

Inclusion, Exclusion, and C.O.G.s at Mountain View

by Bruce Fest, Inclusivity Committee

For the last six months at Mountain View we have engaged in a conversation about what it means to be included in our church family using the concept of the Wesley Quadrilateral. Everyone was invited to join in the conversation either in small group sessions or for those away at school or otherwise unable to attend we asked for and received written responses to our questions. Young and old, women and men, and members of varying genders and unique experiences participated. We shared our stories of the joys of inclusion and the hurt and pain of exclusion. These stories explored the tradition and experience pillars of the Quadrilateral.

We asked ourselves three questions: 1) Think of a time when others did something or made comments that made you feel really good about yourself. How did you feel? 2) Think back to a situation when others did something or made hurtful comments. How did you feel? 3) How were you received at Mountain View? What does inclusivity at Mountain View mean to you? We heard some remarkable stories and a diverse range of views.

1) What does it feel like to be included? Here are your responses in your voices:

“gratitude”; “recognition”; “validation”; “smiles from others”; “touched”; “appreciated”; “taken seriously”; “nurtured”; “safe and secure”; “comforted”; “loved”; “feelings of humility, honesty, empathy, nonjudgmental and kindness”; “elevating”; “happily surprised”; “heaven”; “connection”; “heartwarming”; “listened to”; “grateful and proud”; “allowed to be myself”; “knew what was expected (for good or bad)”; “empathy, support, and acceptance”.

Each of these heartwarming responses came from a very personal and unique story. Being included generates these positive and uplifting feelings in us. When others include us it is a gift. It is grace. We recognize, value and feel that grace. We begin to soar spiritually. Our hearts melt.

2) What does it feel like to be excluded because of race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, disability or for being different? Here are your words:

“hurt”; “resentful”; “being judged”; “worthless and disrespected”; “unsafe”; “alienated”; “alone”; “powerless”; “unwelcome”; “humiliated”; “embarrassed”; “feeling terrible”; “ridiculed”; “voiceless”; “afraid”; “in pain”; “persecuted”; “belittled”; “self-conscious”; “destroyed by lies”; “mortified”; “bullied”; “who knew people could be so mean and evil”; “cliques are hurtful”; “rejection, pain and exclusion”; “backhanded ‘compliments’”; “hurtful labels”; “minimized”; “lonely”

There is not one positive emotion. Instead our responses are laced with pain, some more than others, some short-lived, others long lasting. Are we attacked when we are excluded? Does that wound our soul? Does our soul flee? Retreat into hiding?

One member of our church family transformed that pain: “being excluded can be a teachable moment to carry forward positively.” As another in our family put it: “disappointment can turn into a positive.”

3) How were you received at Mountain View?

“uncomfortable in the Sunday service”; “accepted”; “welcomed”; “being listened to”; “nonjudgmental”; “affirming”; “open”; “seeking to connect”; “invited to join classes and activities”; “felt excluded at Mountain View”; “Mountain View is cliquish”; “fake welcome”; “not accepting”; “felt less of a Christian for having different ideas”; “more at home at Mountain View than the bedroom I grew up in”; “our names were known by the second visit”; “grounding and being part of something”; “felt affirmed in gifts”; “community and valued”

“I have reasons to be marginalized but as far as I know, few people know them. But as a member just attending, the congregants are really impersonal and cold.... I smile and say good morning to all I encounter. Half will not even acknowledge the greeting.... There are a small number who have overtly hated me since I walked in the door six years ago.... But I have people who are extremely welcoming. I am really looking for another church. If I find one I will leave.”



“...people are fixed...looking to not have their world rattled, and make only superficial or cosmetic changes for appearances, not in their heart. All of this is what Billy Graham preached. The importance of coming to Christ asap before their hearts hardened.”

What does it mean to be an inclusive church family at Mountain View?

“all are children of God”; “innocence fuels openness and inclusiveness”; “important to have a community of accepting and understanding people”; “our church doesn’t take a stand on subjects”; “non-Christians see us as exclusionary”; “we avoid tough conversations”; “we are friendly but lack articulated values”; “open to all”; “introverts have trouble”; “need to recognize quiet people”; “lack of recognition of women by staff”; “Mountain View is increasingly inclusive”; “God’s presence”; “individual faiths based on different experiences but we come together as one community”; “Mountain View feels welcoming of all and accepting of LGBTQ”; “Mountain View hasn’t always been accepting of the LGBTQ community”; “now Mountain View accepts people how they present themselves”; “it comes down to LOVE”



Here are the written responses:

"Inclusivity isn't necessarily about results, it's about openness and effort. I have always been impressed by the effort at MVUMC. I hope that can continue, and I think from talking to people who often are excluded, they also really are mostly asking for effort, not perfect understanding or the absence of any awkward moments ever."

Inclusivity “means being listened to, being heard, being welcome, knowing there is a place for me, being asked to participate, being accepted regardless of whether or not some parts of my life are at odds with the beliefs of others, being valued for my contributions, and even being told when my behavior is unacceptable (it does show people care and pay attention)....”

“I’ve been bothered for quite a while about our church’s response to marginalized people.... I have considered moving to another congregation that is more accepting of LGBTQ individuals. I’m hoping that Mountain View will take a stand in support of people who deserve understanding and acceptance.”

“...I have felt so unwelcome and so out of place that I didn’t even enjoy coming to church when I was home. ...the South where I was living [was] constantly belittled and... I [was made to] feel like I was no longer a part of the Church.”

“We are ALL Children Of God, C.O.G.s in a great big machine. When the machine leaves out a C.O.G. the machine may still function, but not as efficiently as it would with all the C.O.G.s in place.”

“I was raised really around a conservative view of ‘family values’ and...the traditional Christian values, around a family unit of one man, one woman, raising children.... I don’t have to look far to see that things are changing rapidly in our society and with our moral values and social norms. Family values, the church, and conservative thought are under attack from many angles, and in the long run I fear this steady drumbeat of negativity is what is driving many millennials to seek other forms of spiritual fulfillment.”

“My concern with inclusivity is that the victims (yes, I know that is not a politically correct term) of the LGTB+ community, the spouses, kids born when the person presented as straight, parents who usually lose the chance at biological grandchildren, and the siblings who serve as intermediaries between their gay sibling and their straight parent be welcomed equally with LGTB+ members. Thus, a sign on the church door saying “LGTB+ Welcome” would be offensive to me. However, with my ex-lesbian sister and my numerous LGTB+ friends and acquaintances I also want them included at Mountain View, just not in a way that marginalizes the other group.”

Some final thoughts: First, we have a beautiful diversity of experiences and views in our church family. We should embrace and honor that diversity. Without that diversity and disagreement we would be a dull and boring family. Moreover, uniformity of thought is unachievable. It is a fantasy. So let’s celebrate our differences. After all each difference and each divergent view springs from the heart and the mind of a uniquely individual child of God. So let each of us as a child of God engage each child of God in our Mountain View family not to convince and convert but instead to listen with empathy so that we understand each other. We must first understand. Only then can we be understood.

Second, the conversation is not over. There are many in our family who have not spoken up. It’s not too late. In fact it is early and there is a long way to go. We want to hear you, listen to and understand your concerns. They are important. Talk to each other and to members of the Inclusivity Committee, email us or even write us anonymously. Your concerns will be honored. You are essential to the conversation. Our exploration of the Wesley Quadrilateral also continues with an informational look at Reason on April 29 — look for a future article about this session. In the fall we finish up the Quadrilateral with an in depth look at Scripture.

Let Us Reason Together

by Bruce Fest

The prophet Isaiah tells us, “Come now, and let us reason together.” This is sage advice. The Inclusivity Committee plans to follow it.

On Sunday, April 29 the Inclusivity Committee is presenting a panel discussion on sex, gender, and sexuality. A biologist, psychologist, and sociologist will be on the panel. Each will give us a 25 minute presentation on the latest knowledge and developments on questions of sex, gender, and sexuality in their respective fields. This will be followed by Q&A and discussion. The panel discussion will be held from 2:00 to 4:00 pm in the Sanctuary. Our entire Mountain View Family is invited to attend, participate, and learn.

We have three highly qualified panelists. Samuel Flaxman is an associate professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado. Matthew C. Brown got his Ph.D. in 2003 in sociology at the CU, where he teaches sex, gender, and sexuality in the Department of Sociology. Glenda Russell is a clinical psychologist and also a Research Associate and Lecturer at CU.

Two of our panelists have special connections to Mountain View and Methodism. Sam Flaxman’s kids attend our neighboring Horizons school where they perform community service by helping at Mt. View’s Community Table. Glenda Russell does clinical work and research on the LGBTQ community in mainstream Methodist churches that have become reconciling congregations. Matt Brown comes to us with a special life’s journey. From his start growing up on a farm in Ohio he has traveled through teaching and research all the way to performing comedy improv in Denver.

The Inclusivity Committee was charged with “using the Wesleyan quadrilateral of experience, tradition, reason, and Scripture to guide the LGBTQ conversation at Mountain View.” Was Isaiah John Wesley’s inspiration for including reason in his quadrilateral? Reason and faith are certainly closely linked. According to George Weigel, a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, “Reason purifies faith. Faith without reason risks descending into superstition; reason without faith builds a world without windows, doors, or skylights.”

We look forward to seeing you on Sunday, April 29. It will be enlightening. We anticipate a conversation that is open, honest, respectful and lively.



Dr. Samuel Flaxman



Dr. Matthew Brown



Dr. Glenda Russell

Inclusivity Committee Wraps Up Study of Human Sexuality & Gender Issues

By Bruce Fest

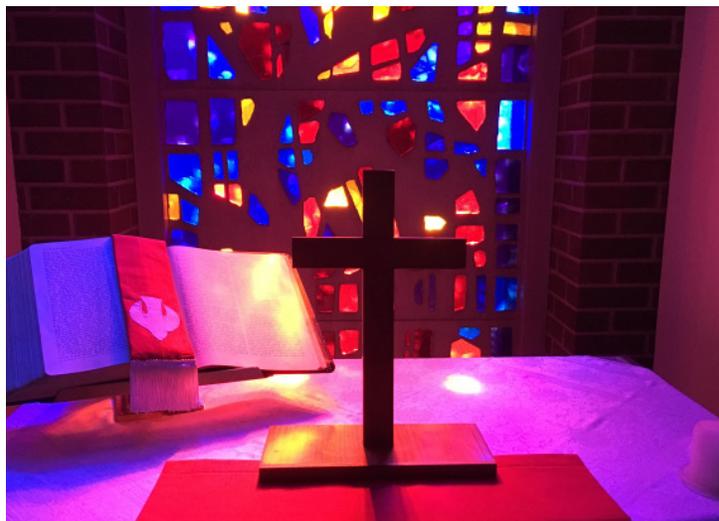
Please join your Mountain View family as Inclusivity Committee wraps up our look at human sexuality and gender issues through the framework of the Wesley Quadrilateral. Last winter and spring we covered the pillars of tradition and experience in small groups sessions. Then in April we had a biologist, a sociologist and a psychologist from the University of Colorado on a panel addressing the latest developments and knowledge in their respective fields on sexuality and gender. That was the pillar on reason. Now the Inclusivity Committee addresses the final and important pillar of Scripture.

Sunday, October 7, 2:00 – 4:00pm in the sanctuary the Inclusivity Committee will present a panel discussion on what scripture says about human sexuality. Three Methodist clergy are on the panel. Rev. Joel Kershaw, senior pastor of Brighton UMC, will present the “traditionalist” view. Rev. Emily Hagan, senior pastor of Berthoud UMC, will present the “compatibilist” view. Rev. Dr. Harvey Martz, retired senior pastor at St. Andrew UMC in Littleton, will present the “progressive” view.

Each panelist will make a 25 minute presentation. Then the panelists will address and discuss written questions you submit. This is your opportunity to raise Bible passages and scriptural issues concerning human sexuality and gender. This is also an opportunity to learn, listen with our hearts and understand the variety of views and concerns in our Mt. View family.

Rev. Kershaw grew up the eldest son of a United Methodist pastor who served in Platteville, Wray and Pueblo. He received his BA in music with a minor in religious studies from Colorado State University in 2002 and a Master of Divinity from Boston University in 2005. He was ordained an Elder in 2008. His first appointment was as a youth minister at First UMC in Ft. Collins. He has been Senior Pastor of Brighton UMC over eight years where he has brought stability and growth. For the past two years he has also served as a volunteer chaplain with the Adams County Sheriff’s Office. He and his wife Raven have two sons. Rev. Kershaw is a “rabid fan of the Denver Broncos,” who loves skiing, snowboarding, hiking and old movies, particularly those of Alfred Hitchcock.

Rev. Hagan graduated from Saint Paul School of Theology in 2004 with a Master of Divinity degree. She was ordained an Elder in 2007. She served as solo pastor in Rye and associate pastor in Canon City. She now serves as the pastor of Berthoud UMC. While at Saint Paul School of Theology Rev. Hagan had an



immersion experience in a Trappist monastery as well as a Korean/China immersion experience. She has been on mission trips to Meru, Kenya; Goodland, Kansas; and Mission, South Dakota. She participated in a “Study, Sabbath, Service” project on Francis of Assisi through Columbia Theological Seminary and co-led an education trip to Assisi, Italy. Rev. Hagan and her husband Erik have a four year-old son. She enjoys music, reading and nature.

Rev. Martz grew up on Wichita Falls, Texas where he met his future wife Judy in Sunday school class at their home church. He was ordained Deacon in 1967 and Elder in 1970. When he was Pastor in Charge at Calvary Methodist Church in Colorado Springs he organized and sponsored a city wide Diversity Festival to draw persons away from the Ku Klux Klan rally held in the summers of 1992 and 1993. The Diversity Festival drew 1000 persons the first year and 5000 persons the second year. After the second Diversity Festival the Klan stopped holding recruitment rallies in Colorado Springs. In 2005 Bishop Warner Brown awarded Dr. Martz the “Bishop’s Award for Excellence in Parish Ministry” at the 2005 session of the Annual Conference. Dr. Martz retired in 2012. He and his wife Judy have two adult children.

Please join us on Sunday, October 7 as we continue the journey of loving conversations and differing beliefs within our church family. We can continue to serve our same God together as we look to provide a church that includes all. As John Wesley said, “We do not have to think alike in order to love alike.”