



April 30, 2021

To the Beloved Community of Chelsea First United Methodist Church,

Over the next few months, you will see more than the usual number of written communications from Chelsea First. There is much to share! You can expect to hear about the return to in-person activities, community outreach, missions, congregational care, and financial and facilities updates.

This particular letter concerns a change in policy adopted by the Administrative Council at its April meeting. Specifically, the Council unanimously adopted the following addendum to the church's "Wedding Planning and Requirements" document:

As of April 8, 2021, the Administrative Council approves use of the facilities of Chelsea First United Methodist Church for ceremonies of Christian marriage for all couples, regardless of gender.

The Council took up the question of same-gender weddings at the request of the Path Forward Task Force¹. The unanimous vote conveys that the leadership of this church finds that now is the time to fully embrace our future.

The Administrative Council takes this action while recognizing that it means moving ahead of the denomination as a whole. Allowing same-gender weddings in our building puts Chelsea First – and Joy Barrett as Senior Pastor -- on a path to violating the current United Methodist Book of Discipline². The United Methodist Council of Bishops, and our Bishop in particular, have recognized that same-gender marriage is an issue of conscience that is highly likely to divide the denomination. They have indicated that church legal action on this topic will be "held in abeyance" and not acted on for the current time.

There is reason to hope that the global United Methodist Church, once its decision-making body is able to meet, will reconfigure its rules in ways that align with our new policy. The twice-postponed General Conference is now set for September 2022.

¹ The Path Forward Task Force is a group asked by the Administrative Council to give advice on next steps in becoming a more inclusive congregation with regard to homosexuality and gender diversity. Its members are: Nolan Peterson (Co-Chair), Jessica Fahlgren (Co-Chair), Andrea Alford, Justin Alford, Marna Balazer, Barbara Brown, Diane Brown, Dave Gilbert, Jeff Melvin, Tammy Melvin, Darrel Noye, Dan Roehm, and Bill Ruddock.

² The Book of Discipline is the rulebook for the United Methodist Church.

The Administrative Council is grateful to the Path Forward Task Force for its recent survey of the congregation. Everyone was invited to rate and comment on 7 ideas for enacting further inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQIA³ persons at Chelsea First. Surveys were distributed by email and by U.S. mail to those who prefer that method.

A summary of the survey data is attached. The results indicate broad consensus. Of 159 responses, 121 (76%) agreed with at least 4 of the 7 ideas to improve inclusion and disagreed with none. Another 19 (12%) expressed disagreement with at least 3 of the ideas. The remaining 18 (11%) were either mostly neutral or mixed. The survey also gave people a chance to list questions they have about these issues and our church; a complete list of all of questions submitted with answers drafted by the Administrative Council is posted [here](#) on our website.

The Administrative Council did not look to the survey to provide permission or “cover” for changes to the wedding policy. It is Council’s duty to lead, and its members take responsibility for the decision. However, the results give hope that this vote is a source of joy and relief to a large majority of the Chelsea First community: joy in doing the right thing, and relief in getting past an issue that has so long prevented us from being the church we are called to be for all people.

Finally, the Administrative Council expresses deep gratitude to Pastor Joy Barrett. Joy has shaped our life together in so many beautiful ways, always with careful judgment for balancing the needs of a diverse congregation. She has expressed her personal conviction that now is the right time for this change. We cannot fully appreciate the emotions and courage involved in this step for a clergyperson who has been devoted to her denomination and continues to work so hard for its benefit. We recognize that Joy is putting herself on the line for us, and we are humbled.

With Hope in Christ,

Edie Wiarda
Administrative Council Chair
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On behalf of Administrative Council members: Mike Vanderspool (Vice Chair), Heather Hay (Secretary), John Seto, Dana Schmunk, Sandy Schmunk, Charles Schmunk, Kerry Plank, Brenda Beck, Jim Alford III, Nolan Peterson, Rev. Rodney Gasaway, Rev. Joy Barrett

³ The term LGBTQIA+ is widely-accepted to refer to people with varied gender and sexual identities.