessing for those who seek it?

1. *Reflect.* A *hermeneutics of humility* requires that we reflect on our ecclesial record.

- We do not deny that the earth revolves around the sun – and not the sun around the earth, but there was a time when churches *did* deny this and required that other believers do likewise. They read, interpreted, and applied scriptures like Joshua 10:12-14.
- We do not deny that women can be called to speak in the congregation, preach, teach, pastor, and even serve in episcopal capacities, but there was a time when churches *did* and required other believers do likewise – and some still do. They read, interpreted, and applied scriptures like I Corinthians 14:34.
- We do not deny that women or people who have been divorced can serve as bishops, but there was a time when churches *did* and required other believers do likewise – and some still do. They read, interpreted, and applied scriptures like I Timothy 3.1-7.

2. ***Acknowledge.*** *A hermeneutics of humility* requires that we acknowledge what we do not know. This begins with understanding the difference between what we think, what we believe, and what we know.

- Most of us do not know, know how, or acknowledge that there are people who are born with XXY chromosomes (i.e., other than XY (biologically categorized male) and XX (biologically categorized female) chromosomes). We *know* that the Bible does not directly address this fact of human existence; consequently, *we do not know* the perfect reading, interpretation, and application of scripture to address this reality. Nevertheless, because the Bible does not name a third sex or make provisions for the roles of those born in this way do such people bear no rights to sex or marriage? Must such people adopt a binary sociological gender according to the choices doctors, parents, and guardians made before they could self-determine?
- Most of us do not know what it feels like to live in the body of a person who is only sexually attracted to people of the same sex – or the spiritual, physical, and social complexity of acknowledging this truth in a world that hates difference almost as much as it hates truth. We *know* that the Bible does not directly address this human existential phenomenon; consequently, *we do not know* the perfect reading, interpretation, and application of scripture to address this reality.

3. ***Restraint.*** *A hermeneutics of humility* requires that we exercise restraint and refrain from acting on what we do not know – or acting on that about which we do not know *enough*. More precisely, we must refrain from acting in judgement, and refrain from acting to condemn, that which we do not know or fully understand. Such judgement and condemnation have never served people of African descent well. Instead, such xenophobic judgement and condemnation have been the pillars of the genocidal practices and institutions that have made us an “us” according to our melanin and targeted us for abuse and demise. When we build our church on

the strong foundation of a hermeneutics of humility we do not defend or advocate the physical, social, or spiritual harm of anyone on the basis of our religious beliefs – especially not people whose existential reality (i.e., people whose human experience) we do not understand. We refrain.

- We refrain from supporting policies and practices of state and/or institutionally sanctioned or vigilante punishments including but not limited to death penalties, incarcerations, corrective rapes, conversion therapies, exorcisms, castigations, exiling – and/or defrocking on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation.
- We refrain from taking hardline positions that directly harm people with few or no opportunities to safely explain or defend themselves and their perspectives, and people who do explain and defend at great risk and great cost.
- We refrain from creating and maintaining church law that further distances us from knowing and understanding the people we (do not know, but) judge and condemn.
- We refrain from participating in or performing ceremonies for *anyone* whom we, as clergy, have not discerned to be suitable for marriage. AME clergy are permitted and authorized to perform marriages. Clergy AME clergy are not *obligated* to perform marriages for anyone.
- We refrain from creating and maintaining church law that punishes those who *have* discerned – by their godly wisdom – consenting adults suitable for marriage regardless of their apparent gender or sex.

4. ***Study. A hermeneutics of humility requires balanced study.*** Some are convinced that the Bible condemns homogenital sexual intimacies – and the people who enjoy such intimacies; some, convinced of this condemnation, also see little or no distinction between their interpretation of the Bible and God. This interpretation and this perspective have been blamed for parents and grandparents forsaking children and grandchildren; siblings and cousins forsaking their kin, flesh and blood; aunts and uncles forsaking their nieces and nephews; nieces and nephews forsaking

their aunts and uncles; pastors forsaking members; members forsaking pastors; communities forsaking some of their most gifted and most vulnerable. Beyond forsaking, this contingency of our families has been muted, silenced, ignored, rejected, lied on, lied to, abused, misused, forced by fear into closets of hiding and deceit, outed into chaos, confusion, and various dangers, and driven to suicidal and self-protective forms of harming self and/or others.

The harm that has been done because of our interpretive arrogance and laziness makes it seem hardly worth the words it requires to reiterate the work that biblical scholars have already done:

- Genesis 1.27 and elsewhere “male and female” are invoked together; knowing that God made *more* than male and female with respect to biological sex negates an assumption of the insertion of “*only*” in interpretations of passages that refer to “male and female” (i.e., “male and female” qua “*only* male and female”). “Male and female” does *not* necessarily – and certainly does not *always* mean “*only* male and female.”
- Genesis 19.1-11 is about rape (in general and here as the rape of angels) as a consummate example of inhospitality – not homogenital sex;
- Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13 – especially in context – point to the nation building objectives of the earliest post-Exodus Hebrew / Israelite community, making sure that sex was primarily (if not exclusively) healthfully procreative and establishing an identity for the Hebrew / Israelite community distinct from their regional neighbors through purity codes – not the *morality* of certain forms of sex; (New Testament scriptures consistently challenge and mitigate the retributive language of passages like Leviticus 18:30 that specify Divine judgement against customs of cleanliness (c.f., Leviticus 21.1-4; 22.9 read alongside Luke 7.14);

- Deuteronomy 22.5 refers to an “impurity” that is a matter of “religious taboo,” not a moral wrong (Helmeniak, 61) – and still leaves us with no clear biblical word on hermaphrodisism or transgenders;
- Romans 1.26-27 (and verses 24-32 for context) addresses “atypical” (*para physin*) acts, but not necessarily immoral sex acts; the “atypical” (*para physin*) acts referenced here are not necessarily homogenital sex acts when it comes to women, but could simply refer to non-procreative sexual acts; moreover, Paul makes reference to these “atypical” acts as a contrast with (not as tantamount to) “wickedness” (*adikia*) specifically to highlight and respond to gentile “uncleanness” as a cultural distinction and not as a moral disqualification for right relationship with God (Helmeniak, 75-104);
- I Corinthians 6.9 (and verses 9-11 for context) and I Timothy 1.10 (and verses 9-11 for context) use terms often translated in contemporary ways that are ahistorical, decontextualized, and inappropriately target homogenital intimacies or those who enjoy them. *Malakoi*, in I Corinthians, is better translated as “self-indulgent” and *arsenokoitai*, in I Corinthians and I Timothy, is better translated as “male prostitutes” (Helmeniak, 105-115);
- Hebrews 13.4, Revelation 21.8, and Revelation 22.15 (and verses 14-16 for context) all use a term, *pornos*, that can be variously translated as “one who practices sexual immorality, *fornicator*” or, in a related term, as “one engaged in sexual relations for hire, *prostitute, whore*” – and, in both cases, “a political entity hostile to God.” None of these apply exclusively or particularly to consensual, non-transactional (or transactional) homogenital sex.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Jude 7 and all other references to Sodom and Gomorrah must be re-interpreted through an interpretation of Genesis 19 that acknowledges that the inhospitality toward and

hostility against God's messengers, not homogenital sex or (distinctly) homogenital rape, are what sealed the fate of these cities according to the biblical narrative.

And then, there are countless other scriptures that have been invoked to support an overarching way of reading the Protestant biblical canon as a source *predisposed* to supporting monogamous, heterosexual marriage between a man and a woman as the only context appropriate for sexual intimacies:

- Isaiah 58.1 declares: "Shout out; do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins." This scripture has been invoked to justify turning a spotlight on homosexuality as a sin. However, Isaiah 58 says *nothing* about sexuality. It *does*, however, hold the people of Israel accountable for turning their back on their kin:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and *not to hide yourself from your own kin?* (Isaiah 58.6-7) (Emphasis mine.)

- Genesis 1.26-28 has been used to highlight God's purpose with respect to gender being limited to male and female, but actually reflects the *fluidity* of gender within a God who has made "humankind" (inclusive of *any* and *all* genders) in "our" image (v. 26).
- Genesis 5.2 has been quoted to reinforce that there are only two genders and that these two are limited to male and female. This has been *scientifically* disproven through [genetic, physical, and psychological research](#). Just because the biblical text does not *name* what *more* and what *else* there is does not mean that more does not exist within the realm of what

God has created and called good. Moreover, the text does not specify that *only* male and female were created.

- Matthew 19.4-6, drawn from Genesis 2.21-25, invokes the second creation story offered in Genesis. While this story has often been read to assert the primacy of men and the notion that the first woman came from a man, it has already been stated and proven that gender and sex *cannot* be reduced to male and female, men and women. Given this [genetic](#), [physical](#), [psychological](#), and spiritual fact, the scripture *must* mean something other than its traditional interpretations and applications suggest. The Hebrew words ascribed to the two named categories within humankind are complimentary terms (i.e., 'iysh and 'ishshah) – that need not have anything to do with anatomy or hierarchy. In fact, the translation of “ishshah” in Genesis 2.24, also cited in Matthew 19.5, as “wife” is *already* a human *choice* translators and interpreters have made. The *point* of the text is *clearly* not about gender, but about:

1. Human beings *coming* from one another, sharing the same genetic material, being of the same species and complimenting one another as such;

2. Human beings clinging to one another as “one flesh” to build family – beyond their nuclear family unit; and

3. The fact that God has a hand in this joining.

In other words, human beings are designed for companionship founded on us being alike, but not *too* alike, and connected with one another in this special way according to a Divine guidance. And Jesus cites this Genesis 2 passage *not* to provide ammunition for contemporary gender/sex biblical literalists and those who wish to minimize the familial bonds that LGBTQ+ people have made with one another (despite all the odds), but rather: Jesus cites this Genesis 2 passage to *discourage* those who take this human bonding lightly,

those who are too quick to divorce, and those who disparage, desecrate, and compromise this bonding process.

- Mark 10:5-7 is like Matthew 19, except that the judgement upon divorce *precedes* the invocation of the human bonding. Consequently, verses six and seven might be more appropriately translated, read, and understood: “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made humankind in complimentary diversities.’ ‘For this reason a person shall leave their parents and be joined to the God-ordained partner who compliments them.’”
- John 2 specifies a bridegroom at the wedding at Cana, but no bride – and this wedding is not recorded in any other gospel account: this no more means that Jesus would disapprove of the bridegroom having a bridegroom than it means that there was no bride. Neither possibility is mentioned. Just because the Bible does not mention a specific possibility for righteous human relationship does not mean that such a possibility does not exist.

Perhaps we do not all agree with the interpretations of these scriptures I have offered^{iv} – or that these interpretations are the only possibilities. Must we all always agree on the interpretation of scriptures to the verse? What would preaching be if God did not often grant fresh, revelatory, and creatively reframed interpretations? Do we dare insert a hurdle on the track to eternal life more than salvation by grace through faith? Do we dare insert ourselves or our interpretation as a hurdle between *anyone* and their quest to know and receive the love and affirmation of God – and share that love with others? **One question we all must ask ourselves is how different we can be from one another – how different can our beliefs be *internally* – while we still agree to be a body of believers, a people who follow the way of Jesus Christ together.**^v There are plenty of denominations with whom we are in ecumenical fellowship who are far more conservative than we (on average) are and far more liberal than we (on average) are as African Methodists. Though we may have questions and doubts at times, we do not prioritize castigating

those who are different or challenging their legitimacy or *true* Christianity because of how different they are. The differences, however, are not just outside of us; there are also differences *among* us. It is written in Ephesians 2.8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Do we dare to lift a standard higher than faith (by God’s grace) for salvation? As African Methodists, is it our *way* – or is it the way we strive to be – to make a certain brand of holiness or a (hypocritical) biblical interpretation a prerequisite for belonging within our denomination? Are we ready to reject some believers – inviting them to be at home as Christians elsewhere? Or, worse, are we ready to tell some believers that *their* belief does not count, *their* belief is not Christian belief? Will *we* as a Church turn the scripture against *one another* shouting, “We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ,” denying that people who are different and believe differently might *still* all be on a path of obedience to Christ according to the knowledge of God? Will we forget the teaching of Jesus in Mark 9.38-40?:

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

As we build, *we* could choose to offer one another cups of water because we bear the name of Christ instead of tearing one another down because of what we believe about gender and sexuality. *We* could choose not to deny one another their rewards as each performs deeds of power in Jesus’s name.

I take the time with this exercise notwithstanding several critical points that may make this a futile and worthless endeavor:

- **The biblical text has built in features conducive to gaslighting; *we* must resist the urge to weaponize these features.** One might argue that my critique is too redactive, forgetting how much the scripture is interpreted in translation – to say nothing of how much was written *after* texts like Deuteronomy 4.2, Deuteronomy 12.32, and Revelation 22:18. And it is easy enough to dismiss every argument I have made through an invocation of Matthew 4.1-11 and Luke 4.1-12: just because one knows the scripture does not mean that can and do apply it in righteous ways. However, this cuts in all directions. This is why, from my perspective – and one I hope we can share as African Methodists – the foundation of our faith is love:

So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, “I love God,” and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 John 4.16-21)

Such love is not reduced to “love the sinner; hate the sin.” Such love is strong and deep enough that it takes responsibility for its object. If love is *true*, the object one’s love does not self-destruct under the condemning crush of that “love.” True love accentuates,

flourishes, resurrects, and brings into a fullness of life. We as intelligent believers must be careful not to gaslight others as we would not like to be gaslit. We as believers descended from enslaved and colonized Africans must remember that “we were slaves once” as we contemplate the freedoms and opportunities of others.

- And, *sociological* study reveals that biblical interpretation is not what keeps us from acknowledging and affirming the natural gender and sexual diversity of our communities. Biblical interpretation is a smokescreen and crutch. We are much more concerned about maintaining our categories and norms of social order and power. If what “the Bible says” is really the issue – and we are truly consistent in our literal biblical interpretive methods, then along with a condemning homogenial sex and the people who enjoy it, we would also have to confess that there is no clear condemnation of slavery, justification of women’s ecclesial leadership, or rejection of ethnocentrism, etc. If what “the Bible says” is really the issue – and *we* are not the ones with same-sex or same-gender attractions – even if we believe such attractions or acting on such attractions is sin, why would we focus on this instead of our *own* sin? What scripture will we quote to justify punching down? **Many of us know what we know and believe what we believe – and do not have too much interest in learning, growing, and changing.** We *say* this is not the case, some of us *hope* this is not the case, and fewer of us try to work to make sure this is not the case, but learning, growing, and changing become increasingly difficult as we age. This is all the more reason to be gracious towards others who we do not understand and who are different from us – because we *know* we have our own biases that are nearly intractable!

Still while we are thinking about how we think about the Bible, we might also consider how we might be able to read and apply the scripture differently if we acknowledged certain foundational truths such as:

- A. Human sex and gender are not limited to male and female, men and women. This is scientific – and an undeniable physical reality.
 - B. Scientific and physical diversities and variances of gender and sex – that are often invisible to the naked eye – *inherently* and *explicitly* imply that we *cannot* stipulate a singular path of righteous sexual relationship building and/or intimacy based on gender or sex.
 - C. The standards for upright sexuality – and the ways individuals are held accountable for upright sexuality – varies and shifts throughout the Hebrew scriptures and into the New Testament scriptures. (Just consider the prevalence of bigamy and procreation with the enslaved and (those playing) sex workers in the Hebrew scriptures.)
 - D. The opportunity to build family in diverse ways is a gift God gives as God sees fit to all human beings.
5. ***Serve. A hermeneutics of humility requires that we prioritize serving the least among us.***

The Gospel According to Matthew 7.21-23 reads:

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly.’

Sometimes I wonder who among *my* contemporaries will hear the Lord say, “I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly”; of course, I also wonder if the Lord will say this to me. Who could read this passage, who *would* read this passage and not wonder if it applied to them? Who could read this passage, who *would* read this passage and not do everything possible to make sure the Lord would not be inclined to say this to them? A hermeneutics of humility

counsels wonder without worry – and work worthy of the love, grace, and mercy God has shown each of us.

So, I ask myself: “What is the work worthy of the love, grace, and mercy God has shown each of us?” And I remember the words recorded in Matthew 25.34-40:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,’³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink?³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing?’³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’

Worthy work is for the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, incarcerated, and strangers among us; worthy work is the care we offer to the least of the Lord’s siblings. Today, the least of the Lord’s siblings includes our LGBTQ+ siblings who have been made hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, incarcerated, strangers – and who are dying^{vi} – among us because of *our* refusal to extend ourselves in unconditional love and affirmation evidenced by full inclusion and balanced consideration for opportunities to serve.

It is true, however, that our LGBTQ+ siblings are not the *only* “least of these.” One of the most fundamental challenges facing the AME Church is the systemic bias against members of our Church born in Africa and in the Caribbean. This is a bias fueled by a global sociopolitical order still governed by a trinity of anti-Black terrors that (even Black) religious institutions mediate:

colonialism, slavery, and racism. Instead of daring to understand justice and equity for our members in districts 14 through 20 as integral to justice and equity for our LGBTQ+ members (and vice versa), we have bought into the lie that these particular demands for justice and equity are not only detached from one another but that justice and equity for members in districts 14 through 20 is in conflict with the justice and equity LGBTQ+ members of the church and their advocates seek. Sadly, there are leaders who wish to capitalize on this lie:

- Some will campaign insisting that their opposition to LGBTQ+ people and practices is tantamount to their being *for* Africa or the Caribbean – as though there are no LGBTQ+ people in Africa or the Caribbean and no LGBTQ+ members in the AME Churches in these regions – and/or that our church has no responsibility to these people and members;
- Some leaders will demonstrate their support for our clergy, lay, and episcopal leaders from Africa and the Caribbean by attesting to (what amounts to) a confirmation bias, and by witnessing to the ways that governments in some African and Caribbean countries expect the AME Church to support campaigns against homogenital sexualities, but will offer little to no support for these same clergy, lay, and episcopal leaders from Africa and the Caribbean to exercise full self-determination and enjoy equitable connectional leadership opportunities.
- Some will insist that support of LGBTQ+ AMEs (and the desire to expand AME Church membership through ministry to LGBTQ+ people and communities) can, will, and should result in the mass exodus of individual congregations or entire districts within the connection – and especially among those in districts 14 through 20 – from the AME Church, but have done little to evangelize, contribute resources to, and/or grow the AME Church.

When we are among the least, when we are dispossessed, when we are disinherited, we should always be asking ourselves: **Who else is experiencing something comparable to what *we* are?**

The discrimination others are experience will never be exactly the same, but there will always be common features. **What do we have in common?** I have no doubt that significant contingencies of LGBTQ+ AMEs, AMEs from Africa and the Caribbean, and *especially* LGBTQ+ AMEs from Africa and the Caribbean *all* feel ignored, at risk, silenced, neglected, forgotten, taken for granted, misunderstood, and/or demonized. **For what can we work together?** At the very least we can:

- Refuse to be pitted against one another as though there are no African and Caribbean LGBTQ+ AMEs – and as though AMEs who are African and Caribbean and AMEs who are LGBTQ+ have no common ecclesial interests (even when they are not also LGBTQ+ or African or Caribbean, respectively).
- Work to cultivate *a hermeneutics of humility* – especially as it pertains to one another.
- Create conditions for us to hear one another and for the connectional AME Church to hear us – and others who we tend not to hear or whose voices we tune out – in ways that cultivate and reward holy, courageous, and constructive discipleship.

We must ask ourselves: are we building a church committed to the augmentation of the powerful among us – or are we building a church committed to seeking out the least, those in need, and those who are weak to serve with care and diligence that all needs may be met and all bound may be liberated? We cannot afford to pretend that the least do not exist – or make sure that the least are not among us. If we fail to do right by our LGBTQ+ siblings, we should all be prepared to hear the Lord say, “I never knew you” because *we* will have chosen not to know the Lord as reflected in “the least of these.”

Our interpretations and ecclesial policies are not abstract or theoretical; they are not about other people and other peoples’ churches. These interpretations and policies impact real people, real AME

people – many of whom cannot and will not be able to speak up for themselves and their families for fear of the risks and the costs. These interpretations and policies have real bearing on the future of the AME Church. These interpretations and policies are building blocks for the AME Church – and for the world we are helping to build far beyond our ecclesial parameters.

And arrogance is poor building material. Arrogance is a mudpie of lies about ourselves and the world around us – bricks without straw. The storms of life will wash away interpretation and policies shaped in and formed by hermeneutical arrogance lacking a balance of reflection, acknowledgement, restraint, study, and service. Ultimately, such arrogance will prove more devastating to the AME Church than an exercise of humility through the removal of the same-sex marriage prohibition.

Why do we lie and suggest that there are families, cultures, communities, countries, regions, and continents that do not have and have never had gender and sexual diversity? Why do we accept the neocolonial lies that white supremacist, neo-Nazi evangelicals are trafficking and exporting into our communities in *all* regions that our human gender and sexual diversity is a sin? This is nothing more or less than the next generation of the same people who raped, sold, subjugated, and trafficked people of African descent because we were hypersexual. And once more, *we* are being conscripted to participate in our own oppression conceptually, spiritually, and even physically. We are better than this.

We are the *inkosi ygbafazi* among the Zulu in Southern Africa; the *eshenga* of Namibia; the *mwaa* among the Ila of Southern Zambia and Zimbabwe; the *chibadi* of Zambia; the *nkhonsthana* of Mozambique; the *ndongo-techi-la* of the Congo and Sudan; the *ikibindu* of Burundi and Rwanda; the *mugawe* of the Meru people in Kenya; the *asbtime* in Ethiopia; the *gor-digen* and the *yauss* and *oubi* of the Wolof in Senegambia; ‘*Yan daudu*’ of Nigeria; the inheritors of the homoerotic traditions of the Akan and Ashanti people of Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Liberia; the *kbawal* of North Africa; the bisexuals, gays, lesbians, queers, and transgender

people of African descent, the Blackqueers and Quares in and beyond Turtle Island,^{vii} and the bonified, breddren, and bunnununus of Jamaica; and we are straight as well as countless named and unnamed other gender-sexual minorities in Africa and its diaspora. We are all of this and more. Humility and strength go hand-in-hand for those who love God, follow the way of Jesus, and bear the good news accordingly. With humility and strength, we must build our church – as we build a new world. Builders must be confident and strong in *a hermeneutics of humility*. “Builders must be strong.”

Who will build with me?

ⁱ Dr. Vincent Harding adapted this phrase to the tune of “We are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.” So we can “hear” it as we read it, and as we do it.

ⁱⁱ This article refers to “God” as such. In other written work, following the lead of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and certain Jewish traditions, I use “G*d” to refer to the Supreme Being – and triune Divinity we recognize through the three persons of Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. I have not use this “G*d” form in this article for the sake of legibility to readers unfamiliar with this way of referring to G*d. This form, G*d, signifies (1) the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence of G*d (through the “G”), (2) the mystery, unknowability, genderlessness, and genderfulness of G*d (through the “*”), and (3) the humanity and proximity of G*d through Jesus (reflected in the “d”).

ⁱⁱⁱ From Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 854-855.

^{iv} The interpretations I have offered here draw most heavily from Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, Alamo Square Press: New Mexico, 2014 (first printed in 1999). However, I also encouraged those who wish to study further to engage Obery M. Hendricks, *Christians Against Christianity: How Right-Wing Evangelicals Are Destroying Our Nation and Our Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021); Deryn Guest et al., eds., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 2015); Robert Goss, *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000). These are but a few examples of a robust, growing canon of biblical scholarship that exposes the flaws and biases of biblical interpretations and ecclesial policies that reject and exclude LGBTQ+ people. Also consider Article 5 and Article 6 of the Articles of religion when thinking about scriptural interpretation: while Article 5 reminds us that nothing outside of our (protestant) canon is required for salvation and Article 6 attests that “the Old Testament is not contrary to the New,” Article 6 also reminds us that “the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, doth not bind Christians” – demonstrating the agility of scriptural interpretation.

^v See Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath’s Blog, [“It’s Not About Sex – It is about How We Live with Differences”](#)

^{vi} According to Ami McReynolds of Feeding America, “>22% of LGBTQ+ adults live in poverty and are disproportionately affected by food insecurity.” (<https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/podcast/Food-Insecurity-LGBTQ-Community>). This is but one social indicator among *many* social indicators that reflect the ways LGBTQ+ people around the world are experiencing the kind of suffering cited in Matthew 25.

^{vii} The Lenape, Iroquios, and Anishinaabe term for North America in translation.