

## **Proposal to the Church Council to Commission an Inclusivity Committee**

### ***What is the challenge of LGBTQ inclusion at Mt. View UMC?***

1. Controversy exists at Mt. View and in the larger UMC surrounding gender identity and the role and status of LGBTQ individuals in the church. As in the worldwide church at Mt. View there are traditionalists, centrists and progressives. This only roughly describes the myriad views and perspectives over a wide spectrum that exist on this issue. In addition, there is a range of intensity of feelings from little or no interest to intense interest and partisanship. Finally, there is hurt and pain among some members of the congregation with the way Mt. View and our sister churches have dealt with, failed to deal with or mishandled this issue.
2. While this issue confronts the entire UMC we at Mt View have only the power and therefore also the responsibility to make decisions about what we do in our congregation.
3. We believe that LGBTQ are children of God. Likewise all traditionalists, centrists and progressives and those with differing views are children of God. All God's children must be included.
4. Just as a family has disagreements and even disputes about how to budget and spend its money or how to discipline the children, so we at Mt. View have our disagreements and disputes about how to include all God's children in our Mt. View family. Just as spouses are unfaithful to their marriage, their children and their family if they fail to discuss, work through and grow in the process of resolving their issues, so we at Mt. View would be unfaithful to our church and each other if we fail to discuss, work through and grow in the process of resolving how to include all God's children in our Mt. View family.
5. In our failure to discuss gender and inclusivity we have been unfaithful to our youth. Our youth deal with these issues with their friends and families all the time. But when they come to Mt. View there's little or no discussion of what it means to be gay or straight, to be a gay Christian, to be in a gay marriage, to be gay clergy or to be a gay member of our church family. Their heartfelt voices on these questions are silenced. The youth in turn are turned off and turn away from Mt. View. Our unfaithfulness is not limited to our youth.
6. If we desire a family resolution of how to include God's children, none of us can start this process with a fixed answer or solution. Having a desired outcome in advance will inhibit or entirely derail resolving this matter. Nor is there any binary solution. It is not "yes or no." It is not "in or out." It is not "stand still or full speed ahead." No ideal, perfect or preordained solution exists. Rather there are a variety of creative solutions to including all God's children regardless of gender and regardless of views on gender. Finding the creative resolution for Mt. View may be long and difficult but it is ultimately rewarding.
7. Because this is a family matter, we must be open to everyone in our Mt. View family to hearing all the perspectives, all the experiences, all the pain, and all the joy that surrounds the inclusion of God's children. Even more, we must commit to compassion to honor and understand each other and our differences.

***What can Church Council do to address this challenge at Mt. View?***

- A. Establish an Inclusivity Committee based on the current task force. The current task force members are Bruce Fest, chair, Belinda Strickland, secretary, Connie Balazs, Dick Habighorst, Jim Rhoads and Elizabeth Kaufman.
- B. The purpose of the Inclusivity Committee is to lead our Mt. View family in a conversation to explore the role and status of the LGBTQ community in our church and in doing so include the full range of views and perspectives of members of the congregation in this discussion.
- C. The goal and the hope is to arrive at a consensus on how to include all God's children in our church family. There is no predetermined outcome other than it will be the outcome chosen by our Mt. View family for Mt. View.
- D. The current task force recommends using the Wesleyan quadrilateral of experience, tradition, reason and scripture to guide the LGBTQ conversation at Mt. View. This would include creating safe spaces for Mt. View members to tell and listen to personal and family stories of experiences with or as LGBTQ individuals, the traditions of the churches they grew up in relating to the LGBTQ community and how those experiences and traditions have evolved and changed over the years and decades. The current task force is also considering panels of experts with a diverse range of views to address the pillars of reason, which necessarily includes knowledge, and scripture. One panel may consist of psychologists, biologists and/or anthropologists to discuss scientific, biological, mental and emotional issues surrounding gender and gender identity. Another panel of UMC theologians with traditional, centrist and progressive perspectives can address scriptural issues pertinent to gender issues. These panels may be combined with questions and discussions from the congregation. These ideas and others will be developed to encourage an open, honest and respectful dialogue throughout the congregation.
- E. Such a fearless conversation will likely take a year or more to arrive at a thoughtful consensus and a creative outcome that the Mt. View family is comfortable with.
- F. When we find that creative outcome and consensus at Mt. View, we will then have to consider issues that present themselves because we are part of a connectional church. We have faith that there are acceptable and agreeable ways to preserving our position and role in the larger UMC. Perhaps we can even be a model for other Methodist congregations and the larger UMC on how to engage each other and resolve a sometimes divisive and controversial issue.
- G. Central to this journey is the trust and the faith we have in each other to hear, to listen, to understand with our heads and our hearts and to honor the differing views of others in our church family. We must have faith in each other that we can have a respectful conversation on a difficult issue. 1Peter 3:8-9 states: "Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless - that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing."