

Full and Equal Welcome:

A Word to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Community

As a priest of the Episcopal Church, it has been my duty and joy to ensure that all persons enjoy a full and equal welcome in God's House and at God's Table. My pledge to you is that neither you nor your family and friends will encounter spiritual violence from the pulpit. We preach the love of Christ, who welcomes all with open arms.

We are committed to practice what we preach. The following policy was adopted by unanimous vote of Good Shepherd's vestry, our governing board. It was developed in consultation with LGBT members of the parish, including members of the vestry. They agreed that it was true to their experience of Good Shepherd. It reflects the longstanding consensus of our parish community. After our parish statement, I have cited and commented on relevant portions of Episcopal Church policy going back to 1976. I should note that, in response to the faithful witness of trans-Episcopalians, gender identity and expression were explicitly added to these policies in July 2009.

I am aware how subtle negative messages can be and that they are often invisible to those of us who are part of the majority. I am also aware that Good Shepherd is as diverse in its opinions as American society in general. Our firm commitment to God and to you is to make Good Shepherd a safe place where all are welcome. No exceptions allowed.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Carroll", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Rev. R. William Carroll, Rector

In May 2009, the vestry (our parish's governing board) endorsed the following resolution:

We, the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, reaffirm with gratitude all provisions of the nondiscrimination canons of Episcopal Church. In conformity with our longstanding commitment, we promise to surpass what is required of us as we actively welcome all people, without exception.

In particular, we rejoice in a long history of full and active inclusion of our LGBT sisters and brothers in our worship and fellowship, including all ministries, sacramental rites, and leadership positions for which they are qualified. We give thanks to God for their presence and ministry among us, and we encourage them to participate in every aspect of parish life on the same terms as every one else. We deeply regret that we continue to live in a society where this needs to be said.

Noting our Anglican heritage of respect for individual conscience, we observe that our membership is not uniform in its opinions, and we welcome the contributions of members who

disagree with this policy. Nevertheless, we celebrate this commitment to full and active inclusion and insist on continuing and strengthening it. We are convinced that this is not only permitted but also required by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since 1994, the following nondiscrimination canon (Church law) has been adopted by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church:

No one shall be denied rights, status or access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by Canons. (Title I, Canon 17, Section 5)

Similar provisions govern equal access to the ordination process and employment. These are binding on all congregations, dioceses, and church institutions of the Episcopal Church. Nevertheless, compliance is uneven, ranging from enthusiastic embrace to active resistance and with every conceivable position in between. The commitment of our diocesan bishop and parish priest to obey the canons and continue to move the Church forward have been public and clear. As noted, this has been the prevailing consensus among members of Good Shepherd for decades.

In 1976 the General Convention passed the following resolutions:

(1) Resolved, that it is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God and have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.

(2) Resolved, that this General Convention expresses its conviction that homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection of the laws with all other citizens, and calls upon our society to see that such protection is provided in actuality.

In 1997 the General Convention passed the following resolution.

That this 72nd General Convention apologizes on behalf of the Episcopal Church to its members who are gay or lesbian and to lesbians and gay men outside the Church for years of rejection and maltreatment by the Church; . . . That this Church repents of its sins committed against lesbian and gay people—physical, psychological and spiritual—through covert and overt action and inaction. We seek amendment of our life together and we ask for God's help in sharing the Good News with all people.

The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd
Seeking and serving Christ in all persons

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