

A Church for All People:

The More Light Statement of the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church

Whereas we praise God and rejoice in the presence of all whom God has gathered by the movement of the Spirit and we confess before God that the church has caused and continues to cause great pain in the lives of all those it would exclude, shut out, or repress;

Whereas we acknowledge that the church, if it is to follow Jesus, cannot condemn groups by exclusion and must look for the worthiness in each person, resist legalism, and respond to each person's request for membership with knowledge of that person's belief in the living Christ;

Whereas we are mindful of our obligation to show hospitality to guests and strangers, even those in our midst, as Abraham and Sarah did by the oaks of Mamre and the two disciples did on the road to Emmaus, that we might experience the divine presence;

Whereas we are exhorted by Paul -

- “*to welcome one another...as Christ welcomed you,*” a practice of hospitality and mutual acceptance that in situations of pain or enmity requires healing and reconciliation,
- to affirm the unity and equality of all believers, and
- to acknowledge that we are “*one body in Christ, and individually members one of another*” and to reject all actions that by wounding our brothers and sisters disfigure the body of Christ;

Whereas we take special note that the Book of Order directs Presbyterian churches to provide “*a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity*” (F-1.0404) and mandates that we should welcome into full membership all persons who respond in trust and obedience to God’s grace in Jesus Christ;

Whereas this congregation has long declared and described itself as a “Church for All People” and has long sought to affirm racial justice and the rights of women and to welcome refugees;

Whereas we affirm with the Special Commission on Historic Principles, Conscience, and Church Government (195th General Assembly) that “*controversy, and the tension inevitably produced by diversity, may be the arena where – in the struggle and grappling with ideas – the Spirit is most likely to speak to the church*”;

Whereas we rejoice in the denomination’s decision (2011) to remove barriers to ordination for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, restoring the long-held and inalienable right and responsibility of ordaining bodies to determine the suitability of each candidate for ordination, considering each candidate as an individual rather than rejecting entire classes of persons;

Whereas we, as a community of faith, celebrate our joyous moments with one another, sustain each other through difficult times, and comfort one another in times of loss and pain;

Whereas we struggle to remain faithful to the biblical directive to live out Jesus' command to love one another by recognizing that all people need loving and truthful relationships;

Whereas we affirm the sanctity of all relationships that are based on love, fidelity, intimacy, and communication as good gifts from God;

Whereas we are committed as a congregation to marriage equality, so that all members desiring such a covenant to live out together before God their lives of discipleship may celebrate their commitment with this community of faith;

And whereas we actively seek yet more light on the inclusive nature of God's grace in Jesus Christ and more light in ministry with all people in all forms of loving expression:

Therefore, be it resolved the Takoma Park congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) welcomes all people into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit regardless of gender, race, age, country of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ethnic heritage, abilities or disabilities, educational status, marital status, economic, cultural or religious background, or any other human condition. Affirming that God works through all of us, we extend to anyone wishing to share in the worship, life, work, and leadership of the church all privileges and responsibilities of membership, including ordination and Christian marriage. We affirm our intention to continue to extend to each and every member the right to hold office if elected by the congregation and the right to the celebration of Christian marriage publicly witnessed and acknowledged by this community of faith.

Be it further resolved that the Session of Takoma Park Presbyterian Church authorizes the pastor, or her or his designee, to conduct services of Christian marriage between people of the same gender, and authorizes the use of the sanctuary and other church facilities for this purpose.

As one sign of these intentions and commitments, we hereby re-affirm our 1992 declaration to be a "More Light" congregation, joining with scores of other Presbyterian congregations around the country in the struggle to be inclusive of the lives and witnesses of our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer brothers and sisters, and to engage in a process of reconciliation and healing. We re-affirm our membership in More Light Presbyterians and the Open Doors chapter of the National Capital Presbytery and our support for the mission of More Light Presbyterians: "*Following the risen Christ, and seeking to make the Church a true community of hospitality, the mission of More Light Presbyterians is to work for the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people in the life, ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and in society.*"

As another sign of our intentions and commitments, we rededicate ourselves as a congregation to being in communion with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in our church and in our community, listening to all, considering each other's spiritual needs, addressing the damage done by some of the church's messages in the past, finding opportunities for healing, connecting to each other's personal challenges and the challenges of the LGBTQ community, advocating for change in church and society, and celebrating the good news of the gospel together.

(Approved by the TPPC Session, April 2014)