

## *A Message from the COCU ad hoc Reconciling Ministries Team*

Although much has happened to all of us since the fall of 2019, you may recall having completed during that time a Congregational Assessment survey that we, on the ad hoc Reconciling Ministries Team, had circulated to determine your views regarding the question of LGBTQ involvement in the life of our church. At that time, many of you remarked that you were unable to answer some of the questions because you simply did not have enough information to give a thoughtful response.

As a result, the Reconciliation Ministries Team determined that we needed to further inform you about our efforts. And, in February 2020, before the Great Lockdown began, Peg Knapich began the process by explaining what it means to be a Reconciling Congregation.

Despite all the time that has elapsed since the start of Covid, and all its ramifications on worship, we - the Reconciliation Ministries Team - have resolved to continue the discussion during worship, and through our church media. In coming weeks, we will discuss, in further detail, the many reasons why we, the Reconciling Ministries Team at COCU believe that becoming a Reconciling Congregation is in keeping with our mission and ministry.

The one true guiding principle of our Christian faith is the belief that God is Love. We are all God's children, made in God's image, regardless of skin color, national origin, gender OR sexual orientation. Oftentimes, the phrase "sexual preference" is used to describe one's sexual orientation. I firmly believe this is a misnomer. Our predisposition to being heterosexual or homosexual is not a thing we choose, or something we can overcome with therapy. It is a character trait instilled at birth, like eye or hair color, or right- or left-handedness. During the 2020 Presidential primary contests, then-candidate Pete Buttigieg responded to Vice President Pence's negative comments about Pete's sexual orientation. Buttigieg replied simply: "If you have a problem with who I am, your problem is not with me -- your quarrel, sir, is with my Creator." Pete Buttigieg is a Christian. And he firmly believes, as do I, that whatever he is comes from his Creator, God. And we, as followers of Christ, believe we should extend God's fully inclusive love to all God's children in our midst, and to welcome them into our worship and fellowship. The Methodist Book of Discipline proclaims "all persons are of sacred worth" and that "we commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons."

As well, Christ gave us the commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself," and bids us to "Now go and do likewise." As disciples of Christ, we are called to be a light in the darkness and neighbor to all, most especially to those who have been and continue to be unjustly pushed to the margins.

We understand that some of you may have reasons, scriptural or otherwise, to reject the inclusion of the LGBTQ community within our mission and ministry. But we hope that, as we bring you these Reconciliation messages, you will give prayerful consideration to the reasons why we SHOULD welcome and fully include these, God's children, in our worship and fellowship.

Evelyn Kersey