

# EPISTLE

January, 2017



**Bradford Congregational Church – UCC**  
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Dear Church Family,

Happy New Year! This congregation has not made New Year's resolutions, but we have stated some of our aspirations. One that came up recently at a Church Council meeting is "to grow in numbers." Everything we have been doing during the two and a quarter years of this interim time has been increasing the likelihood that growth will happen.

- We developed a sense of who we are and what God is calling us to do, and we unanimously endorsed it in our **Identity and Aspiration Statement**.
- We confronted what the congregation saw as its biggest problem and obstacle to growth—the hurtful ways of communicating and treating one another in the past. We officially adopted guidelines for **Healthy Communication and Beloved Community** and are becoming skilled at using them.
- The congregation was not ready to form a **Pastoral Search Committee** until I had been here one and a quarter years, but since last January the Search Committee has been doing excellent work. It

is almost ready to put the church profile out and start reviewing candidates for your next settled pastor—right on schedule in the timing of the average process in the UCC.

- The Church Profile for the pastoral search asks us to say whether we have had an **Open and Affirming (ONA)** process, considering whether to become certified as a UCC congregation that is open to and affirming of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. ONA is of increasing importance to a wide range of pastors, and there is a good chance that one of our top candidates will be lesbian, gay or transgender. The Search Committee’s congregational survey showed that three quarters of the respondents supported the idea of exploring becoming ONA. The Committee voted unanimously to ask the Diaconate to consider undertaking a process, and the Diaconate unanimously agreed. The congregation has just voted unanimously to look at what being ONA would mean.
- We have made **worship** more accessible to people who are not familiar with our liturgy, we have increased the participation of children and we have integrated diverse traditions of music into worship on a regular basis.

Every one of these is a step toward growth. I believe you are ready to grow, if you continue on this positive path and are diligent in your practice of healthy communication and beloved community. How can we move forward now into possible growth?

The good news is that we have a map. We asked the Holy Spirit to give it to us, and it spoke through our hearts and minds, and here it is:

“We aspire to grow in numbers as we make this an increasingly welcoming, loving, helpful congregation where we take the love we find here out into the world around us, and where people want to participate because the church makes a positive difference in their lives throughout the week. We will seek to maintain healthy communication and a positive, hopeful attitude as we face inevitable challenges. We want this to be a church where we feel joy, peace and a steady deepening of Christ-like love and faithfulness among

us. We intend to continue being a congregation where children are cherished, and where we offer encouragement, support and programs for youth and young families as well as people of all ages. We dream of being a church that shines like a lighted window into the community, a beacon for social justice, increasingly engaged in works of mission and widely known for generously serving those in need.”

That is the second paragraph of our Identity and Aspiration Statement. Everything you need in order to grow and thrive is right there, and the good news is that you have been doing it—you already are well along that path!

So really the question is how to do it more, and more effectively.

There are many dimensions to that question, as you will see below, but here is the short answer:

Love more, and more boldly! Shine your light more widely in the community, and more brightly!

To come up with a practical plan for growth, we need to figure out very specifically:

- How we can be increasingly welcoming, loving and helpful.
- How we can be more intentional and effective at taking the love we find here out into the world around us.
- How this congregation is already making a positive difference in our lives throughout the week so we can build on that and make even more of a difference.
- How we can integrate healthy communication practices into every conversation and interaction, from one on one to congregation-wide. How we can make our “positive, hopeful attitude” and our “joy, peace, Christ-like love and faithfulness” so apparent that a new person

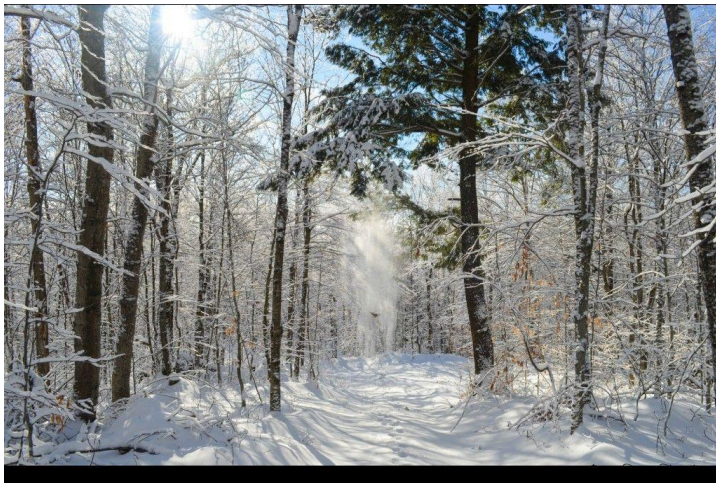
feels as attracted by the warm glow of our beloved community as by the other beauties of the sanctuary.

- How we can continue to grow our amazing Sunday School in a way that is sustainable. How we can encourage and support families with children who have some challenges today that no generation before has faced, on top of all the other challenges that never change. How we can make every child who comes through our doors feel cherished.
- How we can offer programs for all ages to meet the spiritual needs of our congregation and wider community, given our limited resources.
- How we can make even brighter the light we shine through our window. We have a history of significant contributions to the community and world. Our Board of Mission and Social Action has helped us do some brilliant work recently. Our Diaconate regularly helps people in need. We can look for ways to bring our hope and inspiration to more people in our community, and for more opportunities to invite the community to be part of the movement to establish God's realm of love and compassion, justice and peace here on earth.

We are already well on our way—we are taking steps in all these directions, and they are already bringing increased vitality. In the days ahead I hope to work with you to go farther with them.

We live in an area where church attendance is steadily declining. Vermont has the lowest percentage of church-goers in the nation. We should not hold the numbers of the past as a standard of success. The standard of vitality that matters is living into what God is calling us to do and be. If we are fulfilling our Identity and Aspiration Statement to the best of our ability with the energy and resources we have available to us, if we are letting that light shine as widely and brilliantly as we can, then growth in numbers will come as one of the by-products of letting the Holy Spirit continue to lead us on that path.

Please do not let yourselves be discouraged if growth comes slowly, and do not despair if there ever comes another time where the congregation seems to lose ground. Remember, “All things work together for the good for those who love God.” (Romans 8:28) Look at all the good that has come out of your past trials because you turned to God with faith, hope and love! Jesus shows us that any kind of death can lead to new and greater life through God who is the unstoppable force of love and light flowing through the universe.



We are on an exciting adventure no matter what happens, as long as we have that hope!

You have proven this with your resurrection into new and greater life. Let's see where the path will lead from here! I treasure every step of your journey that I get to take with you. Thank you so much for allowing me to be part of it.

Epiphany is the season of seeing and recognizing the manifestations of God's light everywhere within and around us, and helping them shine. That is what this letter is really all about: the tasks facing this congregation are of Epiphany.

Epiphany blessings to you,  
Tom



Prayer requests may  
be emailed to  
[our prayer group](#)

**It is our privilege to  
pray for you and  
those you care about.**

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**We pray for  
each other,  
*without ceasing***

**and  
your prayer requests are held in strict confidence.**

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***Would you like the person(s) for whom we are praying to  
receive a note saying we are lifting up those prayers?  
Please let us know their address and we will mail it.***

***We keep any names, concerns, and personal information  
in strict confidence.***



## 2017 Bazaar – Holiday Table

We are planning ahead for the 2017 Harvest Bazaar and hope you will too! This Christmas when you are decorating your home for the holidays please keep out any unwanted ornaments and decorations for the 2017 Harvest Bazaar Holiday table.

There will be a box in the Vestry labeled **2017 Bazaar**. Please feel free to bring in your unwanted holiday items during the months of December and January. They will be stored for safe keeping until next fall. We hope to celebrate holiday cheer at the Bazaar next year!!

Erin Odell

### **Diaconate Note:**

We **Hope**, with hearts filled with **Peace** and **Joy** and **Love** for our Church and YOU, that your Advent and Christmas and Epiphany have been filled with the **light** of Christ's promise for us all. As we live into this Season of Epiphany, may our hearts and words and actions be as beacons shining out into the world around us.

We'd like to call attention to two dates in January (and one in February).

**January 8<sup>th</sup>** ... the potluck luncheon meeting after worship to discuss what “open” and “affirming” mean in an Open & Affirming designation, and to look at some covenants which other churches have adopted. We hope as many of the congregation as are able will attend this event, to gather in fellowship and love for this last, yet crucial educational session. Regardless



of your viewpoint, we want to hear it! Just as a family gathers at the dining room table to discuss important matters, so too do we.

(Can you help set the table? ... clear the dishes? ... clean up? Just let Bridget or Marcia or Tom know ... and THANK YOU IN ADVANCE!)

**January 29<sup>th</sup>** ... whilst Tom is away we are thrilled to announce that Ted Goodfleisch will be filling the pulpit! As many of you may recall, then-Deacon Ted of the Piermont Congregational Church was often in our midst singing and even joined our Senior Choir for a year before feeling called to UCC National office in Cleveland. After that, he returned to answer the call of the Wentworth (NH) Church and for his installation our choir went on tour to sing at that special service. Since his retirement Ted and his wife have returned to Massachusetts. Please be sure to mark your calendar for the 29<sup>th</sup>!

**February 5<sup>th</sup>** ... filling the pulpit and serving Communion will be the Rev. Harvey Bartlett, who will also be serving as Emergency Pastoral Care for the two weeks Tom is absent.

## **From the Vermont Conference**

### **Can We Wait for God's Spark?**

God sparks innovations, but only on God's terms, and those terms usually involve disruption. From burning bushes to wood that burns even when soaked, God's sparks manifest themselves in unusual ways. We can choose to ignore the spark or even squelch the spark. But, if we take notice of it, the spark soon becomes a roaring fire. What are the conditions for God's spark? And, does the spark look different if people rather than God initiate the encounter?

### **How Business Views Disruption**

The average life of a shopping mall or center built today is fifteen years. And if the shopping venue does not make a radical change at least half-way through their expected fifteen-year tenure, it may not even last that long! Geoff Colvin recently wrote that the most innovative companies today, "see their business as disrupters would see it." They never stop self disrupting their own companies.

### **God's Disruptive Spark in the Bible**

Sparks from God are indications that God has heard us or wants to reveal something to us. What happens when God initiates the contact? The book of



Matthew reminds us that God's initiative contact is usually disruptive. God's encounter with the mother of Jesus was certainly disruptive. When God visited the shepherds and asked them to go to King Herod to inquire about a new king, that news was not received warmly by the current king. Jesus rocks John the Baptist's world by asking John to baptize Jesus and presenting standards for an utterly new lifestyle in the Sermon on the Mount. The disruptions continue and become more personal as Jesus eats at a sinner's home and shatters Sabbath protocols. Walking with Jesus means living a constantly unsettled life.

### **Can We Seek God's Spark?**

The book of Matthew also reveals instances in which humans initiate contact with God, and we quickly discover the importance of faith in such encounters. When Jesus calmed the storm, he asked his disciples, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26). However, when a man brought his daughter to Jesus for healing, the man openly expressed his faith, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live" (Matthew 9:18). Likewise, when two blind men came to Jesus, he asked, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9:28). No matter who initiates the contact, it is clear that God must sponsor the change in order for the spark to grow into a fire. We see this communication breakdown with God in a community where the owner of a local diner purposely hires and trains former prison inmates and other persons who have difficulty finding work. When the owner was asked if he had contacted local clergy to invite them to be part of his community ministry, his response was surprising. "Yes," he said, "And it was a disaster. The clergy kept asking the employees uncomfortable questions about their background. They made it clear that they would want them to attend their congregations if they helped." The clergy wanted to be a part of the spark, but could not handle the flame.

### **Are You Ready for Congregational Change?**

"A small green apple cannot ripen one night by tightening all its muscles, squinting its eyes and tightening its jaw in order to find itself the next morning miraculously large, red, ripe, and juicy beside its small green counterparts. . . . We must wait for God." Look for God's pre-emptive spark and once you find it, block it from distractions, and fan it with flames of trust.

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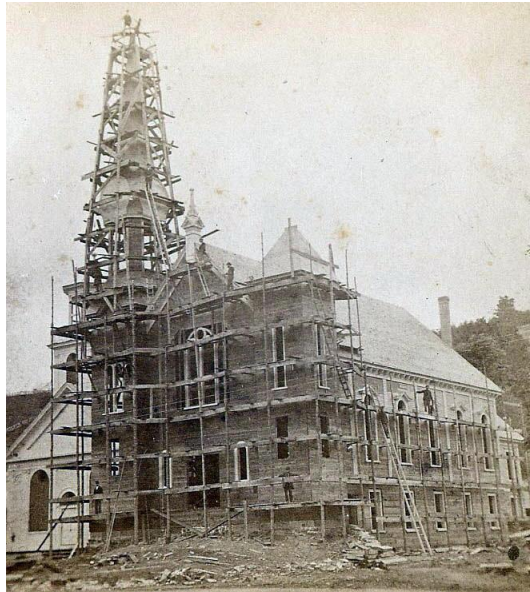
- Permission for each congregation within the Vermont Conference, UCC to (a) photocopy or electronically distribute for local use as many copies as it needs, (b) post them on its Web site, and (c) quote sentences and paragraphs.

**From our Church Historian:**

Here is the **Table of Contents** for the first of the four albums on display in the vestry reading areas

Book I: 1810-1982

1. Photo Rev. McKeen
2. 1901 Manuel
3. Photo Capt. Wm. Trotter Communion Set
4. Photo – Old Church
5. Manual – Members – 1859 (2)
6. Memorial Sermon Geo. Prichard – by Rev. McKeen
7. Photos Church Being Built 1876 (4)



8. Deed of Gift – Town Clock 1877
9. Waits River Journal – Volume 1
10. Photo of New Church – Old Photo (2)
11. Photo of Inside of Church (4)
12. Photo of Rev. McKeen Plaque
13. New Photo Inside of Church
14. Copy 1905 Corporation of Church Papers
15. Photo – Inside Church
16. Journal Opinion – 100 Anniversary of Church

17. Photo 1912 Sawyer Chapel
18. 1926 Program of 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Church Building
19. 1926 Playbill of "Absent-Minded Bridegroom" by Ladies Society
20. Playbill of "Deacon Dubbs" by Ladies Society
21. Financial Statement 1932 Church
22. Leather-bound New Hymnal 1931
23. Ladies Society Year Book 1934
24. Ladies Society Year Book 1931
25. Ladies Society Year Book 1936
26. Ladies Society Year Book 1939
27. Playbill "Spring Festival" by Ladies Society at B.A.
28. Program of #27
29. Playbill "Mary-Gold" by Ladies Society
30. Program - 135<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1810-1945
31. 2 Photos of Participants of above
32. 1945 135<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Photo of Congregational
33. 1965 J.O. Taking Weather vane Down
34. 1960s J.O. Article of P.V. George's Family Going to India
35. Photo of Painting "Christ and The Doctors" in vestry
36. 1948 Financial Statement
37. Lenten Services Program – Rev. Vorba
38. 1950 Calendar – Photo of Church
39. 1951 Lenten Program
40. 1951 Palm Sunday Program
41. 1951 Finance Letter
42. 1951 Church Bulletins (5)
43. J.O. Photos (4) David Johnston Bazaar – Belair Family + Maurice & Thelma
44. Program of P.V. George's Ordination 1962
45. Photo and J.O. Article – P.V.
46. J.O. Photo and Articles on P.V. & Carol George with Steve Munson (Bon Voyage India Party)
47. State of Vermont Conference newspapers (6)
48. Congregational Stationary (sample)
49. The Late Maurice & Thelma Belair
50. J.O. Photo – Canopy on Old Church Being Removed
51. Photo – 1959 Farmhand-Osgood Home donated
52. Photo 1960 of Church Society
53. 1976 Bulletin with Copy of Order of Worship Used 1876-1893
54. History of Chrismons with drawings

- 55.8 ½ x 11 Photo of Our Church
56. Circa 1969 Booklet on Osgood, Beebe and Tillotson
57. Slides of Stained glass Windows
- 58.8 ½ x 11 Photo of Old Church
- 59.2 Tickets of Bernard Craft Testamomial Dinner 4/18/70
60. Colored Photo Inside Church
61. VT Conference Photo and Article RE: Jim & Pat Livingston Farewell Party
62. Copy of Proclamation of National Day of Prayer
63. Program of American Revolution Bicentennial Flag
64. Program 1976 Centennial of Church Building
65. Cookbook – 20 Years Wild Game Supper “From Beaver – Buffalo” 1976
66. “Out of Our History” Booklet 1980
67. Program of 1980 Dedication of Sanctuary
- 68.13 Colored Inside Sanctuary 1980
69. Photo – Eris & Bud Eastman 1981 Mr. & Mrs. Club
70. Church Bulletin Dedication of Mumler Window 11/14/1982
71. Program etc. - Dedication Mumler Window
72. Extra Copies of above

Eris, Historian



## Lectionary Readings January (Year A)

### Jan 1 - Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-6 (Light has overcome darkness!)

Ephesians 3:1-12 (All share the promises revealed in Jesus Christ)

Matthew 2: 1-12 (The Magi seek the King of the Jews)

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14 (guidance and support for the King)

theme hymn: *We Three Kings of Orient Are*

### Jan 8 - Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 42:1-9 (YHWH's chosen servant is officially presented)

Acts 10:34-43 (Peter says all can be transformed)

Matthew 3:13-17 (Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist)

Psalms 29 (the voice of the Lord is powerful, full of majesty)

theme hymn: *When Jesus Came to Jordan*

### Jan 15 -

Isaiah 49:1-7 (this call is a light unto all the nations)

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 (God has given us everything we need)

John 1:29-42 (John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the "Lamb of God")

Psalms 40:1-11 (Wait patiently for the Lord)

theme hymn: *On Jordan's Bank*

## Jan 22 -

Isaiah 9:1-4 (People have seen a great light)

1 Corinthians 1:10-18 (Paul addresses disunity in the church)

Matthew 4:12-23 (Jesus begins his ministry, begins selecting disciples)

Psalm 27:1,4-9 (The Lord is our light!)

theme hymn: *The Church's One Foundation*

## Jan 29 -

Micah 6:1-8 (do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God)

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (God's love for us revealed in the cross)

Matthew 5:1-12 (Beatitudes, Sermon on the Mount)

Psalm 15 (Do what is right, never be moved)

theme hymn: *What Does the Lord Require*

*The theme hymns listed with the lectionary reading lists are found in our Pilgrim hymnal and/or the Hymn folders and are listed here only as lyrical illustrations of the week's scripture selections, so readers may carry the theme in tune form throughout their week!*





If you couldn't make it to the Pageant in December, here's a fun look back at the excitement and joy!





Other Advent and Christmas moments: Bridget and Randy rehearsing “Star of Bethlehem” with an assist from Micah and blankie; some of the Sunday School members lighting the Advent candles of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love; the Unkles reading the lesson of the first Advent candle; and Christmas Eve “Silent Night” candles held soundlessly aloft in wonder and light.





Our December Community Supper included some very special help in the kitchen!



And eager diners in the buffet line and at the table!



And a DELICIOUS time was had by all!

## **Thank you, dear congregation!**

Dear Church Family,

As you know, the membership of the church voted a unanimous "yes" in November to examine what it would mean for us to become a UCC Open and Affirming designated congregation, and to hold one or more congregational meetings for education and discussion on this topic.

**On Sunday, January 8th, following worship, please join us for a potluck lunch and a meeting, as we begin to discern what Open and Affirming would look like in this congregation, should we decide to take that step!** This will be a time to learn, as well as to share our own thoughts and opinions with each other. We'll be addressing questions like, what does "affirming" mean exactly, and would we have to fly a flag, and why does any church need to do this? We will look in detail at what other churches have done and at what is required.

Please plan to attend (and bring a potluck item to share if you can), and encourage others to attend as well--this meeting will be the main introductory educational opportunity about Open and Affirming. It is very important that no matter how we proceed, it's a good fit for our congregation, so every voice is a very important one in the process! (If you are not able to attend the meeting but have questions, please contact Marcia Tomlinson or Bridget Peters.)

In advance of the meeting, please read the following two documents of information, which include some questions and answers that we'll be addressing on January 8th, as well as some sample Open and Affirming covenants from other churches, which will help us to think about what we might like our own to look like.

Thank you for your continued thoughtfulness and participation in this journey.

Yours in Christ,

The Diaconate ad hoc Open & Affirming Committee

**Bridget Peters and Marcia Tomlinson**

## Updated and Expanded: Questions and Answers about Open and Affirming (ONA) December 2016

### *1. What does the United Church of Christ mean by the words Open and Affirming?*

Open and Affirming (ONA) is the United Church of Christ's (UCC) designation for congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the UCC which make a public covenant of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. **All ONA congregations must adopt an explicit covenant or statement declaring themselves to be open and affirming, and the wording must be approved by the national UCC ONA program.** These covenants or statements vary from congregation to congregation; there is no one standard form. Most address a wide range of groups that have been excluded or made to feel unwelcome in churches over the years for reason of things like race, economic status or disability as well as sexual orientation. Many churches adopt a non-discrimination policy at the same time that covers the same range of people.

### *2. Why do we have to say anything? Why might it be important to people to see that a congregation is officially designated as Open and Affirming?*

It is extremely painful every time an LGBTQ person, or a parent, child or friend of one, finds that a church sanctuary is not a safe place for them. Sadly, this often happens. **Someone compared a congregation having an ONA designation to a hotel having AAA certification. It is a nationally recognized stamp of approval by an authorized, trusted body that says something very clear and specific to people who are LGBTQ or who have loved ones who are or who care about the issue as a matter of social justice.** There are congregations in our region that say “All Are Welcome” on their signs and even welcome gays and lesbians, and yet they consider LGBTQ people to be sinners and will not permit them to become members. **It is still common for LGBTQ people to be treated by churches as inferior. Official ONA certification tells them that in this congregation they are safe and assured of being treated as full and equal members, just as they are.**

### *3. Why do we have to say, “affirming?”*

This is something that some of us struggled to understand as we went through our education and discussion series on sexual orientation and gender identity. The importance of saying “affirming” became clear when we heard our panelists talk about their experiences as faithful Christians and leading church members who knew they were different in this way when they were still children. **There is a night and day difference between being welcomed into a friendly, loving congregation that kindly tolerates who you are, accepting you as someone unequal and inferior to them, versus a congregation that affirms you as a beloved child of God, equal and as worthy of**

**love, respect and full membership as every other child of God in the congregation.** Our panelists talked about the pain of feeling un-affirmed, and how even a welcoming, loving congregation that did not affirm them felt unsafe. The only way a UCC congregation can assure people that they are safe is by taking the steps required to become Open and Affirming.

***4. Do we have to do what the UCC says?***

**The UCC does not require congregations to become Open and Affirming—they offer it as a certification**, like the AAA Hotel rating system, to be a universally recognized quality assurance—in this case the quality of being a safe church that is open to and affirming of all people, including those who often have found themselves being treated as unequal or inferior. Triple A hotels are very different one from another, and the UCC allows ONA congregations a wide range of ways of putting their commitments into words and actions. Certain general standards need to be met with approval before a congregation can call itself ONA, if they choose to seek that designation.

***5. Do we have to fly a big rainbow flag? What new things do churches do once they become Open and Affirming?***

**We get to decide what actions we will take to live into the Open and Affirming covenant that we write** and the UCC ONA Coalition ultimately approves. The range of things that churches can do, if they so choose, include:

- publishing our Open and Affirming covenant on our website and newsletter;
- posting it prominently in the church building;
- having a sentence about it in the bulletin each week and printing the covenant in the bulletin on occasion and reading it in worship;
- including it in a letter to the editor of the local paper;
- putting the words “Open and Affirming” on the church sign;
- putting a small rainbow decal or a rainbow flag or banner on the outside of the church;
- supporting the local high school Gay Straight Alliance and anti-bullying efforts;
- hosting or founding a local Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays group (PFLAG);
- supporting any other anti-discrimination efforts relating to race or ability or economic status or any of the other groups sometimes hated and treated as unequal or inferior;
- celebrating same-sex weddings;
- being completely open to having LGBTQ lay and ordained leadership;

seeking ways to incorporate the spirit of our Open and Affirming covenant in our church life, including worship, mission, outreach and education.

**Some congregations do all of these, some do very few. It is up to us to decide.**

***6. Do we get to write our own covenant? Who will draft it?***

**Every ONA congregation writes its own covenant.** By now there are over 1300 churches nationwide that have covenants, so we have an abundance of models to help us draft our own. We may find one that fits us that we can easily adapt, or we may piece together parts of many others and add something of our own. **The Diaconate will be the drafting committee, and the congregation will have opportunities to contribute to its creation before it is brought before a warned congregational meeting for a vote.**

***7. Where did the idea come from of this congregation becoming Open and Affirming?***

The idea to have our congregation explore becoming ONA originated in the Search Committee earlier this year. The Church Profile that the Search Committee is compiling requires us to say whether we have had an ONA process. It is of increasing importance to a wide range of pastors, and there is a good chance that one of our top candidates will be lesbian, gay or transgender. **The Search Committee's congregational survey showed that three quarters of the respondents supported the idea of exploring becoming ONA.** The Committee voted unanimously to ask the Diaconate to consider undertaking a process, and the Diaconate unanimously agreed.

***8. What impact does becoming ONA have on a congregation?***

Occasionally one or more members will leave a church because they are opposed to being open to and affirming of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Sometimes they leave because they do not want to be part of a congregation that would even discuss such a thing. On the other hand, the book *Real Good Church* credits ONA with playing a major role in reviving declining congregations. ONA often leads to church growth and increased giving. It also can lead to a renewed sense of purpose if a congregation enthusiastically lives into being ONA as part of its mission and does many of the kinds of things listed above. Young families tend to be attracted to ONA churches because they want their children to learn those values.

***9. For More Information***

If you have other questions, please be in touch with Deacon Bridget Peters or Marcia Tomlinson, and please, whether you have questions at this point or not, be sure to come to the meeting after worship on January 8<sup>th</sup> where we will begin to discern what Open and Affirming would look like in this congregation, should we decide to take that step!



## **Open and Affirming: Three Model Covenants**

### ***Model #1***

Because we believe that all people are created in God's image and thus are blessed and loved equally by God, and because love is a unifying and strengthening force within our Christian faith, we, the members of the \_\_\_\_\_ Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, hereby declare ourselves an Open and Affirming Christian community, actively expressing Jesus' inclusive embrace of all people.

We welcome all who seek to follow Jesus, including persons of every age, gender, race, national origin, faith background, marital status and family structure, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, mental and physical ability, economic and social status, and educational background, to share in the life, leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, blessings and joys of our church family.

Jesus teaches us to welcome all God's children into God's covenantal community. As we grow together in faith and love, we will strive to celebrate the diversity in which God has created us.

### ***Model #2***

We, the members of \_\_\_\_\_ UCC, believe that all people are created in God's image and thus are loved and blessed equally by God. We take seriously the command Jesus teaches us "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:25-28).

Therefore, on April 12, 2009, a unanimous vote by the congregation was taken to become an Open and Affirming congregation in the United Church of Christ.

We invite and welcome into our community persons of every gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ability, age, race, nationality, economic and social status, faith background, marital standing and family structure.

In our community of faith all people are encouraged to participate and share their talents and energy in worship and sacraments, leadership positions, ordained ministry, lay ministry, learning, service, mission and fellowship.

Therefore, no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome in this United Church of Christ.

### ***Model #3***

We, the members of the \_\_\_\_\_, United Church of Christ, regard all people as beloved children of God. We give thanks for the many and diverse gifts of God among us.

We declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming congregation, welcoming and accepting into full membership and participation people of every race, nationality, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, and economic status. We honor the worth and dignity of all people. We affirm all relationships founded on the principles of God's love and justice.

We acknowledge that the Christian church has often excluded people based on their sexual orientation. We believe such discrimination to be incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pledge to work to end oppression and discrimination whenever we encounter them, and, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to help create the beloved community of God's realm.