



Presbytery of Lake Michigan

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

September 6, 2023

Beloved Siblings in Christ:

We are writing to you to invite you to an opportunity at our September Presbytery meeting to learn more about bringing **real hospitality** to our siblings in Christ who identify as LGBTQ+.

The afternoon portion of the September 16 Stated Meeting will include a presentation and panel discussion about gender and sexual diversity led by Avery Arden, an autistic, gender-queer minister from Atlanta and a More Light Presbyterians board member, and members of the Nominating & Representation Committee. The panel will feature presbytery members and congregations speaking about their experiences with the topic.

We want this to be a time of learning so, if you have questions, please **submit your questions** prior to the Presbytery meeting via [an online form](#). (Questions should be submitted via the form by Friday, September 15, 2023.) **We welcome all questions; no names will be attached to questions used in the conversation at the Presbytery meeting.**

When reading that Presbytery will be looking at welcoming siblings who are LGBTQ+, some of us will think, “it’s about time” and look forward with anticipation. Others of us will think, “can we just stop with this” and adopt a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. Some of us may feel discomfort (indeed, even as some of us struggle with our own sexuality). Regardless of how these issues touch our spirits, as one member of our committee said, “our desire is to have relationships built and not broken.”

Addressing how to offer a radical hospitality for all of God’s children is a moral and ethical imperative for the Christian church—for each of our congregations. The #1 reason for teen homelessness is that, too often, parents throw out those who identify as LGBTQ+ on “religious grounds.” What if each of our churches were known as safe places for *everyone* to be welcomed? If we were to speak out, as homophobic rhetoric is repeated by those in our communities?

This became a bit more personal than I was anticipating when I exuberantly offered to write this letter. I passionately explained at our July Nominations & Representation Committee meeting that varying understanding of sexuality has existed in *so* many religious expressions for millennia.

A week after our N&R meeting, I went to a wedding. The groom was at our home frequently as an adolescent; his mother left when he was seven and he welcomed a sense of motherly love. When my children were adolescents, our home was open to *everyone*—so friends would bring friends. These kids would joke that our home was “the island of misfit toys” (a reference to *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*.) As I sat at this wedding and watched “the kids” (now adults) tears came to my eyes. There was a lovely young man with a beard whom I knew as a “girl” when he (his pronoun) was young. He was there with his brother (born as a “boy”) and they see each other, fully, as “brothers.”

Another young person excitedly wore a beautiful dress, twirling as she danced, eyes sparkling. This person was known to me as a “boy” when an adolescent. A decade later, my family was one of the first to whom she “came out.” As she spoke, my daughter-in-law excitedly said, “I knew it!” jumped up, and quickly returned with a silk blouse that she (my daughter-in-law) thought she (transgender woman) would enjoy. When I saw this precious now-woman hold the silk blouse to her face with delight and a beaming smile, I realized that I was understanding more—because I trusted *her* experience of *herself*. And as I sat at the wedding and saw this same woman, now with long, thick hair, flowing dress swirling around her shaved legs with delight . . . I thought of Louis Armstrong’s song “What a Wonderful World,” knowing that there *is* a place where they are welcome—as *they are*—even though they are not fully welcome in their own families of origin. Beloveds, for too long “othering” a person has been done in Jesus’ name as racism, xenophobia, and sexism flourished. We are inviting you to stem the tide and welcome *all* in Jesus’ name.

Thanks for learning with us, even when sometimes we don’t know what we don’t know. Thanks for being willing to welcome everyone, in Jesus’ name—the same Jesus who radically welcomed those who were not welcome in his society.

In Christ’s Peace & Power,

Ruth Lowry

On behalf of the Nominating & Representation Committee of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan:

Amber Nettleton

Benjamin Boerkoel

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Bill Bussell

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