



Chebeague United Methodist Church
258 North Road
Chebeague Island, Maine 04017

March 17th, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Here on Chebeague, the doors of this church are open to all; we embrace everyone who enters and strive to reach out to those around us. Our vision is to be a people of diverse traditions who welcome, worship, serve, and find joy together – and many aspects of this vision are already reality. Being the community church on the island means that we worship alongside Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Catholics, those who don't fit any category as well as those who don't know where they are on their spiritual journey. We welcome our seasonal friends and visitors, our year-round fellows, and all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. As we have moved forward with identifying our church's vision and mission, our awareness of the status of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) sisters and brothers and their families in our denomination has started a conversation around what it would mean for our church to make a statement of intentional welcome.

The United Methodist Church's recent Special General Conference revealed that the wider church cannot move forward while embracing our differences, and has taken measures to enact further harm toward those who are LGBTQ. 53% of delegates voted to enact more punitive measures for clergy who officiate same-sex weddings (and congregations that host them) and strengthened rules against ordaining married gay clergy. The plan also included requirements for Annual Conferences, clergy, and congregations to sign pledges agreeing to enforce the Book of Discipline, particularly those portions that exclude LGBTQ individuals.

On Sunday, February 24th, this congregation's administrative council voted to discern together around becoming a Reconciling Church, which, in the United Methodist denomination, is a congregation that makes explicit its welcome of those who are LGBTQ and their families.

We have established a timeline which includes opportunities for learning and study as we talk together around what this might mean for us as a congregation. There will be three congregational conversations held in the Parish House: **Sunday, March 31st following worship, Sunday, May 5th at 3 PM, and Wednesday, May 15th from 7 PM - 8:30 PM.** These conversations will be open for questions, sharing, and listening as we talk and pray together.

We will also engage in a study called "Claiming the Promise" which talks about the passages in the Bible that have been used to harm LGBTQ individuals and how we might interpret those scriptures in this day and age. Dates are: **Saturday mornings, March 30, April 6, April 13th each 9 - 11 AM.** Materials will be provided in advance, so please talk to Pastor Melissa if you are interested in participating so we can get the book to you. If you would like to participate but cannot make those dates, please also let Pastor Melissa know dates and times that work for you.

A congregational vote will be taken on **Sunday, May 26th following worship**. We will be voting on a Statement of Welcome, which will be published in advance of the vote, and on becoming a Reconciling Church. All members and people who feel connected to the Chebeague United Methodist church are encouraged to vote. If you worship with us seasonally, or are unable to be present that Sunday, you may request a ballot and return it to us via mail. Ballots will be available starting **May 1st** and must be returned to us by **May 25th**.

There are many resources available if you wish to learn more about what the Bible has to say about homosexuality, or what it means to be a Reconciling Church. We will have books available in the back room of the Parish House as part of our church library for you to check out and read. You can also check out Blue Babies Pink (<https://www.bluebabiespink.com/>), a podcast about one man's journey of growing up gay in the Christian south. To learn more about the Reconciling Ministries Network, please visit their website at www.rmnetwork.org.

Even though there is much uncertainty about the future of the United Methodist Church in light of this past General Conference, we believe it is important to be in conversation with one another and to discern whether this step is right for our congregation. The church believes that here on this island, God knits us into one family. One of our core values is inclusivity, which means that "we affirm the sacred worth of every human being. No matter who you are or where you are on your journey, you are loved and a child of God."

Please know that we are available for questions about this process and to listen to your perspective. You can contact any one of us for conversation.

Grace and Peace,



Melissa Yosua-Davis

Pastor

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Karen Corson

Ad Council Chair

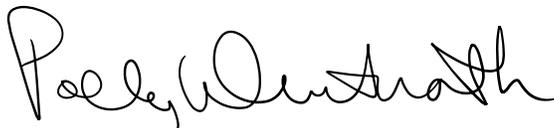
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