

Dear friends,

Remember the United Methodist television commercials with the tagline: “Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.”? North Church has tried to practice that openness for decades. Not everyone outside our walls, however, is aware of the welcome they’ll receive when they walk into our church. We are writing to invite your participation this summer in a congregational conversation about how we more publicly share our welcome of all people to the ministries and life of North Church.

This spring North Church’s Board of Directors created a Task Force on Inclusiveness. The task force was asked to develop a process to help the congregation discern its response to two questions:

1. How will we publicly promote our openness to all persons, including the GLBTQ<sup>1</sup> community?
2. What will be our relationship to the Reconciling Ministries Network<sup>2</sup>?

The Board’s action was a direct response to requests and recommendations submitted by several church groups including the Ministries Council, the Reconciling Adult Education Classes of North Church (the Amazing Grace and the Power & Light classes), and the all-church Radical Hospitality forum that met last fall. The requests submitted to the Board include adding a Statement of Inclusion to North’s website which includes, but is not limited to, the GLBTQ community and publicly declaring that North Church is a Reconciling Congregation.

We encourage everyone to participate in this important conversation. These conversations are not about whether persons who are GLBTQ, have special needs, or whose abilities are different from our own are welcome at North. We established that welcome in many ways. This is a conversation about how to extend that welcome more publicly to the larger community. Some might even call our efforts evangelism – sharing the Good News! The discernment process requires the full participation of as many North members and friends as possible. It also requires a commitment to the disciplines of prayer, reading scripture, engaging the Wesleyan tradition, and listening intently to God and one another. We request that you join us in these disciplines.

We wish to have an honest and respectful congregation-wide conversation and will do our best to create an environment where such a conversation can take place. We are receptive to and encouraging of all views. We want to hear from our members and friends not only in areas where you support taking these steps but also with respect to any risks you may see or concerns you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> GLBTQ stands for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning persons.

<sup>2</sup> Reconciling Ministries Network is a grassroots organization of United Methodists whose mission is to mobilize United Methodists of all sexual orientations and gender identities to transform our Church and world into the full expression of Christ’s inclusive love.

The process to engage North Church members and friends in conversations on the above questions will utilize a variety of methods and venues including small groups where dialogue is already occurring (Sunday School classes, ministry teams, fellowship groups, etc.), an all-church meeting, and electronic communication. These conversations will be undergirded by a Sunday morning sermon series beginning on June 26 on the public ministry of Jesus. The intent is to complete the process by September 1. At that time, we hope to have a statement of welcome that we can share broadly in our publications and that also will guide us in living that welcome in our daily lives.

Other members of the task force are Suzanne Anthony, Rod Brown, and Mark Grove, chair. Please feel free to contact any one of us if you have questions.

Shalom,

Ann C. Mackey  
Chair, Board of Directors

Lyn K. Berkebile  
Chair, Ministries Council

Kevin R. Armstrong  
Senior Pastor