

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
NORTHEASTERN JURISDICTION COMMITTEE ON
NATIVE AMERICAN MINISTRIES (NEJNAMC)
POSITION ON FULL INCLUSION OF LGBTQIA2S+
PERSONS

APRIL 12, 2021

Because our Book of Discipline confirms that every individual is created in the image of God and is of sacred worth, we affirm full inclusion of LGBTQIA2S+ persons which includes Two Spirit¹ people. Therefore, all negative or discriminatory language related to LGBTQIA2S+ people must be removed from the Book of Discipline. In addition, the Discipline must specifically endorse same gender marriage and the ordination of persons who identify as LGBTQIA2S+.

The affirmation and full inclusion of Two Spirit persons is a justice concern² with intersectionality. It weds the foundation of acknowledging all persons to be of sacred worth with the call to address our colonialism that is grounded in the Doctrine of Discovery³ and white supremacy.

In the 1600s Jesuits began forcing First Nations Peoples⁴ to conform to the binary understanding of gender and sexuality that Western Christianity brought to Turtle Island.⁵ Because of this history, Indigenous Peoples are not of one mind since many were raised with such a binary perspective and detached from their ancestral traditions.

¹ *Two Spirit* is a modern Pan-Indian, umbrella term used by some indigenous North Americans to describe Native Peoples in their communities who fulfil a traditional third gender ceremonial role. It was claimed in 1990 by the Indigenous Lesbian and Gay International Gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada to distinguish and distance Native American/First Nations Peoples from non-native peoples concerning perspectives on sexual and gender diversity. *Two Spirit* became a universal term that all First Nations could use simultaneously since each native language had its own unique word to identify Two Spirit persons.

² Embracing First Nations Peoples fully into The United Methodist Church requires that the church honors the ancient traditions that many Natives have maintained or are seeking to recover as a means to heal from the injustices caused by colonialism.

³ "The Doctrine of Discovery" established a spiritual, political, and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians. It has been invoked since Pope Alexander VI issued the Papal Bull "Inter Caetera" in 1493.

⁴ For the purpose of this document the term *First Nations Peoples* is an umbrella term that includes Native Americans, Indigenous Peoples, American Indians, Native Peoples, tribal nations, etc..

⁵ "Turtle Island is the name many Algonquian- and Iroquoian-speaking peoples mainly in the northeastern part of North America use to refer to the continent. In various Indigenous origin stories, the turtle is said to support the world, and is an icon of life itself. Turtle Island therefore speaks to various spiritual beliefs about creation and for some, the turtle is a marker of identity, culture, autonomy and a deeply-held respect for the environment." (*The Canadian Encyclopedia*)

The term *Two Spirit* was adopted by Native Nations in 1990 as a way to reject what they called the “western binary implications, such as implying these persons are both male and female.” They understand *Two Spirit* persons to be a third gender.

Definitions of *Two Spirit* and how it is embraced is specific to each nation. It is a very nuanced term relating to a different perspective on gender and sexuality than the binary perspective of white culture. *Two Spirit* embraces the vastness of diversity of gender and sexual orientation. *Two Spirit* affirms that there are multiple genders— various nations recognize from three to six genders. One of its many dimensions is the acknowledgement that one’s sexual orientation is a sacred gift to be honored.

Two Spirit persons often are affirmed as having a close relationship with Creator and thus may be the healers, visionaries, and medicine people who are honored instead of marginalized. They may be given special ceremonial roles.

The United Methodist Church has declared its intent to repent of its colonialism of Native persons. Full inclusion and honoring their Two Spirit traditions is one concrete way to assure The United Methodist Church’s faithfulness to this commitment. Indeed, embracing First Nations Peoples fully into The United Methodist Church requires that The United Methodist Church honors the ancient traditions that many Natives have maintained or are seeking to recover as a means to heal from the injustices caused by colonialism.

Now The United Methodist Church members have the opportunity to confess the sin of colonialism. Authentic repentance only can be achieved by affirmation and full inclusion of all persons. This would support First Nations Peoples as they seek to heal from injustices caused by The United Methodist Church. It also would acknowledge their honored traditions of the God-given place of Two Spirit persons in their communities.

The Northeastern Jurisdiction Native American Ministries Committee is committed to affirming the gifts Two Spirit persons bring to their congregations and to affirming that God is speaking through them. Affirmation and full inclusion is one way that The United Methodist Church can recognize the sacred worth of all persons and be faithful to its commitment to participate in the healing of the injustices being caused through colonialization.

Adopting a position of full inclusion is a beginning; we call for the General Church to adopt and implement policies of full inclusion.