

OPEN AND AFFIRMING DECLARATION

passed by a vote of the congregation at the Semi-Annual Meeting, June, 1992

In the fall of 1991, we, as a congregation, entered into an intentional period of reflection and study that was to lead to a vote on declaring ourselves an "Open and Affirming" congregation. From that time of reflection, we have come to recognize many things:

We recognize that this congregation has a long record of non-discrimination on the basis of criteria such as race, age, gender or disability.

We recognize that it has been the practice of this congregation to welcome and include people who have sought membership or involvement in the congregation, without regard to sexual orientation.

We recognize that this church has declared itself to be a Just Peace congregation, committing itself to action and involvement on issues of social justice in church and society.

We recognize that matters of sexual orientation are important in current issues of social policy and legal rights; we recognize that many voices debating such public issues invoke the language and authority of theological and biblical morality.

We recognize that matters of sexuality evoke deeply emotional reactions from all of us, reactions that have been shaped by our family situations, our self-identity, our theological and ethical convictions, and a wide variety of influences from our society.

We recognize that sexual orientation is a central element about how we each understand ourselves, and is influential in how we develop relationships with those around us.

We recognize that for those who do not find their sexual orientation to be primarily heterosexual, the issues of self-identity, social relationships, and legal rights are especially complex, and are frequently painful; we recognize that the church is called to minister to the special needs of these people.

We recognize that the tradition of this congregation has been to grant to individuals substantial freedom in determining the content of their theological and ethical convictions.

We recognize that central to the Christian gospel and to the life of this congregation are essential proclamations about God: that God is a God of love, who is accepting of all persons, and who inspires loving relationships among people; that God is a God of justice, who calls us to seek justice in our society.

We recognize that contemporary interpretations of Christian scripture, theology and ethics offer a variety of voices about sexual ethics; within those interpretations, expressions of homosexuality are not uniformly condemned, and expressions of heterosexuality are not uniformly condoned.

In light of these recognitions, we declare Washington Park United Church of Christ an Open and Affirming Congregation with the following statements:

1. We celebrate that we, as a congregation, are open to and affirming of all those who are a part of our community of faith, regardless of sexual orientation. Because the Church in many times and settings has been open to and affirming of only those who are heterosexual, we want to be explicit in stating our openness to and affirmation of those who are homosexual (gay and lesbian) and bisexual.
2. We, as members of the congregation, acknowledge that our openness may be imperfectly expressed, despite our good intentions; we thus accept the challenge of wrestling with becoming fully affirmative of the variety of sexual orientations.
3. We commit Washington Park United Church of Christ to a policy of non-discrimination on the basis of an individual's sexual orientation with regard to church membership, congregational involvement or employment by the church.
4. We consider issues of discrimination based on sexual orientation in both church and society to be of vital concern, and we encourage individuals and groups within the church (lay and clergy, local boards and denominational agencies) to inform us as a congregation of such issues, and to speak to these issues in ways appropriate to the diversity of the congregation.
5. We deplore and condemn any acts, policies or laws which lead to an infringement of the civil rights of gays, lesbians or bisexuals.
6. We acknowledge that, as a non-creedal congregation in the free church tradition, these statements are not presented as tests of faith or expressions of doctrine for individual members; we do hold ourselves to the standards of open behavior that are defined here.