

To: Church Council
From: Bruce Fest, Chair
Inclusivity Committee
Re: Our Journey to Become a More Inclusive Family at Mt. View
Date: January 22, 2019

Where did we begin?

Our efforts to make Mt. View an inclusive family began in September 2017 when the Church Council vigorously and unanimously approved the **Proposal to the Church Council to Commission an Inclusivity Committee**. The mandate from the Church Council was both expansive and restrictive. It was expansive in its goal:

Because this is a family matter, we must be open to everyone in our Mt. View family to hearing all the perspectives, all the experiences, all the pain, and all the joy that surrounds the inclusion of God's children. Even more, we must commit to compassion to honor and understand each other and our differences.

We wanted "a [fearless] conversation to explore the role and status of the LGBTQ community in our church and in doing so include the full range of views and perspectives of members of the congregation in this discussion."

It was restrictive in the limited focus. "While this issue confronts the entire UMC we at Mt. View have only the power and therefore also the responsibility to make decisions about what we do in our congregation."

We began with six committee members: Belinda Strickland, Connie Balazs, Dick Habighorst, Elizabeth Kaufman, Bruce Fest and Jim Rhoads. Over the course of our journey Jim Rhoads elected to become an ex-officio member and Adam Fortin joined us for the remainder of our travels.

Where have we journeyed?

John Wesley's quadrilateral of tradition, experience, reason and scripture was our bright star to guide our Mt. View family on the journey to become a more inclusive Mt. View family.

Through small groups we listened as we told each other about our individual experiences and traditions. We shared our personal stories of the joys of being welcomed, included and treated as a child of God. We also heard the stories of the pain of exclusion, the hurt of being seen and treated as the "other" because of race, gender, ethnicity, sex, disability, etc. and of the anguish of being excluded from the kingdom. Every member of our Mt. View family received an invitation to participate in these small groups. Those who could not join a small group sent emails with their personal stories. These heartfelt stories are gathered in "Inclusion, Exclusion, and

C.O.G.s at Mountain View.” You can find this article in the May 2018 issue of the Messenger. In the safety of the small groups members of our family revealed unexpected hurts that were unknown to us and often hidden in silence. We learned that our Mt. View family is not just male and female but also LGBTQ+. Finally, we discovered the willingness to listen with our hearts and the desire and the courage to become more welcoming and inclusive.

In April 2018 we had a panel discussion on reason. A sociologist, a psychologist and biologist from the University of Colorado gave presentations in their respective fields on the latest developments and knowledge on gender issues. The presentations piqued our curiosity. The presentations were followed by a lively Q and A with people wanting learn more. We followed Isaiah’s injunction, “Come now, and let us reason together.”

This last October we held a panel discussion with three Methodist clergy on what Scripture has to say about gender: Rev. Joel Kershaw presented the “traditionalist” interpretation; Rev. Emily Hagan was the “compatibilist”; and Rev. Harvey Martz discussed the “progressive” view. This generated a lively discussion in the following Q and A. There is a diversity of views within our church family. This is to be expected and healthy. Conformity to a single Biblical interpretation would be stale, boring and even deadening. We had an honest and heartfelt discussion of differing views. Rather than confronting we listened, understood with our hearts and we honored each other and our differences. We lived up to the aspiration in the **Proposal to the Church Council to Commission an Inclusivity Committee**: “We believe that LGBTQ are children of God. Likewise all traditionalists, centrists and progressives and those with differing views are children of God. All God’s children must be included.”

Our journey at Mt. View has become a model for other Methodist congregations. The presentations by Revs. Kershaw, Hagan and Martz were recorded and posted on the Mt. View UMC website. An “Inclusivity” page has been created where anyone can listen to the recordings and read the handouts, pamphlets, slides and written manuscripts on Scripture and gender. Other materials on this question are posted there as well including the **Proposal to the Church Council to Commission an Inclusivity Committee**, the Messenger articles on the small groups and the panel discussions, and Resources from the UMC Commission on the Way Forward and from the Cabinet and the Delegates to the General Conference 2019. The Mountain Sky Conference of the UMC is publicizing our Mt. View website as a resource to be used by other congregations. We at Mt. View can be justly proud of our contribution to the conversation in other local churches and the wider United Methodist Church.

Where do we go from here?

Our journey is not complete. We now must hold a church conference to come to a consensus about what inclusion means in our Mt. View Family. At the same time the world wide Methodist church is holding its General Conference this February to

discuss this question. Multiple proposals with divergent goals and outcomes have been made. The discussion is fraught and contentious. The outcome is unknown.

In contrast the conversation in our Mt. View family has been marked by “compassion to honor and understand each other and our differences.” Whether consciously or not, throughout our journey at Mt. View we have been guided by John Wesley’s wise words, “We do not have to think alike in order to love alike.” We must never lose sight of that principle.

So how do we proceed? A church conference to reach a consensus about gender and inclusion in our Mt. View family is a must. Given our journey over the last year and a half that consensus is within our grasp.

So when do we have our Mt. View church conference? The General Conference in February will have fallout. It may be good, bad or mixed. It may be mild or it may be severe or somewhere in between. We simply do not know. But we do know that the good works, progress and hopes on our journey to a more open, welcoming and inclusive family at Mt. View must not be derailed. So the Inclusivity Committee recommends a pause to catch our breath and make a calm assessment of when to hold our church conference. Maybe it will be within weeks of the General Conference. Maybe it will be months.

In the meantime the Inclusivity Committee remains active and engaged. We invite anyone at Mt. View to contact us with their cares, concerns and questions regarding gender and inclusion. We are pleased to serve as a resource and to continue the conversation. Just as there is a range of views in our church family so is there a range of views on the committee. Each member of our Mt. View family will be comfortable talking to at least one committee member. Do not hesitate to contact Dick Habighorst, Connie Balasz, Adam Fortin, Elizabeth Kaufman, Belinda Strickland or Bruce Fest. Both the conversation and the journey are continuing.

The Proposal to the Church Council to Commission an Inclusivity Committee concludes:

Central to this journey is the trust and the faith we have in each other to hear, to listen, to understand with our heads and our hearts and to honor the differing views of others in our church family. We must have faith in each other that we can have a respectful conversation on a difficult issue. 1 Peter 3:8-9 states: “Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless - that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing.”

These words along with the input, advice and wisdom of the Church Council will be the guideposts for the Inclusivity Committee as we continue on our journey to make our Mt. View family ever more open, welcoming and inclusive.