

LGTBQ Welcoming Church Process

In 2012 our congregation engaged in a process to decide if we want to be identified as a "Welcoming Church" in the sense of actively supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgendered people in Christian life and ministry. Tacitly, it means that our congregation would renounce the vilification of LGBTQ people, ask for forgiveness for the harm we have committed, and seek redemption by welcoming, respecting, and supporting our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. To that end we created a year-long program culminating in a vote by the whole congregation at our regular Annual Meeting in January 2013. Happily, the vote was unanimous to become a Welcoming Church.

Other churches have approached us about the process we developed. To help other churches embark on this journey we offer an outline of the process. We hope it is of help to congregations within the Diocese of Northern California and beyond. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Welcoming Church Process Outline

Identifying as a "Welcoming Church" (WC) means that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons – or anyone in the "queer" (LGBTQ) community – are welcome to be fully participating and accepted members of our church community.

We formed a committee to develop and implement a plan to educate, inspire, and discuss our becoming a WC with the congregation. Below is an outline of our plan.

Members of the Welcoming Church committee are: The Rev. Sara Potter (Rector), Mary Bockover, Marylee Bytheriver, Diana Cooper, Robin Hodson (Chair), Maureen Johannsen, Colleen Reed-Rodes, and Cindy Woods.

October-November 2011

The committee convened in October 2011.

Individuals from both services were identified who were willing to serve as information/confidential discussion resources for congregants.

Mary Bockover drafted a Welcoming Church vision statement and brought it to the November Welcoming Church meeting for discussion. [See "Welcoming Church Vision" under Resources]

January 2012

The Rector, the Rev. Sara Potter, introduced the idea of becoming a Welcoming Church in the January newsletter. In the article Potter also identified those individuals who were willing to provide information about being a Welcoming Church for church members and also available for private or group discussions on the topic. [See "Sara's Newsletter Article" under Resources]

February/March 2012

Mary Bockover led three Sunday morning Adult Spiritual Forums covering justice issues such as inclusion and discrimination. The congregation wanted to have a longer discussion of these issues, and so three more forums were given in 2013. [See “Welcoming Church Forums” under Resources]

April 2012

Cindy Woods wrote a newsletter article (with help from others) on the forums.

On Sunday, April 22 the Rector preached on the Welcoming Church theme. [See “Sermon” under Resources]

Following each service the congregation was invited into small discussion groups (3-4 people) to discuss the sermon and the aim of becoming a Welcoming Church. The Welcoming Church Team facilitated the conversations.

May/June 2012

The Team developed a list of Welcoming Church related summer reading suggestions. Marylee Bytheriver purchased the materials for the church’s library and made them available to the congregation. [See “Recommended Books and DVDs” under Resources]

The Vestry and the Book Group read, *This Far by Grace: A Bishop’s Journey through Questions about Homosexuality* by J. Neil Alexander. The wider congregation was also invited to read the book and two discussions were held in late summer.

Two Sunday morning Adult Spiritual Forums on transgender concerns were presented by Mary Bockover and Loren Canon, Professors of Philosophy at Humboldt State University. [See “Justice Forums” under Resources]

August 2012

The Rector led three Bible Studies on the critical passages related to Homosexuality.

October 2012

On Sunday, October 30 on service was held in conjunction with a brunch in the parish hall. In place of the sermon several members of the congregation spoke to why they hoped Saint Alban’s would make the decision to “officially” be identified as a Welcoming Church.

January 2013

On Sunday, January 27 at the Annual Meeting the congregation unanimously voted to be identified as a Welcoming Church.

This is a good resource for all things WC: <http://www.welcomingresources.org>