

GUIDELINES FOR COVENANT OF WELCOME

The Welcoming Community Network is a primary way a public statement of welcome is developed. It is a grass roots approach to build understanding one congregation at a time. This program will promote an intentional inclusive ministry and will help heal the pain of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender who have been excluded in the past.

What Should Be Covered in the Covenant of Welcome?

A Covenant of Welcome must have specific and clear language which welcomes persons of all sexual orientation and gender identity. Language is important! You will need to use language which is inclusive of genders, ages and sexual orientations. Many gay men and lesbians do not like the term "homosexual". In the past it has been associated with illness and oppression. Self-identified people are more comfortable with the terms bisexual, lesbian and gay men.

Most congregations assert that all persons would be welcome in their church. Many have statements to that effect on signs and bulletin covers, yet many would not intend for that welcome to apply to openly gay persons. In our society, lgbt persons suffer discrimination, violence and exclusion, many times in the name of religion, justified by scripture. Welcoming communities must be public about their intentional welcome. Otherwise, there is an overwhelming perception, supported by historical attitudes and current practice within many churches, that only heterosexual person can enjoy full participation in the life and ministry of the church.

An affirmation of persons of differing sexual orientations and gender identity and of their role in the church should also be part of your statement. Basically, this means that you affirm persons of all sexual orientations and gender identity, without the expectation one be heterosexual or celibate in order to be a faithful Christian. Since their partners, relationships and significant life events are not recognized and celebrated, lgbt members often feel that they are second-class citizens in our churches.

How Should the Statement be Formulated?

Each church or group is free to use whatever process is useful for them. Some churches form a task force to draft a statement, while others use an existing board or study group. It may be a separate Covenant of Welcome or wording within their mission statement. The Covenant will usually be approved by taking a vote after a significant period of study, worship, discernment and prayer. Others who have a history of welcoming and affirming lgbt persons may reach a consensus in less time. In any case, churches and organizations joining the Welcoming Community Network should submit a statement that publicly expresses their stand on the issue, not only for the understanding of WCN but also as a part of their own records. This will help to ensure that the current understanding of the Covenant of Welcome is not lost as leadership changes.

Along with the statement, please submit a summary of the process by which you have become welcoming & affirming, along with the date and circumstances of the statement's final approval and/or your decision to join the Welcoming Community Network.

Upon receipt of an appropriate Covenant of Welcome your congregations and Covenant of Welcome will be posted on the WCN web site so that those searching for a welcoming and affirming place to worship can find you.

When accepted the Covenant of Welcome should be prominently displayed near the main entrance to the church and used in your publicity. This not only informs new persons who might visit you but also reminds your membership of their covenant with the lgbt community and God.

Below are several samples for other congregations and faith traditions. Review the samples for inspiration, but make it your group's expression of vision and ministry.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS OF WELCOMING COMMUNITY CONGREGATIONS AND MINISTRIES

- In working to bring about the realm of God, Basileia: An Open Door Community of Christ values diversity and celebrates those differences as intentional acts of God's creation. In that the realm of God includes all persons, we welcome and include all persons including persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities and family units in the full life of the congregation.
Basileia: An Open Door Community of Christ, Southern California www.basileia.net
- We welcome all without regard to race, sex, socio-economic status, age, mental or physical ability, marital status or sexual orientation..
St. Paul Community of Christ, St. Paul, Minnesota stpaulministries@headwatersmc.com
- *Who is welcome here ?*
 - If you are Asian, Hispanic, Black or White...
 - If you are male, female or transgender...
 - If you are three days old, 30 years old or 103 years old...
 - If you've never stepped foot in a church; or attend church regularly...
 - If you are single, married, divorced, separated or partnered...
 - If you are straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual...
 - If you are affiliated with a political party not registered to vote...
 - If you have, or had, addictions, phobias, abortions or a criminal record...
 - If you own your home, rent or are homeless...
 - If you are fully-abled, disabled or a person of differing abilities...

You are welcome here!

You are welcome here because you are a child of God. You are worthy of God's love and grace. By the grace of God, made known in Christ Jesus, NO THING that you have done, feel, are, believe or will do, can change that.

We are committed to being a thoroughly loving and welcoming community of faith, centered in the Good News of Jesus Christ. We support the full participation of all persons

in every phase of church life. Through education and informal discussion, we will strive to better understand those who are different from us, and to fulfill our mission of fostering peace and reconciliation for all people.

Therefore, in faithfulness to the Gospel and our Community of Christ heritage, and to the best of our ability, we promise to provide programs, ministries and pastoral care to all who seek God in this place.

Clearwater Community of Christ, Clearwater FL. <http://www.cofchristfmc.org/clearwater>

- As a people of faith, we recognize the diversity of people created in the image of God. We welcome to this congregation people of any age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, health status, and any element of humanity of created by God."

Lafayette Park United Methodist Church, 51. Louis, Missouri lpumc@stlnet.com

- God calls Broadway United Methodist Church to be a faith community embracing the diversity of our Chicago neighborhood and larger community. We welcome all persons celebrating the human family's God-given diversity of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, and physical or mental capabilities. We also welcome persons, regardless of social and economical class and faith background. At Broadway, we are accepted into God's nurturing family, which invites us into spiritual growth through worship, study, mission, and social action. We are grateful for the opportunities God gives us to experience the love of Christ."
- Broadway United Methodist Church, Chicago, Illinois BrdwvUMC@BrdwvUMC.org**

- We, the people of Epworth-Roanoke United Methodist Church, believe that God's love is expansive and unconditional and that, through Christ, God calls us to love one another as God loves us...

We declare that all persons are recipients of God's love and grace. God intends the church to be a community that embodies love, grace, and justice for all people. In particular, we discern that God is challenging our Christian community to accept lesbians and gay men as sisters, brothers and co-workers in the household of faith. We affirm the full participation of lesbians and gay men in every aspect of our church and society.

Further, we welcome and shall support all persons regardless of gender, race, age, cultural or religious heritage, ethnic background, sexual/affectual orientation or identity, or economic circumstances.

We celebrate the worth, dignity, and gifts of every person as a child of God. We hope that our affirmation of the worth of all persons we bring reconciliation to all people within the church who, because of prejudice, hate, homophobia, or ignorance, find themselves exiled from the body of Christ."

Epworth Roanoke United Methodist Church, Kansas City, Missouri www.ERUMCKC.org

- "We take up in love the challenge of discovering and celebrating the diversities we find among us-diversities of culture, theology, gender, sexual orientation, and congregational size-so that these diversities may strengthen us all, and so that our life together may witness to the presence of Christ's Spirit."

The Episcopal Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota

- We recognize that gay men and lesbians, both lay and ordained, have made significant contributions within the life of the church throughout history. Some of these Anglicans believe that they were called to celibacy, and others as with heterosexuals, believe that they are called to express their God-given sexuality with a committed relationship. We regret that many gay men and lesbians are still forced to deny both their sexual orientation and their committed relationships in order to participate fully in parish life.

We therefore declare ourselves to be a parish that is open and affirming of the celebration of the Christian faith by all people including *gay* men and lesbians, and supports all people in all aspects of the life of the Church:

St. John's Parish, Anglican Church of Canada

- Who is welcome here?
 - If you are Asian, Hispanic, Black, or White...
 - If you are male or female or transgender...
 - If you are three days old, 30 years old, or 103 years old...
 - If you've never stepped foot in a church; or if you are Buddhist, Roman Catholic, agnostic or are a life-long Lutheran...
 - If you are single, married, divorced, separated, or partnered...
 - If you are straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual...
 - If you are a Republican, Democrat, Independent, Socialist, or not registered to vote...
 - If you have, or had, addictions, phobias, abortions, or a criminal record...
 - If you own your home, rent, live with your parents, or are homeless...
 - If you are fully-abled, disabled, or a person of differing abilities...

You are welcome here!

This congregation is committed to being a radically loving and welcoming community of faith, centered in the Good News of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in faithfulness to the Gospel and our Lutheran heritage, and to the best of our ability, we promise to provide programs, ministries, and pastoral care to all who seek God in this place.

Prince of Peace Lutheran, Philadelphia, PA