The Council of Bishops has made public their recommendation of the One Church Plan as the way forward for the United Methodist Church as it relates to the inclusion of LGBTQ people. The Council shared the following in their May 4th press release.

“The One Church Plan allows for contextualization of language about human sexuality in support of the mission; and allows for central conferences, especially those in Africa, to retain their disciplinary authority to adapt the Book of Discipline and continue to include traditional language and values while fulfilling the vision of a global and multicultural church.

This plan also encourages a generous unity by giving United Methodists the ability to address different missional contexts in ways that reflect their theological convictions. The One Church Plan removes the restrictive language of the Book of Discipline and adds assurances to pastors and Conferences who due to their theological convictions cannot perform same-sex weddings or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals.”

We think the One Church Plan is the best option offered by the Commission on a Way Forward. We are grateful for the work of our bishops and believe they made a wise decision. While we support the removal of the restrictive language (the incompatibility statement and prohibitions of marriage and ordination equality), we regret the impulse to add new language that allows for continued inequality, separation, and discrimination under the umbrella of contextualization. We regret this for two reasons: 1. It continues harm; and 2. It’s unnecessary.

When the UMC desegregated, we did not maintain language that allowed for the continuation of racism. When the UMC voted to ordain women, we did not include language that allowed for the continuation of sexism. Doing so would have been unjustifiable and harmful, as would adding this new language around human sexuality.

Even without added assurances for theological convictions, the options for Central Conferences, clergy, Boards of Ordained Ministry (BOOM), and Annual Conference clergy sessions remain the same. Central Conferences can already and will “retain their disciplinary authority to adapt the Book of Discipline.” Clergy throughout the connection can already decline to officiate weddings, for a variety of reasons. BOOM and clergy sessions can already vote to discontinue or defer a candidate for ordained ministry, for a variety of reasons. These are current policies that will remain under the One Church Plan. The additional language is not needed.

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Reconciling United Methodists Texas Conference is committed to the equality and full inclusion of all people, without exception. We value the rich cultural and ministry experience of our global church and we do not wish to split. We may not all agree on all things at all times but are reminded of Jesus’ summary of the law and the prophets to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. Inspired by this, we commit to serving with one another faithfully even in our disagreement.

We know that change is both challenging and life-giving. We recognize that our global connection is ready for some, but not all the change we seek. We believe that the majority and a growing number of faithful United Methodists in the Texas Annual Conference are ready to welcome and love our LGBTQ members, neighbors, and friends.

We are called to do no harm, to do all the good we can, and to love God. As Wesleyans, we know that sanctification is a process; it’s true of our individual lives and it’s true of our work together in our beloved UMC. We remain willing to work out sanctification together.

In 2016 the global church asked our Council of Bishops to lead. We have prayed for, supported, and will continue to respect the process.

We choose to reject fear and prioritize love. We will remain engaged in relationship building and advocacy. We seek to follow the Holy Spirit and move forward in hope! We invite you to join us!

Support Group Offered for Parents: When Kids Come Out
By Jim Waugh

For the past four years, I have offered a class called “When Kids Come Out” in the Columbus, OH area. My aim has been to reach out to parents whose children have come out and to provide a safe space in which they can ask questions, share their journeys, and talk about the future for them and their LGBTQ children. I market the class through emails to U.M. pastors encouraging them to publicize the meetings or to encourage parents from their congregations to attend. I also email former participants and ask that they encourage others whom they might know to attend. Facebook is another way that I have promoted the class.

The class meets for four sessions (over four weeks) in the spring and in the fall. I want to meet parents where they are so the topics about which we talk each week will vary according to the questions, issues, and concerns of those who show up for the class. I have had as many as seven or eight persons in the class and at other times no one has shown up. I just had the first class of the spring session, and I had three families represented in the group.

Over the years I have been offering the group, I have collected articles and resources that are the “tool box” that I use for the group. On occasion I have invited in local persons to share about their own journey as the parent of a gay child or as a LGBTQ person growing up.

For more information, feel free to contact me at jwaugh4@mac.com
Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

Has your son or daughter recently told you he or she was gay, lesbian, or bisexual or they feel like they were born into a body of the wrong gender and actually are the other gender?
Are you in a state of shock?
Do you worry that you might have somehow caused or contributed to their being gay or transgender?
Are you worried about the religious objections your church may have to homosexuality or gender variance? Are you worried about what your friends or family will think if you should support and accept your child?
Do you feel betrayed by your child?
Are you heartbroken at the thought of possibly not having biological grandchildren by your child?
Are you angry with your child and just want them to stop? Do you feel that they have chosen to be gay or transgender and could choose to be different if they wanted?
Are you worried about your child's safety?
Do you feel a sense of grief?
Do you wish you could get over your feelings but you just can't?
Do you feel some combination of some or all of these things and wonder if you're going crazy?
These feelings are all normal. You can't make them instantly disappear or change, much as you might try. Your child is still the same person he or she has always been, but you have just found out something that you didn't know about him or her. Therefore, it seems as if your child has changed, and it feels as if your whole world has turned upside down.

Your child is still your child. You have the ability to deal with this new information, to adjust to it, and to come to terms with it. Many gay and transgender children are absolutely terrified to come out to their parents, for fear of being rejected, judged, or humiliated. There are, in fact, many homeless LGBT youth because their parents have thrown them out.

Your child's sexual orientation or gender identity will not change, because it is inborn, just as your own is. You did not choose to be straight or cisgendered (which means that your mind, feelings, and body agree about what gender you are). Being gay or transgender was not a decision they made to hurt or punish you or for any other reason. It was not a decision at all, but simply a realization that they are who they are and they way they are, and that way is different from how society thinks they should be.

The suicide attempt rate is staggeringly high among people in the LGBT community, as compared with those in the general population. Your child needs your love and acceptance more than ever before. They most likely struggled painfully before taking the risk to come out to you. They are the target of judgement from certain segments of society in general and may be subject to discrimination and even extreme hatred from some. But they have had the courage to begin to process the realization of who they are and even more courage to tell you about it.

You can be of invaluable help and support as your child processes all these things. Fortunately, there is great help for both you and your child. You can start by going online and finding PFLAG (which stands for Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, and they provide support for transgender people and their families as well). You may also find a support group in your area or online for families of gay and/or transgender people.

If you want the support of a therapist, be sure to look for one who is accepting and non-judgemental. Many therapists are, but there are some who are not. If you go to one who seemed accepting on the phone but you find they actually are not, you are not obligated to stay.

You can do this. It may be very hard at first, but you have what it takes.

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Therapy for Peace

You have the innate power to heal into your natural state of health, peace, confidence, and joy. In healing yourself, you heal the world.

World Peace begins with inner peace. Life in Planet Earth has been complicated and often very painful. As a result, we all have had parts of ourselves that got wounded. When these parts and the painful feelings associated with them get triggered, we are far from inner peace.

Because we felt the need to protect ourselves from feeling the pain of those wounded parts, we unconsciously created blocks to the natural peace and happiness that are always at our core. As we release those blocks, we begin to heal into our true healthy Core Selves.

You do not have to stay trapped in your pain. It is possible for you to learn to free yourself and learn how to be happy.

"Everything changes when you start to emit your own frequency rather than absorbing the frequencies around you, when you start imprinting your intent on the universe rather than receiving an imprint from existence." --Barbara Marciniak

By Terri Hager - MSW, LCSW
715 W. Lake Street, Oak Park, IL | 708-613-5324
In January, USA Today published an article titled "Tolerance Takes a Hit" that reported recent research from the Harris Poll that found Americans are less accepting of LGBT people in 2017. For the first time in four years, acceptance dropped to “very” or “somewhat” uncomfortable in a number of situations tracked through 4 years of surveys.

In every case, the level of discomfort increased in 2017 by at least 2-3%. Respondents were more uncomfortable having an LGBTQ family member, doctor, or child’s teacher. They were more uncomfortable seeing an LGBTQ co-workers wedding picture or a same-sex couple holding hands.

But one that hit me hard was the discomfort at having LGBTQ members at their place of worship. Twenty-four percent. Nearly 1 in 4 people. A quarter of the congregation.

I couldn’t help but think of something my daughter said several years ago.

“When someone tells me they’re a Christian, I’m afraid of them.” How that haunts me. What a terrible indictment.

In recent months she’s felt this growing counterflow to acceptance and commented on it. I was hoping wasn’t true, but it appears it is true.

If you have an LGBTQ child, if you’re an ally or family member, if you’re a neighbor who cares or a personal friend, it’s more important than ever to show support. It’s more important than ever to speak up. It’s more important than ever to work to help your UMC community become reconciling.

Talk with your friends. Bring up the topic in your Sunday school class or Bible study. Stand on the side of grace and the all-encompassing love of God for all and speak to others.

If an LGBTQ person is spiritually longing they should be able to become fully included members of any Methodist church. If they want a relationship with God, want to grow in their faith, or want a be part of a community of believers, how can we bear to have the United Methodist Church discriminate and segregate them?

Help us work toward increasing acceptance again.

From Janet Duke, PRN Steering Committee member; Bee Creek UMC, Austin TX; jdukeaustin@gmail.com

Pride

In 2017, San Diego Pride became the first parade in the nation to kick off the parade with clergy leading the way. Over 50 clergy from various faiths and denominations showed support for the LGBTQ+ people in San Diego and were received with cheers and open arms. About 7 leaders of United Methodist Churches participated in the clergy group, with at least 5 reconciling congregations/ministries marching in the parade. It was wonderful to see both the support of the church members and the reception of the crowd as we reminded everyone that all people are beloved children of God and when we say “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors” we truly mean it! We look forward to even more people joining us at this summer’s Pride Parade as we remind the people of the United Methodist Church and beyond that God’s love cannot be limited by human boundaries.

-Rev. Melissa Spence, First United Methodist Church of San Diego
One night at bedtime my 3 year old son asked me in complete confusion, “Why did God make me a boy?” I barely slept that night trying to figure out why my son would ask me that question. As the years went on, he consistently expressed that he was really a girl in a boy’s body. I didn’t know what was going on, and I did not yet know the word transgender. In public, he was considered a “boy who liked girl things”; yet I felt it was deeper than that. He was incredibly fortunate to be accepted and nurtured at church and at preschool (which was held at the church). This unconditional love built his confidence enough that by 8 years old he decided he wanted a female name and he wanted to live as a girl. In January of 2011 we attended “Winter Warming” an annual RMN event, and I attended a PRN workshop (led by Blair Barbour) and that was the first time I met another parent of a child like mine. A couple of months later (again at bedtime) my child said to me with great sadness, “I’m the only kid in the world like this”. I knew differently. After another sleepless night, I called my pastor (Bonnie Beckonchrist) and told her that I wanted to create a support group for families with gender creative children. She suggested we meet at the church. Together we created “Pinwheels”. My goal was to create a safe, consistent space for my child and other like-minded children to make friends. I quickly learned that in doing so, I had inadvertently created the same thing for myself and other parents. We started to share resources and support.

Our first meeting was in March of 2011. It was just us and the other family I had met at the PRN workshop. That summer I took my children to the RMN convo in Ohio, and it gave me more hope that there were other churches like ours out there. As we continued meeting monthly (at FUMCAH), we kept growing. In 2013 my transgender daughter and I went to the RMN convo in Washington D.C. and gave a workshop on Pinwheels. We met more supportive people. I continued to attend Winter Warming events each January, and gave more workshops about Pinwheels. Our church circle grew. Then, thanks to celebrities and media attention in 2015, the word transgender became a household word. Our numbers grew, and we added another meeting location in Flossmoor, IL. By June of 2017 we saw the need to add an additional monthly event devoted to teens, where parents could drop off their kid, or stay, or the teens could drive themselves. Then in the fall of 2017 a friend and ally of mine started a Pinwheels group in St. Louis in response to a need in her community. Pinwheels kids range in age from 4 to 18 years old, and they are all at different points in their gender identity discovery. We have hosted guest speakers, special trainings, movie viewings, and even field trips. We continue to be a safe space for families to connect. Many consider us a lifeline.

My child is now a thriving 15 year old girl with dreams of an exciting future. She has met her best friends through Pinwheels. I am forever grateful to my church community for walking with her and all of the Pinwheels children as they’ve been blazing a new trail in the gender revolution in our country. I still don’t know why God “made her a boy”, but I do know that God loves her and all of the other gender creative children like her.

Lorena Cory, Founder/Facilitator of Pinwheels Ministry, FUMC-Arlington Heights (IL)
Ms. Cory will lead a workshop on Friday, July 27th, 2018 at the RMN Convocation at St. Louis, MO Airport Hilton
New center offers LGBTQ youth a 'Safe Place' in Chula Vista

It should be no surprise a new youth center in Chula Vista is bright and colorful. Its decorations include a rainbow-colored, heart-shaped pillow on a bean bag, a rainbow flag on a wall and a stuffed unicorn on a drawer unit.

At its core, the drop-in center at the Trolley Trestle Youth Hub on Ada Street is meant to be a safe haven for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) youth.

The first of its kind in South County, Our Safe Place center will offer what staff and community leaders say are sorely needed services for the young demographic and their families.

"It can feel very isolating being an LGBTQ youth in (South County)," said staff member Leo O’Driscoll. "Up until now, there’s been very little resources in (South County) for LGBTQ people, especially youth."

The center, staff said, is a crucial space to ensure the safety and well-being of the youth. Studies generally show that compared to their heterosexual peers, LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk of attempting suicide, ending up homeless and experiencing violence or harassment.

“We want to change the statistics,” said Patty Chavez of South Bay Community Services, which partnered with San Diego Youth Services and YMCA to help open the center.

Funded by the county’s Health and Human Services Agency, the center puts on health development workshops, group discussions, game and movie nights, and other activities. The space includes a kitchen, couches, a TV, a whiteboard stand and desktop computers.

Near the front door, the center’s “resources corner” includes shelves stacked with brochures and fliers tacked on a bulletin board. Elsewhere in the modest center, the definitions of terms commonly used in the LGBTQ community — such as cisgender and agender — are printed on pieces of colored paper affixed to a wall.

The “identities wall,” staff said, fits one of the most important objectives for the center: to educate others about LGBTQ issues.

The more the public understands this sector of the population, and the more LGBTQ individuals feel welcomed and accepted by society, the less they are at risk, staff said.

Perils LGBTQ people face, such as suicide, are not inherent, staff said. The dangers are “more of a reflection of society’s issues … of how much rejection and discrimination” LGBTQ individuals face, staff member Kelsey O’Brien said.

One of the greatest concerns staff tries to address head-on is suicide. When an adolescent joins the center, a staff member evaluates his, her or their suicidal tendencies using the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale, a short assessment that includes a series of questions.

The staff — O’Brien, O’Driscoll and Ali Shapiro — have first-hand knowledge of the issues facing LGBTQ youth who frequent the center. As members of the LGBTQ community with experience in social work, the trio is suited to address the group’s needs.

“Being able to relate to the youth, and having the youth be able to feel comfortable and safe with us, is really important,” O’Brien said.

Shapiro added: “I think for us, this is 100 percent our passion. We’re not just working with youth, we’re working with LGBTQ youth, and that’s exactly what we want to do with our lives.”

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Their work also centers around the youth’s families, some of whom struggle to understand or feel comfortable with their family member’s sexual or gender identity.

In an effort to provide them a space to process their feelings together, staff lead weekly group discussions exclusively for families (without youth present).

Once a month, PFLAG, a nonprofit composed of relatives and friends of LGBTQ individuals, hosts the discussions, allowing the members to share their experiences.

Staff and community leaders said they hope the center will create a ripple effect that will bring more services to South County for LGBTQ youth — from HIV and STD testing centers to homeless shelters.

"This being the first step in creating a really strong, visible LGBTQ community for people in (South County)," O’Driscoll said. “I think visibility is super important.”

At a grand opening ceremony last month, Chula Vista Mayor Mary Casillas Salas praised the center.

“I’m hoping that we continue to make those strides in our society,” she said. “This center is very, very important for kids to be able to come here and feel safe and feel welcome and feel it’s more than OK to be them. They should be celebrated just like anyone else.”

Councilman Steve Padilla, who previously served as the first openly gay mayor of Chula Vista, said people forget there are still groups that don’t feel part of the larger community and lack a support network.

"Communities are really not complete until we really value everyone in our community, until we can look into the eyes of another human being and see a soul and see a beating heart and see a valuable human being without judgment, without ostracizing people, but simply showing love and compassion and togetherness,” he said.

Our Safe Place is open noon to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and 2 to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Adolescents up to age 21 are welcomed.

by David Hernandez, San Diego Union Tribune, January 3, 2018

Time for Convo: For Everyone Born – July 26-29

By the time that you are reading this, the next Reconciling Ministries Convocation will be less than two months away. The good news is that you still have time to register to be a part of the convocation (https://rmnetwork.org/foreveryoneborn/). The convo will be held during July 26-29, 2018, at the St. Louis Airport Hilton.

Under the theme “For Everyone Born” this will draw hundreds of United Methodists for community, worship, organizing, and living out what it means to be a church where all are welcome and celebrated. Make your reservations now so that you can be part of a weekend that promises to be full of inspiration, connection, and a vision of what the church could be. In addition to great worship and fellowship, we will have two days of engaging workshops, hear from Commission on A Way Forward (CoWF) members about their experience, offer opportunities for jurisdictional teams to meet, and begin planning our presence and witness at General Conference in February 2019.

In addition, the Parents Reconciling Ministries Network Board is hosting a pre-convo forum day on Thursday, July 26 from 10:00 am to 3:30 pm. At this event focused on supporting parents of LGBTQ children, we will learn together, fellowship together, and pray together as we spend the day getting to know one another.

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Parents Reconciling Network (PRN) Board Members

The following members of the PRN board direct the activities of the PRN, an extension ministry of Reconciling Ministries Network. If you would like to contribute to this work, please contact Rev. James Waugh, Broad Street UMC, Columbus (OH).

Email addresses for steering committee members are included. We encourage parents or family members to contact us by email if would like to connect with us for discussing the issues surrounding parenting LGBTQ* children.

Steering Committee Members:
Blair Barbour, Euclid UMC, Oak Park, IL  blairbarbour22@gmail.com
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Rev. James Waugh, Grove City Trinity UMC, Grove City, OH  jwaugh3@mac.com
Laura Young, Lubbock, TX—RMN Staff Member  laura@rmnetwork.org
Rexanna and Eric Swanson, FUMC Chula Vista (CA),  rch040522@gmail.com

Our Mission

Parents Reconciling Network unconditionally walks with the parents and families of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities until all are fully accepted in their families, in their churches, and in society by advocating for acceptance, providing education, and promoting welcoming communities of faith.

(search on Facebook for Parents Reconciling Network)