

Open and Affirming (ONA) Proposal Summary

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Romans 15:7 (NIV)

Vision

The Open and Affirming Team will facilitate the preparation of a covenant written by members of our congregation that clearly expresses the church’s desire to include, as integral members of its Christ-centered family, all people regardless of their socio-economic status, race or ethnicity, physical or mental ability, family structure, faith background, gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation. The church will submit this covenant to the UCC Open and Affirming Coalition for certification of the United Church of Big Rapids as an Open and Affirming Church, and to the Presbyterian Church USA for recognition as a “More Light” church.

Mission

The covenant that identifies the United Church of Big Rapids as open and affirming clearly proclaims that the church: 1. fully embraces Jesus’ love which extends to everyone 2. provides a spiritual home for anyone wanting to be in community with followers of Jesus 3. provides a safe place for those who feel excluded from faith communities 4. leads by example and encourages everyone to recognize their own prejudices and to work to overcome them

Objectives

1. Explore with the congregation the biblical, theological, and societal issues surrounding support for and objections to becoming open and affirming.
2. Prepare an Open and Affirming (UCC) / More Light (Presbyterian Church USA) covenant.
3. Present this covenant to the congregation for its affirmation.
4. Submit the affirmed covenant to both denominations.
5. Celebrate as a congregation our UCC certification as Open and Affirming and our recognition by the Presbyterian Church USA as a More Light Church.
6. Live into our covenant by establishing an ONA/More Light Commission that will work to provide opportunities for the congregation to learn more about marginalized persons, their challenges, and how an Open and Affirming/More Light church can be a positive force in their lives.

Strategies

1. Have J.T. and other identified local professional resources begin to explore the biblical, theological, and societal issues surrounding support for and objections to becoming Open and Affirming/More Light.
2. Identify resources (books, videos, websites, etc.) that are most pertinent to our needs and that would be most likely to prove helpful to implement Item 1.
3. Schedule bible study, presentations, workshops, etc. to coincide with the development and writing of the covenant (development and writing to take place during Lent 2020).
4. Utilize members of the ONA implementation team to help the ONA/More Light Commission reach out to local resource persons who can engage the congregation in fully living into its covenant by providing a deeper understanding of how best to identify and serve marginalized individuals and communities.

ONA Team Members: Lucas Ashby, Sara Daniels, Jon & Diane Fleming, Emily Garlick, Susan H. Grant, Frank Hartley, Maryanne Heidemann, Diane Kennedy, Jerena Keys, Trish McHugh, Maxine McKay, Wayne McKay, Beth Scsavnicki, Dee VanHorn