



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

600 Ninth Street • Wilmette, IL 60091

April 16, 2018

Dear Friends,

A blessed Eastertide to you! In the midst of mid-April snow and tax day and hints of spring, I pray you are noticing signs of resurrection in the most unexpected places.

Early last year, the Session charged the Inclusivity Task Force to study and prepare a theological statement of inclusivity, especially as it relates to God's children who identify as LGBTQ. For many years, our church has been welcoming to the LGBTQ community, but we have never studied the issue in depth and published a formal statement. We believe God is calling us to do that now.

Last December, on behalf of the Session and the Inclusivity Task Force, I sent a letter to update the congregation on our progress. We invited you to attend a forum on Sunday, January 21, following worship, and listed the biblical and theological resources we'd been studying in recent months.

After further discernment and prayer, at our February meeting the Session voted to approve the following two motions.

(1) Marriage Inclusiveness

“We, the Session of First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette, after months of prayer, study and discernment about the nature of Christian marriage, believe that what makes a marriage Christian is not the gender of its partners, but the love of God found in Jesus Christ at the center of it. To that end, we move to allow our teaching elders to officiate weddings on our premises for same-gender couples seeking God's blessing on their marriage, with the same requirements and standards we maintain for heterosexual couples. This motion does not compel any teaching elder at our church to perform same-gender weddings or ceremonies if it is contrary to their discernment of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God. It also does not compel any future Session to approve any wedding that is not grounded in the covenant love of God found in Jesus Christ.”

(2)Join the Covenant Network of Presbyterians

The Covenant Network of Presbyterians is a broad-based, national group of clergy and lay leaders working for a church that is simultaneously faithful, just and whole (for more information visit their website at covnetpres.org).

Then, at our March meeting, in the hopes of communicating these decisions to the congregation and wider community, the Session approved the following “Inclusivity Statement” for our church.

Gathered by the grace of Jesus Christ, we are a vibrant and supportive Christian family whose welcoming spirit reflects God's love for all people. We invite participation in all aspects of our church life by persons of every race, language, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, physical or mental ability, economic or marital status, or faith background. FPCW is a member of the Covenant Network of Presbyterians, a broad-based, national group of clergy and lay leaders working for a church that is simultaneously faithful, just, and whole.

This statement will now be posted in our weekly bulletin, church website, fpcw smartphone app and other communications. In many ways, approving a statement is the easy part. The more difficult part is living it out – in our words and actions, in our ministry together in Christ’s name. In the future, we are hoping to continue discerning how we might embrace more fully the call to inclusivity of racial/ethnic minorities as well as people with disabilities.

Thank you for reading this long letter. If you have questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to speak to me or with any member of our Inclusivity Task Force or Elder currently serving on Session. They would be happy to hear from you. We are grateful for the leading of the Holy Spirit throughout this process and look forward to the challenge and opportunity to more fully live into God’s inclusive love for all people both now and in the future.

With gratitude and love in Christ, and on behalf of the Inclusivity Task Force,

Rev. Jeff Lehn

Inclusivity Task Force Members: Bill Bishop, Nancy Freeman, Laura Lyman, Sheila Ryan, Sue Sklansky, Mary Watt and Jeff Lehn