



UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Becoming More Welcoming to the LGBTQ+ Community

In light of the decisions from the recent 2019 Special General Conference, many congregations are looking for practical ways to communicate to the community that they are truly open and welcoming of all people and in particular the LGBTQ+ community. While some congregations have been focused on this effort for decades, others have more recently become aware of the need to declare their welcome to the LGBTQ+ community.

The following suggestions have been created for churches who would like to publicly welcome the LGBTQ+ community to their services and programs.

Before committing to these steps, pastors and leadership teams will need to discern what is right for your context. Please remember:

- Congregations need to be authentic to who your faith community is and be careful not to oversell how open and welcoming the church might be.
- It can be painful when a congregation initially appears open, but LGBTQ+ visitors experience something different.
- If these materials are new to your church, we strongly encourage you to have a conversation with your church leadership to gain clarity about how to use them.
- Leadership teams need to clarify that these steps do, in fact, represent your church's posture.

Hospitality is in the eye of the beholder, and just because a congregation considers itself welcoming doesn't mean that visitors and community members feel the same way. However, if this is becoming a priority for your church, here are a few ways to get started.

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1. Draft and post a statement of welcome. Be specific and show it prominently on the website and building. Please remember, "open and affirming" means that someone's gender identity or sexual identity is celebrated and not just accepted. (see example [here](#))
 2. Include LGBTQ+ persons in worship leadership including liturgy, words of welcome, scripture and/or preaching.
 3. Offer Bible studies (perhaps open to the community) that articulate how Christians who are serious about scripture also affirm LGBTQ+ persons. (see example [here](#))
 4. Sign up as a church to march with an upcoming Pride parade.
 5. Educate your congregation on the reasons it is important to specifically welcome LGBTQ+ persons because historically they have been hurt and excluded by the church. To build a relationship, you need to be explicit about their welcome.
 6. Ensure that a gender-neutral, single-stall bathroom is available in all areas of your building. (see [here](#) for more on the topic)



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7. Fly a rainbow flag or post signage that declares welcome (e.g. “ALL MEANS ALL”) to easily signal your welcoming stance. (see [here](#) for more on the story of the rainbow flag)
8. Mention LGBTQ+ people and families in sermons and congregational newsletter articles regularly in a positive context.
9. Educate yourself and your leaders on language associated with gender and sexuality. It can seem extensive, but good ministry can depend on familiarity with the language of your people. (see [here](#) for a short overview)
10. Remind your leadership teams that our churches are to practice ministry and have conversations *with* LGBTQ+ people not *for or about* LGBTQ+ people. Consider an LGBTQ+ task force to help discern the difference and plan accordingly.
11. Provide training for your greeters and ushers on appropriately welcoming people of all gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations. (see [here](#) for more)
12. Gather a discussion group to examine the gendered language in your bulletin, newsletter, sermons, liturgies, and hymns. Talk about the assumptions these language choices imply and who might feel constricted or excluded by the gendered wording. Explore creative ways to avoid exclusively binary-gendered language, such as “siblings” or “family” in lieu of “men and women,” “sisters and brothers,” and “mothers and fathers.”
13. Honor anniversaries of all couples in the same way, i.e. bulletin or newsletter listings or by mention in the prayers of the church. Ask each couple for permission prior to listing.
14. When sending mailings from your church to your partnered LGBTQ+ congregants and neighbors, put both people’s names on the same envelope, just as you would for a heterosexual couple. For example, consider avoiding gendered prefixes like “Mr.” or “Mrs.”
15. Perform baptisms and confirmations for children of parents of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.
16. Connect with your local PFLAG chapter and be able to provide information to your congregants who have family members and friends who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. (link <https://pflag.org>)