

Strategy for Inclusivity for the Presbytery of West Virginia

Theological Affirmations

The Presbytery of West Virginia affirms our Christian faith reflecting on creation, covenant, hospitality, and the ministry of Jesus Christ as we seek to do the work and ministry of inclusion.

Scripture makes it clear from the beginning in Genesis 1 that all of creation is of value to God and all of creation is good. Genesis 1:26 tells us that all human beings are created in the image of God. Every person represents a new aspect of God's creative energy and with that understanding, the Presbytery of WV and its members are called to respect individuals for their own special qualities and are bound to imitate God's attributes of love and kindness to everyone. All are to be loved, included, involved, understood, and to have their gifts and talents recognized and used that they may be known and valued individually as children of God, each an essential member of the body of Christ. Scripture affirms that in the body of Christ we have no division or hierarchy based upon one's gender, economic class, disability, or ethnic heritage. Galatians 3:28 (NRSV) states "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

As part of the covenant relationship we have with God, we are called to be in relationship not only with God but with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Leviticus 26:12 (NRSV) reads "and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people." As a Presbytery, we will do our part as Christ's faithful disciples to show compassion, understanding, acceptance, respect, support, tolerance, patience, and a willingness to learn when working with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

As a ministry of hospitality, the Presbytery of WV will strive to create environments of love, fellowship, and friendship that will strengthen our relationship to God and our relationship to our brothers and sisters in Christ. As Christ's faithful followers, members of the Presbytery of West Virginia are called out into the world to advocate in the wider society working with others to advocate for the full inclusion of all God's people in all aspects of life. We are called to offer every child of God Living Water. (John 4:10)

Including Persons with Disabilities

Each person is a child of God with a unique personality, gifts and abilities. As the Presbytery of WV, we are committed to finding ways to include all of God's children to the greatest extent possible, including those with disabilities. "The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has defined persons with disabilities as follows: Persons with disabilities are a diverse group of individuals who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as relating, caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working." (Living into the Body of Christ, p. 8)

We recognize that there is no "one size fits all" way to include persons of differing limitations. We also realize that there are things we can do to welcome children, youth and adults in the whole life of the presbytery. We also acknowledge that many of these events are overseen by

approved by Presbytery of WV on May 17, 2018

volunteers and staff who, for the most part, do not have training in working with persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, we are committed to including persons with disabilities to the greatest extent possible. Some of the ways that we strive to be inclusive are as follows:

- welcoming an “accompanier” with someone with a disability who knows the person’s needs and who is known to the person with the disability. If it is a minor who has a disability, the “accompanier” must be an adult. It may be that the “accompanier” stays in the same housing or in different housing, depending on the needs of the person with the disability. For events within the presbytery, any registration fees for the “accompanier” would be waived. For other presbytery-sponsored events, any cost for an “accompanier” will be considered on a case-by-case basis. All “accompaniers” must be able to pass the presbytery’s background and reference checks.
- including a statement in publicity and registration materials inviting and encouraging persons receiving the materials to be in touch with the event's contact person to consider how interested persons with disabilities might be included to the fullest.
- when possible and reasonable, planning events at sites that can be navigated by persons of different abilities or providing persons who can help others navigate the facilities.

Including People of All Sexual Orientations

All of us are called to the Body of Christ to be members and to welcome others into the body. We understand Christian spirituality as a journey from which no one should be excluded. When we build up walls and limit the involvement of some, we limit the spiritual growth of people, especially those that may be new to their faith, children in the faith, or at transitional points in their faith. In alignment with our values, vision and mission, the presbytery seeks to welcome all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, as guests and full participants in all our programs. As we seek to enable someone to grow into a person rooted in Christ, we are called to offer a home to all who desire a relationship with God.

As we work to welcome all on the journey of faith, we are committed to the following:

- A person is taken at their word as to their identity.
- We affirm that a person’s gender is more complex than what is physically recognizable.
- We will do what we can to be inclusionary and welcoming. This includes, but is not limited to, use of pronouns, bathroom facilities, and lodging.
- A person is welcome to use the lodging and bathroom facilities of the gender with which they identify.

The arc of scripture and the work and witness of Jesus Christ supports accepting people as they are. There are people in scripture who defy gender norms and are accepted – the eunuch who was baptized by Philip and is credited with starting the church in Ethiopia (Jesus also called for acceptance of eunuchs) and Deborah, the female judge and warrior.

Summary

It is difficult to imagine all of the situations where what we have always done is limiting or exclusionary. This document is intended to be a map towards inclusion. As a presbytery, we continue to strive to find ways to be as inclusive as possible of all God’s children. This strategy will be reviewed by the Nurture Committee on a regular basis.

approved by Presbytery of WV on May 17, 2018