

## **Shared by the Shepherds and the Ministers with the Congregation on April 19, 2026**

Good morning, church. We are coming to you this morning to talk to you about an affirmation and commitment that the leadership has spent much time considering and crafting. While this is in the form of a statement, what we are about to share— we believe— is much more than a statement. We believe this is a step toward reflecting Christ's love and strengthening the heart of who we are, as a church body and as image-bearers of Jesus Christ.

For nearly five years, the shepherds and ministers have spent a great deal of our time together considering how churches, specifically Culver Palms, has included and excluded members of the LGBTQIA community. For purposes of this statement, we'll use the acronym LGBT. We shepherds and ministers have spent a great deal of our time together reading the work of theologians and church leaders about how Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and our understandings of the two inform how people are welcomed into church spaces. The conversations that have emerged from this work have been difficult, layered, sometimes frustrating, sometimes joyful—but they have always been approached through our hope in the complete redemption and reconciliation of Christ.

As a part of this work, in 2024, members of this congregation participated in a class led by Karen Keen, a writer and church scholar, who engages in the work of helping churches consider how they welcome and minister to LGBTfolks who desire to participate in the life of a church. Karen is a Christian and active church member, and she is married to a woman. We believe this class opened other important conversations within our church body about who we are at Culver Palms. Also, in 2024 the shepherds and ministers welcomed Steve and Stacy Rouse, who at the time served on the pastoral council at University Church of Christ at Pepperdine. Steve, who recently passed away, openly identified as a bi-man, while also remaining in his marriage to Stacy.

We believe this class and conversation with the Rouses took place in the spirit of hospitality, which is one of Culver Palms' defining values. Biblical hospitality is inspired by the life of Jesus and the radical inclusion of the New Testament church. In Galatians 3:28, Paul proclaims that there are "neither Greek nor Jew", proclaiming definitively that the primary identity of each of us is as a child of God. We welcome each other and abide with each other as fellow children of God, despite our many differences. This hospitality includes, but is more than, a kind smile and a welcoming "hello"; it is a commitment to worship and live in community, affirm each other's inherent worth, generously bear each other's burdens, and faithfully and humbly serve and pray for each other. This hospitality consists of giving and receiving; we serve each other (John 13:1-17) and open ourselves to receive God's blessings from others (Mark 14:1-9).

We acknowledge an authoritative place of Scripture in this discussion while also acknowledging that Scripture does not provide complete, or even clear, guidance on so many issues that confront our communities. Among the leadership, we continue to wrestle with Scripture on a number of issues and we find there are differences among this group on this and, of course, several other spiritual and theological issues. That is OK. We do not believe we are called to

see eye-to-eye on all issues. Rather, we believe we are called to help lead this group in faithfulness to the Scripture and Spirit.

In this spirit, the shepherds believe it is important to expressly extend this invitation of hospitality to all LGBT persons. We repeat: Culver welcomes and opens its doors to all people, including the LGBT community. Why is it important to state this? The fact is that the church has often uniquely denied — through its actions and words, as well its silence — the experience and humanity of LGBT individuals. This is not an abstract or hypothetical situation. We know LGBT individuals at Culver have felt stigmatized and dehumanized through and by our community's actions and inaction. So while this conversation has been happening for five years among the leadership, we know the hurt, stigmatization and exclusion has been experienced for far longer for some in this community. We acknowledge and confess this as sin, and we ask for forgiveness. With this context, and in the spirit of repentance, we believe it critical to make this invitation to the LGBT community clear and to ask for forgiveness for the exclusion and pain caused in the past. We pray for forgiveness, for guidance forward, and for conversation.