



## TEENS COMMITTING SUICIDE— DO WE TRULY CARE?

Two controversial Women's Division petitions relating to teen sexuality and suicide were passed at General Conference 2004. One changed the language in *The Book of Discipline* to allow for the expenditure of funds for ministry related to the increasing rate of teen suicide, and in support of civil rights for homosexuals. A second petition authorized the formation of a taskforce to publish information and make recommendations regarding issues of teen suicide among youth as it relates to sexual identity. Requested funding for this taskforce in the amount of \$375,000 was not approved.

This disciplinary change and taskforce formation is based on erroneous information that teens struggling with sexual identity are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than are other youth. No other reasons for teen suicide are mentioned. **Yet teen suicide reports from the major psychological and pediatric associations do not even mention sexual identity or mention it near the bottom of a long list of other risk factors.** Other teen suicide factors—family breakup through divorce, alcohol or drug abuse and family dysfunction—are mentioned in all the major health organization publications as the *main* factors in teen suicide.

RENEW's analysis of the Women's Division petitions quoted from the following studies which **do not identify sexual identity issues as a major cause of teen suicide:** The American Psychiatric Association, The National Mental Health Association, KidsHealth, The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, The American Academy of Pediatrics.

**The Women's Division claim is based on one source, a 1989 deeply flawed and pro-homosexual study by San Francisco homosexual activist Paul Gibson presented in a report to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.** Dr. Louis Sullivan, former Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) repudiated and distanced his department from the Gibson paper. Since that time, leading research analysts have examined and disproved Gibson's claims.

**If we truly care that teens are committing suicide at higher rates than ever before, wouldn't we want to address the top three to five causes for teen suicide rather than going to the bottom of the list, or off the page to focus on homosexuality? We are talking about the souls and lives of young people.**

Given the documented facts about the causes of teen suicide, it seems there is a political agenda here to promote the acceptance of homosexual practice among teens. One is appalled at the lack of integrity in this program.

The General Board of Church and Society laments the failure of this resolution to be fully funded, but points the reader to a resource developed by the Wallingford United Methodist Church in Seattle, Washington. The GBCS commends this resource, identifying it as a “gift to the denomination.” The Wallingford study is based on the same flawed Gibson report. This resource is in fact an advocacy piece leading toward the acceptance of homosexual practice among teens. **The study, “After the Fact,” appears in Petition #80799-C2 on page 349 of Volume 2 of the Daily Christian Advocate. This flawed study, which is based on the discredited Gibson report, and which has not been thoroughly examined by a broad-based group, is offered in this legislation as a study for the general church.**

A copy of the legislative piece submitted to General Conference asking for an amendment to Resolution #158 which would broaden this resolution to include the top causes of teen suicide is attached (the location in the DCA has not been identified). **The Women’s Division submitted a petition asking that Resolution #158 be retained. It is Petition #80740-C2-R158 found on page 402, top right hand side of Volume 2, Section 1 of the Daily Christian Advocate. If this legislation is accepted, no modification can be made in this faulty resolution, based on flawed statistics. Voting to retain could result in a renewed request for funding for a program ministry that does not identify or work against the primary causes of teen suicide.**

**DO WE TRULY CARE ABOUT TEENS WHO COMMIT SUICIDE AND ABOUT ADDRESSING THE PRIMARY CAUSES WHY THEY DO SO? IF THE ANSWER IS “YES,” A REPLACEMENT TO RESOLUTION #158 IS ESSENTIAL. IT IS IMPORTANT TO VOTE “NO” ON BOTH PETITION #80740-C2-R158 AND “NO” ON PETITION #80799-C2.**

**Teen Sexual Identity and Suicide Risk**  
**Book of Resolutions #158**  
**Financial Implications: None**

**AMEND Resolution #158 as follows:**

**158. Teen Sexual Identity and Suicide Risk**

~~In the year 2003 at least 700,000 high school students will attempt suicide—one in every 13 high school students in the United States.~~ According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide rates among adults have steadied or even declined over the past few decades but teenage suicide rates have tripled.

**An unpublished, rejected, and subsequently discredited** 1989 U. S. Department of Health and Human Services study ~~found~~ **suggested** that teens dealing with issues of sexual identify are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than are other youth. **Other research has found that issues of sexual orientation are not at the forefront of factors contributing to teen suicide. The leading issues are identified by research done by the American Psychiatric Association (depression, alcohol or drug abuse, aggressive and disruptive behaviors, family loss and instability, unplanned pregnancy), the National Mental Health Association (feelings of anger and resentment), KidsHealth (drugs and alcohol, lack of support network, divorce, domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse, repeated failures at school), and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (stress, confusion, self-doubt, pressure to succeed, etc.)**

The United Methodist Church, in Social Principles ¶ 162.H, states: Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons. **We are also committed to identifying and ministering to the actual, verifiable, and scholarly accepted causes of teen suicide.**

The General Conference will establish and fund a task group which will:

- Publish, in laypeople's terms, a summary of current research on ~~homosexual youth at risk for suicide;~~ **the leading causes of teens considering or attempting suicide.**
- Work with organizations currently doing research on these issues;
- Provide a directory of agencies working on issues of teen suicide among youth dealing with ~~issues of sexual identity;~~ **the issues identified as primary concerns.**
- Publish a resource for congregations and families which provides accurate information, recommendation for programs and pastoral guidance.
- Make recommendations for legislative actions within The United Methodist Church;
- Make recommendations for programs for youth through congregations, districts, conferences, mission agencies, **The General Board of Discipleship**, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men and other organizational bodies of The United Methodist Church.
- Report to the ~~2008~~ **2012** General Conference on its findings and work.

**RATIONALE:**

The original resolution was based on a study that did not meet scholarly standards. Sexual identity is seldom mentioned as a cause of suicide in scholarly research. The real causes of teen suicide must be identified and programs of ministry designed for prevention.