

Welcoming Statement (draft)

Grace Episcopal Church is called to the ministry of reconciliation. We recognize and give thanks for the many diverse gifts of God among us. We celebrate our human family's diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, age, marital status, physical and mental ability, economic status, faith history, education, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

We affirm that all people are created in the image of God and as beloved children of God, all are worthy of God's love and grace. We welcome the full inclusion of all people in the life and ministries of Grace Episcopal Church as we journey toward reconciliation through Christ. Grace Church strives to be a space where each person feels safe, cared for, loved, and supported to develop who they are in Christ.

We recognize that there are differences among us but believe that we can love alike even though we might not think alike. We invite all people who seek God's grace to join us in our faith journey toward greater love, understanding, and mutual respect.

Feedback:

1. Are you comfortable with this Welcoming Statement as written?
2. Do you suggest changes?



Welcome

Dear friends,

At the December 4, 2021 Annual Meeting I appointed the LGBTQ Welcoming Task Force (Larry Boetsch, Jane Brooke, Melissa Cox, Kathy Hill, James Keane, Rick Pollard, Steve Shultis, Cecile West-Settle, Sharon White). The Task Force was charged to:

1. Develop a Program of opportunities to learn about gender, and
2. Draft a Welcoming Statement for the consideration of the parish membership.

Then we begin the work of revising the Welcoming Statement, addressing concerns in a spirit of Graceful Engagement, and engaging with the Program outlined below.

Welcoming Statement Revision Process

It is important to note that the Task Force has prepared a draft not a final version of the Welcoming Statement. The Vestry has discussed and approved the draft and authorized the next step - finding out what all the members of the parish think. Early next week Sharon will email the Welcoming Statement draft to each Communicant in Good Standing (everyone qualified to vote in a congregational meeting). The Statement will be in a poll format with a single question: Are you comfortable with this Welcoming Statement as written? Responses will be tallied confidentially. Change suggestions will also be invited and collected confidentially. Results will be reported to the Vestry. The Vestry may redraft the statement in light of the suggested changes and continue to poll the congregation from time to time until 70-80% of the membership reports comfort with it. When 70-80% of the membership is comfortable with the statement a congregational vote will be scheduled, possibly at the Annual Meeting in December.

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Addressing Concerns

Since beginning this process over a year ago I have conducted over 70 one to one meetings to talk about experiences with LGBTQ persons and issues. Vestry members, Welcoming Team members, and Welcoming Task Force members have also conducted one to one meetings. We have not encountered opposition to welcoming LGBTQiA+ persons into full participation in our worship and ministry. We have heard over and over that Grace should and already does welcome people of all genders. At the same time, we have heard many expressions of discomfort and unfamiliarity with some gender related concepts, terminology, science, scriptures, and theology.

We have also heard concerns about whether LGBTQiA+ welcoming or discussion about gender might result in controversy, conflict, or division. I want to acknowledge these concerns. While I have not heard people express opposition to welcoming and including LGBTQiA+ persons, I have heard people express concerns about opposition. It is important for us to distinguish between discomfort and unfamiliarity with gender related concepts, terminology, theology, and science and actual opposition, conflict, or division. Opposition may surface. In any case, it will be best to proceed with an attitude of Graceful Engagement.

Graceful Engagement

Graceful Engagement is listening to understand not listening to rebut. Graceful engagement accepts and respects differences. It is OK if there are people who oppose welcoming and including LGBTQiA+ persons. Just as it is OK if people in the same household and congregation have different perspectives on gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression. The goal of Graceful Engagement is try to prioritize understanding one another, respecting one another, loving one another. What would not be OK is disrespectful, mean, or hurtful behaviors or speech. Throughout this process we will seek to respect and celebrate the communion we have in Christ with each other.

Program Outline

This is the Program developed and led by members of the Welcoming Task Force. The biggest challenge of this program will be securing participation. Please participate in as much of this program as you can either privately, in Christianity and Culture, or in Dialogue Circles.

1. Understanding the Gender Spectrum
2. Pronouns and other Gender Terminology

3. Scriptural and Theological basis for LGBTQ inclusion
4. Recognizing Bias
5. The Science of Gender and Sexual Orientation

Individual/Private engagement

A menu of LGBTQiA+ resources can be accessed on our website, including recordings of all the other presentations.

Christianity and Culture presentations (9:15am Sunday morning)

March 27 – Tuck and Task Force members will present the Program Outline, the Welcoming Statement, and Graceful Engagement.

May 22 - Understanding the Gender Spectrum – Rick Pollard and others

June 12 – Pronouns and other Gender Terminology –James Keane and others

September 11- Scriptural and Theological basis for LGBTQ inclusion – Tuck Bowerfind and others

October 9 – Recognizing Bias –James Keane and others

November 13 – The Science of Gender and Sexual Orientation –Rick Pollard and others

Dialogue Circles

Between May 8-July 24 Task Force members will convene one or more Dialogue Circles of 6-10 people. Dialogue Circles will meet approximately six times and cover one of the topics each time. Dialogue Circle registration will begin shortly.

Storytelling Workshop and Event

In early May we also plan to offer a Storytelling Workshop to help us learn to tell a story about how our relationship with God has changed our lives. The Workshop will be followed by a Storytelling Event at which we will listen to people tell their stories. More information will be coming!

Finally, I want to thank the Welcoming Task Force for creating this program and drafting the Welcoming Statement. I truly believe this will be a positive and uplifting process for all of us and I encourage you to engage with the program in whatever way works best for you.

With Gratitude,
Tuck