



The Welcoming Community Network

WCNnewsletter

December 2011

Lombard Community of Christ becomes Welcoming & Affirming

By Cheryl McCloskey

In the Spring of 2010, our congregation, Community of Christ, Lombard, Illinois, formed a committee to guide us toward becoming a welcoming congregation in the fullest sense of the phrase. We did research on the requirements of the WCN and have attempted to follow the steps suggested to us by Meredith Bischoff, President of the Welcoming Community Network, as well as other printed resources.

First, we acquired and viewed during the 11:00 hour the film "For the Bible Tells Me So." We then had a series of services dealing with the concepts and meaning of the different terms and aspects of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender individuals and what it would mean to purposely welcome them into our congregation and worships. The response was positive.

Then we duplicated and handed out the Congregational Assessment and scored it according to the provided guidelines. The results were positive, but we scored "On the Horizon" and obviously had some work to do. We did feel, however, that the scores were affected by the fact that our members live in many different villages around Lombard IL and that caused some confusion on the question regarding policy in the political entity where we are located. There is also a mix of the amount of time various members have been part of the congregation and so some of the questions about actions the group has taken over the years were difficult for some to answer. We felt these types of questions skewed the results a bit, but still felt there was work to do.



Our committee began work on and eventually prepared a new Mission Statement and Vision Statement for presentation to the congregation which would specifically indicate our attitudes of inclusion.

We then held a straw vote on a Sunday when we had very good attendance. The result was unanimously in favor of becoming a Welcoming Congregation.

In an effort to meet the educational needs we saw, we organized and held a congregational retreat on March 18-20, 2011. Guest speakers included Arthur Butler (a WCN board member), Mike and Chuck Hewett and Lauren Hall, all members of the church who are active in GALA and living in the Independence, Missouri area. They presented information on the history of Community of Christ policy regarding GLBT issues, the process for becoming a Welcoming Congregation with materials from the WCN, discussion of a tangible response, an open discussion by presenters and guests where personal stories and concrete suggestions were shared and action steps were planned for the next phases. The attendance was good, including some individuals from other congregations in our area, a representative of PFLAG and people who had heard we were making

this journey and wanted to investigate and be part of it. The disappointment was that some members did not attend, ask questions or express their views.

We felt that the time had come to ask the congregation to make a commitment and to celebrate the new path we were undertaking, so on June 5, 2011 we held a short business meeting at the beginning of the 11:00 hour at which we discussed the proposed Mission and Vision Statements, voted on and passed them. Then we asked the congregation to vote on the record on whether Lombard should become a Welcoming Congregation. The vote was overwhelmingly positive, but not 100% as the straw vote would have lead us to hope. There was an issue which caused one person to vote negatively. It was voted to include physically and mentally handicapped individuals in our purposeful welcome. Our building is old and does not meet code for accessibility even though alterations have been made to attempt to make it possible for most people to attend there. But one individual felt we would be opening ourselves to expenses the congregation couldn't afford if we made this specific inclusion and so voted against the measure. We are, as a result, beginning a process of evaluating the building to see what we can do to make it more accessible.

One member did not attend the service because he disagreed with what we were doing. Although this was hard to accept, we felt the need to continue in our efforts to become an official Welcoming Congregation and to reach out to all others who want to join us in our efforts to minister as we feel Jesus would ask us to minister.

Great joy was shared in the following celebration service. The church was decorated with rainbows of balloons, the children sang, testimonies were shared, Matt Frizzell preached, communion was shared, and there were many symbols of the body being a gathering of individuals working together to make it effective. Then we marched out of the

church singing together to add temporary stickers to our church sign to indicate to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender population that we would welcome and intentionally include them in our congregational life and work. We are now working on a permanent symbol to show that commitment. After the service we shared a potluck and lots of fellowship. We are joyful and expectant as we prepare to join our sisters and brothers in ministry.



The efforts go on. We are reaching out and praying for any who are struggling with the idea of welcoming all in the Chicago Mission Center. We are continuing to challenge ourselves to find ways to be welcoming and to find community efforts in which to involve ourselves that will help to bring about the equality of all and minister to those who haven't yet found that acceptance and justice.

Help Wanted

WCN is looking a volunteer to take over duties as newsletter editor. We need someone very comfortable using the computer and has ready access to email and Microsoft Word.

We would like to publish the WCN newsletter should appear either monthly or every other month. Assistance with content will be provided by the WCN board.

If you are willing or have questions, please contact info@welcomingcommunitynetwork.org

Upcoming Events

WCN Annual Meeting

- Saturday, January 7, 2012 – 9:00 AM
Community of Christ Walnut Gardens
19201 East R D Mize Road
Independence, MO

Join with the WCN Board to discuss progress made in 2011 and planning for 2012 and 2013. All are welcome!

Building an Inclusive Church Training Opportunities

- January 28, 2012 – Columbia, SC
- [More trainings coming in 2012!](#)

Albums Available for Display

A collection of stories and statements regarding homosexuality was created for display at the last World Conference. They have been helpful with increasing understanding of personal experience and feelings. These albums are available on loan for smaller church gatherings such as mission center meetings, reunions, congregational gatherings, and other events where their display is permitted. To request the albums, contact Pat Marmoy at patmarmoy4WCN@aol.com.

Active in the Community

Dick Foster and Sharon Troyer represented our congregation in the 2011 Larimer County Fair Parade marching with PFLAG.



The Fort Collins, CO congregation [WEAVERS](#) Committee is always looking for ways to let the larger community know that we are a welcoming congregation. PFLAG always marches in the Larimer County Fair Parade and we were invited to join them this summer.

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