



Capitol Hill United Methodist Church

... To Be the Heart of God in the Community

Ginger Gaines-Cirelli
Pastor

Monday, February 14, 2005

Dear members and friends of Capitol Hill United Methodist Church,

One of the blessings of serving God in the local congregation is the opportunity to look for what God is doing and to follow where God is leading. As we look at Capitol Hill UMC, it is clear that God has been at work for many years in this place. We share a distinguished history of ministry in Christ's name.

Contributions to this city, our Capitol Hill community, and to the lives of Christian disciples who have sojourned among us through the years are many. Faithful and committed Christian leaders have laid the strong foundation upon which we now stand. Through the faith and hard work of many, four congregations came together to become Capitol Hill United Methodist Church. This required sacrifice, listening, sharing, and courage. From the beginning, CHUMC has sought to welcome all people and to invite all into its ministries. This is our proud heritage and for this we are deeply grateful.

We continue to serve alongside faithful and committed leaders in our congregation today. This is a great blessing. As we look at where we are today and seek to discern what God is doing among us, it is clear that we are called to build upon our strong foundation through engaging the needs and issues of our day with the same faith, sacrifice, listening, and courage that have been the hallmarks of our past.

For more than six years, the Spirit has led this congregation into dialogue around the issue of homosexuality. This dialogue and debate is not limited to our local congregation but, rather, involves every Christian denomination at the highest levels. We are proud of our congregation for its willingness to enter into this dialogue. The temptation is to avoid difficult conversations for the sake of "keeping the peace." But, as Jesus shows us in the cross, the easy way is not the faithful way. We believe that we honor our church's heritage by having the courage to engage the difficult issue of homosexuality. Further, it comes as no surprise that we are focused on this issue for, here also, we are simply building upon our historical commitment to issues of inclusiveness and welcome.

As leaders in this congregation, it has become clear that we have a decision to make. This decision is whether CHUMC will affiliate with the Reconciling Ministries Network. This network is a national grassroots organization that exists to enable full participation of all sexual orientations and gender identities in the life of the United Methodist Church, both in policy and practice. Every mainline Christian denomination has a similar organization. By affiliating, CHUMC would become a "Reconciling Community." You should also know that there are at least six other UM congregations in our local area who are also engaged in the conversation around affiliation with the Reconciling Ministries Network.

What would it mean for CHUMC to become a "Reconciling Community?" Through our affiliation, we would:

- 1) Make a public statement (published on our literature, website, etc.) that CHUMC is open and inclusive to all persons, including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (gltb).
- 2) State that there is disagreement in our congregation with the current position of the United Methodist Church which excludes glbt persons from ordination and which states that "the practice of homosexuality" is "incompatible with Christian teaching."

(over)

According to *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, the Church Council has the authority to make the decision that is now before us. This would, frankly, be the easy way to proceed. However, God has led us to uphold a commitment to inclusiveness in making this important decision. As a result, in December of 2004, the Church Council approved the recommendation of the Reconciling Community Working Group for an alternative decision-making process.

All members and friends of CHUMC are invited and encouraged to participate. During the holy season of Easter, March 28—May 21, there will be a variety of opportunities for education and discussion. These will be offered on different days of the week at different times of the day in the hope that everyone will find a time to participate that is workable with your schedule. In addition, child care will be available for each of these gatherings. (The full list of opportunities to participate in this important conversation is listed on the insert.) Attendance will carefully be kept at each of the events. All those who have participated in at least one of the offerings will be invited to come together on Saturday, May 21st (1-5 pm), for worship and for a process through which we will make the decision by consensus about whether to become a Reconciling Community. There will not be an “up and down” vote. A trusted and beloved friend of this congregation, The Rev. Dean Snyder, will facilitate this consensus process.

It is important to emphasize why we are moving forward in this particular way. Again, while the Church Council could have made this decision, our Church’s leadership resolved that it is important to be as inclusive as possible in this process of coming to consensus around becoming a Reconciling Community. The process that we will use is absolutely open to all; all persons are invited to be involved in the conversation. Further, the process is designed to bring us together, to encourage sharing across differences of feeling and belief, to emphasize shared interests, and to promote accountability to one another as sisters and brothers in Christ. Finally, the process seeks to keep Christ at the center by building on the *worshipful work* model of leadership and decision-making employed by Church Council.

“Why are we doing this now?” This is a question that some will ask. One answer to the question is: “If not now, when?” Generally, however, our sense is that in order to move forward as a congregation, to continue to discern who God is calling us to be, we must address the question about affiliating with Reconciling Ministries first. Unless we directly engage this conversation and come to a decision, there will be folks who will continue to be frustrated—either by the fact that the conversation is happening or by the fact that not enough is happening. This frustration is destructive to our communal life and to our moving forward together with purpose and joy.

We are confident that the Holy Spirit is at work among us as we seek to faithfully and lovingly address the decision that is now before us. We know that there are strong feelings about this issue and that there is much at stake. Therefore, it is our prayerful and abiding hope that each one of you will agree to sacrifice some time, to listen to your sisters and brothers in the faith, and to have the courage to participate in this conversation. Our community will be strengthened as we continue to faithfully follow where God leads.

May the Holy Spirit bless you and keep you this day and always.

In Christ’s Service,

Rev. Ginger E. Gaines-Cirelli
Pastor

Mr. Don Good
Council Chair
2003-2004

Mr. Sam Marullo
Council Chair
2005