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OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF THE UNIVERSAL LIFE CHURCH

On the 13th of March, 2018 USA Today published an article written by Ron Maxey of The Commercial Appeal, a local Memphis paper. The piece Mr. Maxey wrote grossly distorts the legal status and true nature of the Universal Life Church. The Universal Life Church was never contacted for comment by Mr. Maxey, anyone from USA Today, or any other news aggregator who also published the story. While some of the false claims in the article are offensive to thousands of ministers and families across the country, they also serve to highlight a relatively recent shift in Tennessee policy regarding the ordination of Universal Life Church ministers that we have been lead to believe is a heavy-handed effort to restrict gay marriage in the wake of the 2015 Supreme Court decision.

The article largely consists of false and defamatory comments made by Larry Rice, who runs a small Memphis family law practice. In the piece, Mr. Rice is quoted as stating that the “Universal Life Church is a joke” and “...you can’t get a joke to marry you.” We would counter that only a “joke” of an attorney would make such needlessly inflammatory and insulting remarks. The ministers of the Universal Life Church, who work daily to actualize good in the universe, are as deserving of equal rights and respect as any other religious official in the United States.

This country was founded on the principle of the freedom of religion, a value which the state of Tennessee purports to hold dear. The Universal Life Church was founded on the principle of the openness of religion – that all those who feel so-called should have the ability to access whatever faith training they desire, are permitted to freely explore and answer some of the “big questions” we face as a species, and are empowered to speak their own truth to power.

These rights should be open to all individuals regardless of their ability to kowtow to a bureaucracy in Rome, spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to attend an institutional seminary, and/or funnel voters and dollars to politicians. Every person is naturally endowed with the right to communicate with their God (or gods) in the manner that they see fit; furthermore, every couple is naturally endowed with the right to be united by somebody with whose values they truly agree and align.

To politicians in Tennessee and elsewhere, marriage has clearly become a weapon: something they can dole out or withhold on a whim to exact control over the private lives of their citizens – particularly those who belong to historically marginalized groups.

To people like Larry Rice, marriage has become a meal ticket: something to be ripped apart and scavenged, leaving broken hearts and empty wallets in his wake as his bank account grows and grows.

To the Universal Life Church, marriage always has been and will always remain a fundamental right of **ALL** individuals to unite together however they see fit. It has been torn to shreds by the nefarious powers-that-be, and it is our intent to restore it to its true nature: a personally sacred ceremony designed to unite two individuals before their loved ones and the universe.

The Universal Life Church is in active communication with attorneys in Tennessee and other locations in the country where its ministers’ rights are being fundamentally, systematically denied and will not rest until the rite of marriage and all other religious functions are granted equally to **ALL** faiths, as our founders intended.

Rev. G. Martin Freeman
Presiding Chaplain
Universal Life Church Ministries