

Statement of Inclusion

The Episcopal Church has struggled over the question of the full inclusion of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered) persons for many years. In 2013, the Diocese of Milwaukee's Standing Committee invited us to think about and respond to a survey concerning the theological and pastoral implications of Bishop Miller's decision not to permit the use in this diocese of the proposed liturgies for blessing same-sex relationships. In a November meeting of some 30 members and friends of Grace that explored these questions, a strong consensus emerged that Grace Church make a public statement of our desire for the full inclusion of all persons in our congregational life and worship, completely independent of other labels society might apply. We are especially concerned to provide pastoral and sacramental support to people in loving and life-giving relationships. It is our fervent hope that one day soon we will be able to witness and celebrate the blessing of same sex couples at Grace Church. We also recognize that offering such blessings is only step toward full marriage equality and look forward to the day when same sex marriages may be solemnized at Grace.

There are at least two important reasons for making such a statement. First is a common misconception in our culture that Christianity stands for intolerance and bigotry and that contemporary Christians are united in their strong opposition to LGBT people living out their lives with openness and integrity. The second is that our silence obscures our commitment to the full inclusion of all people in the life of our congregation and our desire to offer the church's blessing to same-sex couples.

Our silence on this issue means that many Christians and seekers might wonder where we stand. They might not know whether they are welcome to join us for worship or become members of our congregation. Our silence means that our effort to share the love of God in Jesus Christ may be ignored or unnoticed by many of those who are seeking God. Our silence means that LGBT Christians who have been members of Grace may not feel fully welcome or full members of the Body of Christ.

We know that many LGBT people have been deeply wounded by communities of faith that have rejected, denounced, or ignored them. We hope that by speaking out we may extend God's love to people who need it, that through our witness, we may comfort the broken-hearted and help to heal wounds. Our public statement might be a word of hope to someone in despair.

Even as we express publicly our commitment to welcome and include all people in our common life and shared faith, we acknowledge that there are some among us who have different views. There are some who struggle to understand how the full inclusion of LGBT people is warranted by scripture, tradition, and reason, the three sources of Anglican and Episcopal theology. We want to emphasize as strongly as possible that the inclusion of LGBT people does not mean the exclusion of anyone else. As St. Paul wrote

in Galatians 3:28, *In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male and female.*” We believe that Christ calls us to embody an inclusive community of differing views and perspectives, united by our shared experience of Christ’s love and our coming together as one body in the Eucharistic feast. By modeling that inclusion, we may be a witness of God’s love and God’s beloved community in our deeply divided culture.

Emerging from a conversation among members and friends of Grace that involved members of the vestry, the Wardens and Rector, this public statement is intended to invite further conversation. We invite Grace members who affirm this statement to add their names to the list of signatories.

SIGNED: