

**Changing the Pronouns in the By-Laws of the Pacific Northwest Conference
to Make Them More Inclusive.**

A Prudential Resolution

Submitted by the Committee on Ministry
to the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Northwest Conference April 29, 2023

1 **SUMMARY**

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3 This resolution calls on the Pacific Northwest Conference of United Church of Christ to
4 recognize the on-going evolution within the LGBTQ+ community in identifying themselves.
5 Particularly important is the way we are learning to use pronouns. The pronouns we use
6 (he/she/they) in everyday life are often associated with gender, but these quick connections are
7 not always accurate – and making assumptions can be harmful. By respectfully using the most
8 inclusive pronouns in our conversations but also our documents we reveal intentional inclusivity.
9 The resolution calls on the Pacific Northwest Conference to 1) acknowledge the importance of
10 using inclusive pronouns; 2) search for and intentionally change pronouns in our documents and
11 3) promote and model the inclusive use of correct pronouns in our churches and communities.
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13 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

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15 The unity of the church is reflected in the rich diversity that is present in all of God’s people –
16 race, gender, ethnicity, theology, sexuality – all are created in the image of the Divine. It is a
17 core value of the United Church of Christ to work towards equality and to ensure that an
18 inclusive communication of the Gospel is present and accessible for all.
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20 The Gospel is a call to action on behalf of the least of these. In this case, for the LGBTQ+
21 community. It may seem a small thing, but updating the use of pronouns in our documents helps
22 with the inclusion of our Trans, Gender-Nonconforming, Nonbinary, Gender-fluid and Queer
23 siblings. Jesus’ ministry was a message to the margins of his day “to proclaim release to the
24 captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18).
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26 The call to the church is to bring the good news of the Gospel, and to ensure that the
27 marginalized are included. Inclusive language is welcoming to all – it says, “I see you and value
28 you.” Jesus saw those in the margins: the outcasts... the anxious enquirers, and bade them come
29 to Him (John 1:38). He saw the impotent man and healed him (John 5:6). He saw the hungry
30 multitude and supplied their need (John 6:5). He saw the weeping mourners and was troubled for
31 them (John 11:33). He saw the distressed mother and cared for her (John 19:26). He saw the
32 blind man, and revealed Himself as “The Light of the world” (John 9:1).
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34 By this small change in the use of pronouns (that may go un-noticed once it is done) we see and
35 welcome the LGBTQ+ siblings. Pronouns count. We propose that we use them wisely and
36 kindly even in our By-Laws.
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39 **HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

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41 Pronouns are the most common way that people refer to one another outside of using proper
42 names. We all want, and deserve, to feel seen. Using correct pronouns is an easy way to validate
43 others.

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45 There's a misconception that the usage of they/them personal pronouns is new, or that it is
46 grammatically incorrect to refer to a singular human as they. Both notions are false. Historically,
47 they/them has been used in situations where a person's gender is unknown, as in, "Someone left
48 their hat, do you think they need it?" Usage of they/them pronouns in the personal setting would
49 be, "They left their book on the counter," or, "They went to their house themselves". Before we
50 meet someone, it is appropriate to use, they/them as the most inclusive pronoun as in, "I can't
51 wait to meet them".

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53 Often, non-cis people are victims of violence because of their genders. That means that even
54 though pronouns aren't necessarily an important topic to cis people, to non-cis people it is a topic
55 that heavily impacts their lives, and the usage of incorrect pronouns is yet one more act of
56 violence against them.

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58 We have a long way to go as a society to make non-cis people feel as safe moving through life as
59 cis people feel. Using the correct pronouns for trans, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, and
60 gender fluid people is the easiest first step in this direction that cis people can take. The act of
61 using correct pronouns serves to show others that you see them for who they are, and creates
62 safety for them.

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64 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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66 **WHEREAS:** The United Church of Christ, at the 1985 General Synod, passed the resolution
67 encouraging churches and other settings to become Open and Affirming (ONA), and

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69 **WHEREAS:** The Pacific Northwest Conference (PNC) became ONA at the Annual Meeting
70 2011, and

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72 **WHEREAS:** It is the intention of the PNC to be inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community in all that
73 we do finding welcoming and affirming ways of being together, and

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75 **WHEREAS:** The various churches of the PNC continue their work of ONA, including attention
76 to the use of Pronouns. For example: they are offering nametags with pronoun designations or
77 they are teaching the congregation to ask individuals "what pronoun do you use?" avoiding
78 reference to the words "preferred" – teaching that the person alone knows their correct pronouns,
79 and

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81 **WHEREAS:** Misgendering or doing unintended violence to individuals is not in keeping with
82 Christ-like love and care. Jesus taught us to "love your neighbor as yourself" John 22:39. So by
83 making this small change the PNC will validate each of our siblings and thereby value our
84 precepts of extravagant inclusivity.

85

86 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Pacific Northwest
87 Conference of the United Church of Christ amend the pronoun use in the By- Laws in Article 1
88 Sections 3 & 4 to read “they are” instead of “she, he is”.

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90 **FUNDING:** There is no funding needed since the By-Laws are in PDF format, available to all to
91 reading or downloading.

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93 **IMPLEMENTATION:** The Executive Administrator or their designee will amend the By-Laws
94 documentation in accordance with the resolution. If other implementation is needed, the Officers
95 of the Conference, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United
96 Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

PROPOSED CHANGE:

**PACIFIC NORTHWEST CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
BYLAWS
(Adopted April, 1997, and amended at subsequent meetings)**

ARTICLE 1 – MEMBERSHIP

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3. A Clergy member of the Conference is in good standing if ~~they are she or he is~~ approved by the Committee on the Ministry and ~~are is~~:
 - a. An active or retired ordained minister of the United Church of Christ; or
 - b. A commissioned or licensed minister who is serving a church or in a ministry affirmed by the Conference; or
 - c. A minister holding dual standing, serving a church or in a ministry affirmed by the Conference, who is registered with the United Church of Christ and holds current standing in the Conference or in an Association within the Conference.
4. A Lay member of the Conference is in good standing if ~~they are she or he is~~ both a member of a Local Church of the Conference; and
 - a. A currently serving Board Director, Officer of the Conference, Chairperson of a Leadership Committee; or a past Moderator of the Conference, or past Chairperson of the Board of Directors who resides within the Conference; or
 - b. The duly elected Representative of a Ministry Network that has received formal Conference recognition (see Article 8.2).
 - c. A missionary, residing within the Conference, who is or was appointed or commissioned by Wider Church Ministries or its antecedents, the United Church Board for World Ministries, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the Board for International Missions.