



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR PASTORS

FEBRUARY 27, 2019

We want to invite your prayers this week for our friends in the United Methodist Church. In a special session of the General Conference, the UMC has voted against working towards the full inclusion of people of all sexual preferences into all of the ministries of the church. As we write this, it seems likely that the conference will end without reconsideration of this vote, and therefore with the specter of schism looming on the horizon; we would covet your prayers both for the denomination as a whole and for all those whose voices and ministries hang in the balance.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has been here before, of course. It was only within the last decade that our own denomination determined to strip away governing language prohibiting the full inclusion of LGBT individuals from our own worship and community life. That conversation caused rifts between friends and colleagues, some of which may not heal on this side of the kingdom — but it also opened doors to so many children of God who had never before heard their own church welcome them in the fullness of their identity.

This is work we are still called to do, even here at UPC. We are proud to say that on any given Sunday morning in our sanctuary you will find all sorts of people of diverse backgrounds, from diverse walks of life, and representing diverse sexualities. But it is also true that for those whose very identity is a regular matter of denominational controversy, it is not sufficient for the church simply to say “God welcomes all.” We need to be more specific.

To this end, last week the UPC session approved the following statement to guide us throughout our congregational life:

University Presbyterian Church strives to embody God’s love for the diversity of creation by affirming the dignity of all persons as created in God’s image. We welcome people of all races, cultures, sexual orientations, gender expressions and socio-economic status in all ministries of the church.

For some, this may read like old news; for others, perhaps not. In bringing this language to session for approval, the Christian Formation and UKirk committees articulated that youth and young adults walking into this church in this time may need some formal assurance that they are entering a place wherein they can safely ask the questions they need to ask; what seems like old news in some corners may be life-saving in others. And of course, if you have questions about this statement, or about the theology underneath it, please know that your pastors are more than willing to answer whatever we possibly can.

For today, what we want to emphasize is that this statement does not represent the end of a journey, but rather only the next phase. One of the most important words in the statement is “strive.” It means that we have work left to do, and also that we are committed to doing it. Please know that your session and your pastors will indeed strive in every way to do this work — by crafting worship that fully represents the diversity of God’s creation; by promoting opportunities to educate ourselves about the practicalities of inclusive ministry; and, especially, by reminding each of you about God’s love for all of you.



This coming Sunday, we're singing a favorite hymn in worship — "For Everyone Born, a Place at the Table" — but we are singing it with a twist. The PC(USA) hymnal that we use every Sunday includes this hymn but does not include an alternate verse — native to the original — that seems due for a timely reintroduction. And so, we will look forward to joining our voices with yours as we reclaim these words with urgency and conviction:

For gay and for straight, a place at the table,
a covenant shared, a welcoming space,
a rainbow of race and gender and color,
for gay and for straight, the chalice of grace.

And God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

Matt

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Gaventa", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The Reverend Matt Gaventa
Pastor

Krystal

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Krystal", written in a cursive style.

The Reverend Krystal Leedy
Associate Pastor

John

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John", written in a cursive style.

The Reverend John Leedy
Associate Pastor