

Open and Affirming Statement

In response to growing contention among Disciples about the role of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the life of the church, the General Assembly appointed a committee in 1997 to examine the issues for the church and to develop a discernment process for exploration of these issues. The committee's report was presented to the 2001 General Assembly in Kansas City.

Since then, and even before then, many congregations and regions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have affirmed their conviction to be Open and Affirming.

We recognize this statement as a beginning, and recognize that, along with most aspects of faith, this is a journey.

Frequently Asked Questions

Aren't we already Open and Affirming?

Disciples do have a tradition of being open to differences of opinion and diversity of belief. The only requirement for membership is a confession of faith in Christ. And while we as a congregation may feel and express our welcome to everyone, we felt it was important to state explicitly and publicly that we welcome and **affirm** gay, lesbian, transgender and bi-sexual people. Unfortunately, the message of the church and much of our society to GLBT people has predominantly been one of judgement. Through this statement and continuing discernment, we are striving as a community of faith to live up to the Gospel message that God's love and justice are offered to everyone.

What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

As with all scriptural interpretation, it's important to understand the historical and sociological background of scriptural texts. For example, one of the primary concerns of ancient Israel was survival. Thus the story of Adam and Eve emphasizes the role of men and women in procreation. We also need to understand that the creation stories in Genesis 1 & 2 strive to answer the questions of ancient people about how we got here. It has long been assumed that God created only heterosexuals who were attracted only to the opposite sex. The argument is often used that homosexuality is thus "against nature." However, there is increasing scientific evidence that sexual orientation is not a choice or a "lifestyle" but a part of a person's biological make-up. In scripture the reference to homosexuality refers to homosexual acts committed by heterosexuals and were often exploitative, and not part of a loving relationship amongst equal partners. As a matter of fact, there is no word for 'homosexuality' in Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic. Jesus never mentions homosexuality, although we know it was a common part of the culture.

If we look at scripture through the lens of God's inclusive and ever broadening love, we see a thread of love, of God's desire for justice for the all people, especially the poor, the

vulnerable, the outcasts. We see in Jesus' life, ministry and teachings an open invitation to God's great banquet.

What are the next steps?

Over the last year we have examined and discussed many ways in which we feel called to be more open, more inclusive, and more intentional about how we do that. Our Open and Affirming statement is one part of that. We have also taken steps toward scent sensitivity awareness and using "green" products. We are in the process of making our building fully accessible for people of all physical abilities. We see all these things as sign posts along the way, but we aren't at the end of the journey by any means. We will continue to seek ways to welcome and engage all people. We are called to continue to grow in faith and knowledge, to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God," (Micah 6:8).