



Central United Methodist Church

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Being Gay is a Gift from God

Campaign Rationale

"Being gay is a gift from God."

This simple statement is intended to be a gift to those who have experienced hurt and discrimination because of their real or perceived sexual orientation. The Church seeks nothing less than the healing of the world, and Central United Methodist Church (CUMC) wants to offer words and acts of healing to those hurt and marginalized.

Also, declaring that being gay is a gift from God is a prophetic call to the Church to get out of the business of marginalizing gay and lesbian persons from the Church, and to welcome them as full members.

Central is a founding member of the Reconciling Ministries Network, which is the United Methodist movement for gay equality in the denomination. CUMC has a fruitful history of over a quarter-century of connecting persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) and straight allies with the body of Christ.

Purpose

The purpose of this campaign is 1) to offer welcome to all persons who are gay; 2) to challenge the larger Church to fully accept persons who are gay into the life of the Church; and 3) to call on all people to bring all the gifts of who they are to God.

This campaign is part of a larger overarching theme being celebrated at Central, "Being *you* is a gift of God."

Current Reality and Environment

- The Church is a key contributor of anti-gay attitudes and behaviors. There is a widespread view that Christians are uncivil or hateful in responding to the needs of persons who are LGBT.
- Persons who are LGBT, have to cope with the stressors of widespread anti-gay attitudes and behaviors. These stressors, which we believe to be uncalled for, are contributing to destructive behaviors, including gay bashing and gay suicide.
- The Church has an opportunity, and we believe a responsibility, to reverse these destructive attitudes and behaviors, and welcome all, regardless of sexual orientation, into the full life of the Church.
- We believe that both those within and without the Church are hungry for dialogue about homosexuality that reflects compassion and humility rather than intolerance and strife.
- Not all Christians are anti-gay. Many Christians welcome gays and the gift of themselves.

As Christians...

- *We believe that Jesus is God made real in the world.* We learn what God is like and what God wants for human community by listening to what Jesus taught and watching what Jesus did. When there is any conflict among teachings in Scripture, our primary source of authority is what Jesus said and did.
- *We seek to reflect the diversity of God's creation.* We see this demonstrated first in the Trinity itself, then in God's grace evident in the abundant variety of nature around us, and then in the creative and mysterious way that varieties of gifts are distributed among us as humans.
- *We believe that all are God's beloved.* Jesus' example shows this clearly. Both those whom society rejects and those who flaunt and abuse their power are nonetheless beloved of God.
- *Jesus broke down the walls that divide us.* We find nothing in what Jesus said or did that diminishes the worth of anyone on the basis of their sexual orientation or suggests that differing sexual orientations are to be seen as unnatural or needing to be remedied.

As United Methodists...

...we ascribe to four ways in which God reveals God's self to us: Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. Each contributes to our understanding and experience of who God is and how God has acted in the past is acting now and will act in the future. This Wesleyan¹ quadrilateral attests that "the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason."²

Scripture

- *The Church is divided over interpretation of Scripture related to homosexuality.* Some say that homosexuality is a sin which must be overcome or not expressed. We believe that our sexuality (whether heterosexual or homosexual) is a gift from God, yet another way in God's infinite diversity, in which God created us to be. The sin is in denying who God created us to be - because it is in that denial that we feel shameful and not worthy of God's love, or anyone else's.
- *Jesus did not speak directly regarding homosexuality.* Nonetheless, we have the authority of what Jesus said and did to help us discern the truth elsewhere in Scripture where interpretations are divided.
- *The issues on which the Church is more united should carry us into the future.* The Church, Scripture, and Jesus are more united on outreaching love toward those hurting, justice for those marginalized and disenfranchised, and humility before God and one another when working out our life together.

¹ John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist movement.

² from *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*

Tradition

- *God speaks over time to the Church in its life.* The Church has accepted growing revelation throughout its history. The Church has worked to overcome sexism and racism, which were once the norm. The Church has struggled and will continue to struggle with these and other "isms" as it lives into the Kingdom of God.
- *CUMC has a fruitful history of over a quarter-century of connecting LGBT and straight allies with the body of Christ.* CUMC is a founding member of the Reconciling Ministries Network, which is the United Methodist movement for gay equality in the denomination

Experience - a Christian's personal and communal journey in Christ.

- *God is not done speaking to us.* God speaks to our lives through the Holy Spirit. We must continue listening.
- *Faithful Christians who are gay have come to accept that being gay is part of who God made them to be* and they have brought all that they are to God.
- *These faithful gay Christians have inspired and strengthened others to bring all that they are to God.* This strengthens the Church. In fact, the Church, the body of Christ, is incomplete without LGBT persons.

Reason - rational thinking and sensible interpretation.

- *Reason is a gift from God,* allowing us to see the unfolding order of God's Kingdom.
- *Science and religion are not incompatible.* Christians need both science and religion to accurately understand the world and address the deepest questions humans face.
- *The overwhelming scientific evidence is that people are born with their sexual orientation, that it is not a choice.* Fully accepting one's sexual orientation and identity is key to leading a normal and healthy life. Children who grow up with LGBT parents are as normal and healthy as children who grow up with straight parents.
- *Forcing people to act against their God-given sexual orientation will lead to dis-ordered lives.* Allowing people to act in accordance with their God-given sexual orientation leads to reconciliation.
- *Holding people morally responsible for matters in which they have no control is irrational and immoral.* Discriminating, condemning and/or abusing people who have a God-given personal characteristic, whether it be race, gender, or sexual orientation, undermines calls to personal and social responsibility, to those very matters which *do* require human choice.
- *Persons who are LGBT often internalize the discrimination, condemnation and abuse of those around them, leading to self-destructive practices and interfering with reconciliation.*

As Central United Methodists...

...our mission is to do justice, practice kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

We Do Justice

- *One way we do justice is by working for the full inclusion of LGBT persons in the life of the Church.* Our faith community shares the Good News of the Gospel with all. Especially those who are ostracized by society and other faith communities. We educate ourselves about injustice, and recognize our own areas of privilege, so we can better relate to communities in need. Through advocacy and direct action, we work to change systems. In addition, we respond to particular needs through ministries of prayer, service, and financial support.

We Practice Kindness

- *One way we practice kindness is by welcoming all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation, to participate fully in the spiritual journey of Christ's faith community.* It is our core belief that all people are beloved children of God. In Central United Methodist, we create an atmosphere of love, respect, and compassion for all. And our practice of kindness empowers us to reach outside our church walls to everyone around us.

We Walk Humbly with God

- *One way we walk humbly with God is by actively listening to the experiences of faithful Christians who happen to be gay.* Our faith community centers us towards a personal relationship with God. We support each other in developing a spiritual life through worship, prayer, study groups, and retreats. We encourage daily prayer, weekly Sabbath, frequent sharing of experiences of God and regular fasting. By connecting to God, we are drawn closer to one another and are inspired to share the Good News of the Gospel.

In short,

- Sexual orientation is not a choice, but a good gift from God.
- The Church contributes to anti-gay attitudes and behaviors.
- Anti-gay attitudes and behaviors are harming people who are gay.
- Not all Christians are anti-gay. Many Christians welcome gays and the gift of themselves.
- The Church could benefit by focusing more on things that we agree on, such as kindness, justice, and humility.
- Central United Methodist Church is a safe place for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, to grow their relationship with God.
- We have experienced reconciliation by actively listening to the experiences of faithful Christians who happen to be gay.
- The Church is not complete without persons who are LGBT.