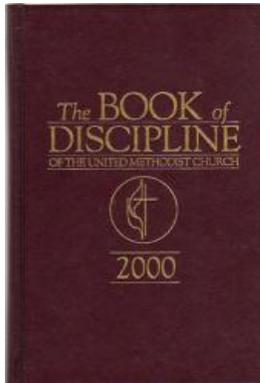


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## Integrity — What's in a Word?

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According to *The Los Angeles Times*, scores of United Methodist pastors in Southern California are planning to defy church law by performing same-sex marriages. The paper provides rather extensive detail about these plans, acknowledging that performing same-sex marriages could lead to disciplinary action against the pastors.

In addition, a large group of retired United Methodist ministers in the region has volunteered to perform the marriages on behalf of pastors who might be defrocked or disciplined if they performed the marriages themselves.

The [paper's report](#) includes some fascinating statements from pastors who plan to defy the discipline and doctrine of their church — and the clear teachings of the Bible.

For example:

*"I'm tired of being part of a church that lacks integrity," said the Rev. Janet Gollery McKeithen of Santa Monica's Church in Ocean Park, who plans to conduct weddings for two gay couples in August and September. "I love my church, and I don't want to leave it. But I can't be part of a church that is willing to portray a God that is so hateful. I would rather be forced out."*

And:

*The Rev. Sharon Rhodes-Wickett of Claremont United Methodist Church joined a retired deacon from her congregation to co-officiate at the July 5 wedding of two longtime members, Howard Yeager and Bill Charlton. The wedding was held off site — at a Claremont complex for retired clergy and missionaries — to avoid violating the rule against such ceremonies in churches. Rhodes-Wickett, who led the Lord's Prayer and gave a homily, said she hoped to avoid discipline by stopping short of actually pronouncing the couple married. That action was performed by the retired deacon, who also signed the marriage license. Rhodes-Wickett said she did not want Yeager and Charlton to leave her church to exchange vows.*

*"This is my flock," she said, adding that the men have been together 40 years, 22 of them as members of her Claremont congregation. "It's a matter of integrity and a matter of what it is to be a pastoral ministry."*

There is a very curious and revealing feature to these comments. Both of these pastors oppose and defy the *Book of Discipline* — the authoritative teachings and policies of the United Methodist Church — and they claim to do so in the name of "integrity."

Pastor Janet Gollery McKeithen said her church "lacks integrity" because it identifies homosexuality as a sin and prohibits pastors from performing same-sex unions. Pastor Sharon Rhodes-Wickett said that her act of defiance is "a matter of integrity."

Integrity is crucial to the Christian ministry, and it is a word that is integral to the matter at hand. What makes the use of the word by these two pastors so disappointing — and revealing — is that the word is used to mask and justify an act that lacks all integrity.

These two women are defying the very policies they are bound and committed to uphold. They sought and accepted ordination in their church knowing that these policies and doctrines were in place. They are defying their church, their doctrine, and the Bible. They pledged to uphold these doctrines, but now they defy them.

Integrity would not lead these pastors to defy their church and violate their ordination vows, but to uphold them. If they cannot uphold these doctrines and policies, let them resign in conscience.

Sydney Biddle Barrows, the infamous "Mayflower Madam" convicted of running an elite prostitution service in the 1980s, once remarked, "I ran the wrong kind of business, but I did it with integrity."

Misused in this way and employed as moral artifice, "integrity" is claimed where no real integrity can exist. There is no "integrity" in running a prostitution ring, and there is no integrity in defying ordination vows.

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