



Emanuel United Church of Christ

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Dear Church Family -

We are writing to provide clarification regarding the recent decision made by Consistory concerning the Open and Affirming (ONA) process. There has been some misunderstanding about our decision to pause the ONA process, and we would like to offer clarity on what we are doing and why and we apologize for not being transparent about our decision sooner.

The process began with a letter asking us to consider becoming Open and Affirming. It was first given to Pastoral Relations, followed by discussions with the Elders and then given to Consistory. Over the course of 8 months, Consistory carefully reviewed the process and also consulted with the leadership of the UCC ONA Coalition. On June 11, Rev. Michael Anthony Howard (Minister of Faith and Action for the UCC) met with us and answered many questions about our concerns that were raised. He mentioned that because of our upcoming transition regarding the search for a new pastor that this might not be the best time to pursue ONA. He also suggested that by creating a policy of inclusion we would continue moving forward with our desire to be open, accepting and inclusive.

It is important to understand that the ONA process is something that cannot be rushed. Consistory's job is to represent the entire membership of our church and that is something we don't take lightly. ONA is a journey that should take two to five years to ensure that every member of the congregation fully understands what it means to be Open and Affirming. There can be strong thoughts on both sides of this issue. Our desire to make sure all sides are given consideration is very important to all of us. Given the current transitional period with the search for a new pastor and our limited resources, Consistory decided to pause the ONA process. This decision will allow us to focus our full attention on it when we are better equipped to do so.

In the meantime, we are taking an important step forward by addressing one of the most essential elements of being welcoming to all: Inclusion. Currently, our church lacks a formal policy of inclusion. We are working to create a policy that clearly expresses our commitment to being a church that welcomes everyone—regardless of race, age, gender, marital status or sexual orientation. This new policy will affirm that all members, without exception, receive the same rights within the church, including marriage, baptism, and other sacraments.

Once this policy is finalized, it will be presented to the congregation for a vote to seek your approval. If this is accepted, it will become a part of our Constitution and By-Laws. We believe that during this time of transition, this policy represents a thoughtful and balanced step forward.

We want to emphasize that creating this policy is an integral part of being "Welcoming to All". We view this as an important first step and a meaningful compromise that will guide us as we continue to reflect on our values and move toward a more inclusive future.

In closing, the decision to pause ONA was difficult, and the resulting reaction to our choice to wait has led to significant stress and anxiety within Consistory and the congregation. We need to focus on finding common ground and work together to achieve our shared goals for our beloved Emanuel High Church.

If you are unaware of what Open and Affirming is, we invite you to go to the UCC ONA Coalition website to get a better understanding of becoming Open and Affirming. <https://openandaffirming.org/>. If you have further questions, please contact any Consistory member.

Thank you for your understanding and support.

Sincerely,

Members of the Emanuel Consistory

Nancy Perry, Kristen Robison, Helen Tritt, Dave Poetter, Karen Foster, Janel Baughman, Bob McCall, Betsy Rawlins, Alexandra Barner and Andrea Sammons