

CONTINUING TESTAMENT  
EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME  
CHANGING LIVES

September 10, 2013

RE: United Church of Christ Endorsed Chaplains  
Guidelines for Same-Gender Services



Greetings:

The repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell and the recent decision of the Supreme Court to declare the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional have prompted the Department of Defense to draft new policies which extend benefits and services to same-gender married couples. The Offices of the Chiefs of Chaplains of the Army, Air Force and Navy recognize that there are many pastoral considerations as a result of this decision and have requested that the ecclesiastical endorsers for each denomination issue guidance to their military and Veteran Administration chaplains in accordance with denominational expectations and requirements.

#### Policy and Guidelines

The United Church of Christ has established itself as a denomination that is open and affirming of all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Throughout our recent history, the UCC has boldly and with conviction ordained members of the LGBT community in the spirit of diversity and inclusivity. Our commitment to an extravagant welcome of all people into the full life and ministry of the Church was demonstrated by the General Synod in 2005 with the support of marriage equality and again more recently with the celebration of the Supreme Court's June 2013 ruling on the Defense of Marriage Act.

Pluralism, inclusivity and respect for all of God's children are paramount in discerning pastoral care, especially for today's service members and our veterans. Understanding that the United Church of Christ serves a diverse family of believers, we affirm that our clergy too represent a broad spectrum of theological understanding and belief. Therefore, we are calling on all UCC military and VA chaplains to prayerfully, and with good conscience, discern in the days ahead how they will answer the call to minister to the population who is now afforded their consul and services, specifically to same-gender couples.

It is the expectation of the United Church of Christ that all of our chaplains have and will continue to treat all Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and members of the Coast Guard who seek their

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guidance and consul with respect and dignity, as they work to change lives. Knowing that the Commanders are given authorization for chaplains as special staff officers to plan and implement a comprehensive religious program that addresses the religious and spiritual needs of the service members in the command, we expect that our chaplains will fully cooperate to either directly “provide” or indirectly “provide for” all who seek their services. In the cases of Strong Bonds (US Army) and MarriageCare (US Air Force) events, guidance is being drafted and developed through the respective Chief of Chaplains Offices. The United Church of Christ anticipates that our chaplains will deliberately and prayerfully consider these opportunities when asked to lead and participate in events attended by same-gender couples.

It must be noted that different commands, installations and posts will be directed by specific policy and, in some instances, state regulations. It is the responsibility of each chaplain to be fully aware and advised as to how those regulations will inform a response to requests for some services. It is the chaplain’s duty to ensure our service members’ free exercise of religion, as a continuing testament to God’s acceptance and love for all people.

As the ecclesiastical endorser for the United Church of Christ, it is my intention to walk and serve with you as you minister to the members of our Armed Forces, their families and our veterans.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Stephen B. Boyd". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Stephen B. Boyd  
Minister for Chaplains and Specialized Ministers  
Ecclesiastical Endorser  
Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization  
United Church of Christ