

# **EPWORTH UMC: STATEMENT OF INCLUSION and AFFIRMATION**

(adopted May 2023 by Epworth Executive Leadership Team)

## **OUR CALLING:**

Ephesians 4:1-3 says:

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

## **OUR COMMUNITY:**

Preserving the unity of the Holy Spirit and the calling we have received, Epworth is an intentionally multicultural, multi-class, multigenerational, and multilingual body of Christ with a diversity of theological views. In this diversity, Epworth affirms the God given worth of all human beings. In a society where many face discrimination, we specifically affirm, welcome, celebrate, and include the LGBTQIA community in all aspects of the life of this local church.

*God is love* (1 John 4:8) and Jesus says his followers will be *known by their love*. (John 13:35) Epworth commits to welcoming and showing God's love to everyone, including persons we do not agree with, persons holding views of scripture different than our own, and persons who are not in full agreement with this statement. 1 John 4:19-20 says *We love because God first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.* No matter how we interpret specific scripture, we commit to being loving, open and welcoming to any and all persons within the church and within our community. For us, loving means we honor who someone understands themselves to be in Christ, even if we do not understand.

## **OUR PRACTICE OF FAITH**

We are a community where faithful and committed Christians believe in the authority of scripture and are guided by the Holy Spirit as we use reason, tradition, and experience to read, interpret, and understand the will of God. This is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Each of us, based on culture, upbringing and past experiences, has different understandings of God's will as it is expressed through scripture on gender and sexuality. We also hold different understandings on whether gender and sexual expression are created by God, chosen by individuals, or a combination of both. These are some of many parts of scripture we read differently.

## **OUR LIFE TOGETHER:**

Our differences require us to lean into the work of Holy Spirit as we preserve unity in the basics of Christian faith and firmly commit to continuing to be a place where all are affirmed as their diverse and full selves. Our faith is a seeking to know God and to walk in God's will

together. We do not need to agree on everything. We need each other and our unique traits and differences to best understand and follow God into God's fullness.

### **OUR LEADERSHIP (local and global UMC)**

Leadership in Epworth is open to all persons who are willing to come under the guidelines of our leadership covenant. We do not discriminate on the basis of age, race, sex, county of origin, language, immigration status, or sexual orientation for local leaders. That said, we are part of the United Methodist Connection which does not yet open ordination and marriage to the LGBTQIA community. As such, we will walk with the larger United Methodist church towards the full inclusion of all persons in all aspects of ministry, including the day when we hope ordination and marriage will be open for all by General Conference, the only body to speak for the full United Methodist Church

### **OUR GOD**

We acknowledge that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. None of us fully know the mind or heart of God. Each of us depends daily on the grace and mercy of God and those around us.

We are the broken body of Christ, called to hope by a God who encompasses all.

Ephesians 4:4-6 says

*<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

As such we acknowledge our differences and remain in community together as we work for justice and serve Christ together with humility, grace, and love until the day when the fullness of God who is over all and through all and in all is realized on earth.