

Union County Pride – Interfaith Pride Celebration

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Welcome – Statement of Purpose

“The intent of this service is to be an interfaith celebration in support for the range of human identity and expression, particularly around issues of sexuality and gender. The intent is not to follow any particular faith tradition. We will seek commonality among various faith traditions, both theist and non-theist, in their affirmation of the goodness in humanity and their challenge that we live according to the better and more wholesome aspects of ourselves in our shared human experience.”

Invocation

“We gather in recognition that there is some reality beyond ourselves. We disagree on details regarding what we call spirituality, faith, humanism, our organization of religious expression, and whether that reality beyond is personal in any meaningful way. For some, that reality may be little more than principles of life humanity has discovered along the path of our existence. Meanwhile, we share the understanding that we are not lone agents, disconnected islands with no impact on one another; that we are more than the sum of our individual selves; that there are realities beyond the limits of our physical experience. Together, we seek such direction and guidance which might lead us into a more harmonious and positive existence. We seek that which unites us in the bonds of humanity as participants in the greater experience of the full reality around us, one we are often too blind to see.”

Litany of Inclusion (Three voices plus people)

Voice 1: We are all one together.

Voice 2: Where you hurt, I am impacted.

Voice 3: Where I hurt, your life is lessened.

Voice 1: Life is about so much more than me,

Voice 2: mine,

Voice 3: and the walls we build around those concepts.

People: Life is about us.

Voice 2: Together we are the human race in all its glorious diversity.

Voice 3: No matter what our gender identity,

Voice 1: No matter our sexuality,

Voice 2: No matter the color of our skin,

Voice 3: No matter our country of origin,

Voice 1: No matter our heart language,

Voice 2: No matter our neurodiversity,

Voice 1: No matter our faith traditions,

Voice 3: No matter how or who might consider us as different.

People: We are bound together in the human experience, even with those who make would make it a more difficult experience than it need be.

Voice 3: We are bound together with those who are most like us and those who are the least like us.

Voice 1: As much as we might be pushed to call for division, we are one.

Voice 2: We are joined in this human experience of life.

Voice 3: We breathe the same air.

Voice 1: We drink the same water.

Voice 2: We bleed the same blood.

People: We are one community.

Voice 3: We learn from one another.

Voice 2: We lean on one another.

Voice 1: We are strongest in our diversity.

Voice 3: We are strengthened by including one another.

People: Where I am, you belong.

Reflection: "Too often, we have allowed those concerned with power to divide us, to alienate us, to tear us apart. Too often, we have allowed those voices to wield religion as a weapon to break apart the human community, to lessen our reliance on one another and find strength in building one another up. Too often, we have allowed those consumed with greed or anger or insecurity to hold portions of humanity at bay, resorting to religious language to do so. In response, join in this reminder from Michael Gungor: 'God Is Not a White Man.'"

"God Is Not a White Man" (Michael Gungor)¹

God is not a man.

God is not a white man.

God is not an old man sitting on a cloud.

God cannot be bought.

God will not be boxed in.

God will not be owned by religion.

**But God is Love, God is Love,
and God loves everyone.**

**God is Love, God is Love,
and God loves everyone.**

God is not a man.

God is not an old man.

God does not belong to Republicans.

God is not a flag,

not even American.

God does not depend on a government.

**But God is good, God is good,
and God loves everyone.**

**God is good, God is good,
and God loves everyone.**

¹ Copyright ©2008 worshiptogether.com songs, by Michael Gungor, CCLI Song #: 5203244.

Atheists and charlatans,
communists and lesbians,
even ol' Pat Robertson,
Oh God loves us all.
Catholic or Protestant,
terrorist or president,
everybody, everybody loved, loved,
loved, loved, loved, oh

God is Love, God is Love,
and God loves everyone
God is Love, God is Love,
and God loves everyone

Yeah, I say, God is love

Stop the hating.
Please, just stop the hating now,
'cause God is Love.

Litany of Grief

Voice 2: We grieve together for those whose lives have been torn by nonacceptance, by hate, by fear.

Voice 1: We grieve for so many who never found inclusion, acceptance, and community.

Voice 3: We grieve for those we have had a hand in tearing down.

People: We grieve for those we could not rescue.

Voice 2: We grieve their loss and pain, for in it we are diminished.

Voice 3: Part of our community, our society has been lessened by lives shoved aside, stolen, dehumanized, shunned, or removed from our midst.

Voice 2: We grieve our own loss and suffering, our own experiences of isolation, ostracism, shame, rejection, and violence from unreasonable expectations to conform.

Voice 3: We grieve for the many ways we and others have become targets of hate by people who did not understand, who could not accept the diversity around them.

Voice 1: In our grief, let us remember that we are not alone.

Voice 2: Our grief is very personal, yet it is more.

People: It is a grief shared among one great community, a community where we all belong together.

Reflection: "Belonging does not begin with knowing one another. Belonging begins much more simply with recognizing one another. It begins with seeing something of value, something human, something worthy of our time and attention in each other's face, each other's life, each other's experience. It is only after we embark upon a journey of acceptance that we can truly become friends and travel together amid the storms of life that come our way. We can all be friends, if we would see each other as worthy fellow participants in the human experience. Join us in this reminder that we can both have friends and be friends."

“You’ve Got a Friend” (Carole King)²

When you're down and troubled,
And you need some love and care,
And nothing, no, nothing is going right,
Close your eyes and think of me,
And soon I will be there
To brighten up even your darkest night.

You just call out my name,
And you know, wherever I am,
I'll come running to see you again.
Winter, spring, summer or fall,
All you have to do is call
And I'll be there.
You've got a friend.

If the sky above you grows dark and full
of clouds,
And that old north wind begins to blow,
Keep your head together and call my
name out loud,
Soon you'll hear me knocking at your
door

You just call out my name,
And you know wherever I am,
I'll come running to see you again.
Winter, spring, summer or fall,
All you have to do is call,
And I'll be there, yes I will.
You've got a friend.

Now, ain't it good to know that you've got
a friend,
When people can be so cold?
They'll hurt you, yes, and desert you,
And take your soul if you let them,
Oh, but don't you let them.

You just call out my name,
And you know wherever I am,
I'll come running to see you again.
Winter, spring, summer or fall,
All you have to do is call,
And I'll be there, yes I will.
You've got a friend.

Litany of Purpose

Voice 1: We live together in unrealized potential.

Voice 3: *We need not be at one another's throat, eternally striving as enemies.*

Voice 2: Every faith tradition makes some recognition that we should live at peace, in community, in love.

Voice 1: This is how we build community, how we build civilization.

Voice 3: *It is how we prosper.*

People: It is how we grow together.

Voice 1: It is how we move beyond our unwarranted fears of the “other.”

Voice 3: *It is how we raise a new generation to reach beyond the failings of previous generations, including our own.*

Voice 2: We have long known the best way forward is in loving one another.

Voice 3: *We have long struggled to practice that same love.*

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People: It is love, however, that brings us peace and life together.

Reflection: "Love brings us together. Love brings us peace. Love fashions us into community. The peace which comes from love is so much more than any cessation of hostilities. It is a new life of abundant living in confidence and community. It is a life of sharing together. It is a recognition that life is of much greater value than conflict, greed, wealth, tradition, or a claim to supremacy. It is a peace founded on a recognition that we all belong together. That is the kind of love this world of humanity needs."

"What the World Needs Now" (Hal David and Burt Bacharach)³

**What the world needs now is love, sweet love.
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,
No, not just for some, but for everyone.**

**Lord, we don't need another mountain.
There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb.
There are oceans and rivers enough to cross,
Enough to last 'til the end of time.**

**What the world needs now is love, sweet love.
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,
No, not just for some, but for everyone.**

**Lord, we don't need another meadow.
There are corn fields and wheat fields enough to grow.
There are sunbeams and moonbeams enough to shine.
Oh listen, Lord, if you want to know.**

**What the world needs now is love, sweet love.
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,
No, not just for some, but for everyone.**

**What the world needs now is love, sweet love.
What the world needs now is love, sweet love.
What the world needs now is love, sweet love.**

³ Copyright ©1965 Bacharach, Burt and David, Hal.

Abraham and Strangers: Genesis 18

The Abrahamic faiths share a cycle of narratives in common. They often find ways of interpreting, using, or looking at those narratives from different perspectives, but some of those narratives reach beyond the distinctives of those faiths. Sometimes, the basic teaching or emphases reach beyond even those Abrahamic faiths as they uncover and develop truths which extend much further to a much larger range of faiths and traditions.

In Genesis chapter 18, we find a story of Abraham, considered the father of faith in three major faith traditions. It is an important story, not so much because of any particulars of a historical event. It is an important story for how it determines to display for us all that Abraham was a righteous or just man.

Growing up overseas and living in community with people from many nations and cultures, I have found that most every nation likes to think of themselves as hospitable. Oh, we define and extend hospitality in varied and contrasting ways. We might not recognize the efforts at hospitality in one culture as it might be extremely foreign to our own views and traditions. Even so, there is this shared sense that hospitality is somehow sacred, important, or basic to our humanity. How we fulfill its requirements displays before others a glimpse into our character.

It's kind of like that adage, "You know who someone is, not by how they treat those in positions of power or authority over them, but by how they treat those in a lesser position." It's like how we evaluate someone's character by how they treat animals as a window into their character, their innermost being.

If we travel back to Abraham's historical and social context, hospitality was often a case of life or death for a traveler. Access to water in an arid or semi-arid land was no luxury. It was survival. For one who was traveling, an offer of hospitality or its withholding was a big deal. It threatened life and existence. In that context, the various societies understood a basic tenet of righteousness as tied to providing a stranger access to the essentials of life.

Abraham, as the text reports, saw three men afar off from his tent and made hast to greet them with welcome under his care and hospitality. He did not wait for them to get near. He made no attempt to evaluate their worthiness. He took the initiative to take an offer of hospitality running out to greet and welcome them. He said something to the effect of, "If you have found me worthy, allow me to grant you an offer of some meager hospitality." He placed himself in the position of one whose worthiness could be judged.

I don't know how many of you have ever baked bread. I've tried my hand a limited number of times. I do know that a pound of flour is no more than you need to make a pound of bread. When these strangers accepted Abraham's offer of hospitality, he ordered his wife to make bread for these guests from over 60 pounds of flour. He ordered a calf to be prepared for them. He ordered his servants to bring out milk and yogurt, and spread a feast before them, when he had only promised a meager fare of bread, water, and shaded rest.

Narratives from Rome portray Zeus as the god of travelers. There are stories of Zeus traveling in human guise to test or judge a person or a town's response to a stranger appearing in their midst in need of hospitality. In a similar fashion, this is what the Abraham narrative is about. How did he respond to strangers whose survival depended on his response to them? Did he challenge them in battle? Did he turn them away? Did he prey upon their misfortune? Did he bring them under his protection, provision, and hospitality?

There is a Lakota legend of the Badger and the Bear, in which neglecting generous hospitality toward others is deemed reproachable. There is a Sauk legend of a visit by a heavenly being with whom generous hospitality is shared. In return, she grants those who had been generous to her the gifts of corn and beans to supply their needs. The world over, we find stories about the importance of hospitality, of caring for the needs of strangers, of the need to see in one another the same human dignity and value we bestow upon ourselves. It is not a big leap, however, for us to find that these same lessons from all over are likewise repeatedly ignored the world over by those who would seek to replace what is good with a personal quest for pride and self-advancement.

That narrative about Abraham's hospitality is followed by another so often abused to cast shame upon this very community gathered today in celebration. The visitors who came to Abraham took up their journey, continuing on to Sodom. There, they were met by a people with no display of Abraham's righteousness. Rather than welcome strangers in open hospitality, they determined to abuse them instead, thus proclaiming their self-conceived power and superiority over outsiders.

Ezekiel tells us the sin of Sodom was pride—they had the material blessings of this world, but refused to share them with others in need. Those tales of Zeus as a traveler, the badger and the bear, and the hunters of the Sauk extend the same lesson. It is our charge to care for one another. When we recognize and accept one another's full humanity, we share of ourselves and we are all enriched. It is the only way to live out justice. It is the only way to be community, to do more than simply get along. When we care for one another, we are all enriched for it. Together we build a better world, a better place where we all find belonging and fulfillment.

A world like that is one worth hoping for, worth working for, worth the effort of building. It is a world where strangers are invited to join us in our journey of life. It is a world where all are seen and valued. It is a world where hope is not limited to a few, but spread around in excessive generosity. It is a world where hospitality runs out to greet the stranger to invite them into our circle of care and concern.

Litany of Hope

Voice 2: We hope together for a better world.

People: We hope for a world where all belong.

Voice 1: We hope for a world where no one needs to hide.

Voice 3: *We work for a world in which that hope is much more than any wish upon a star.*

Voice 2: We strive to make that world a reality within our own lives.

People: I cannot change you; you cannot change me.

Voice 1: We can each, however, allow change to come upon ourselves.

Voice 3: We can encourage, strengthen, love, and support one another in the path of this hope we share.

People: This is a dream where all belong,

Voice 2: where all are seen,

Voice 3: where all are heard,

Voice 1: where all are loved and included

Voice 3: can begin here and now.

Voice 2: It can begin with me; it can begin with you.

Voice 1: It can begin as each of us allows the hope of this dream to become the reality of our lives, the response we determine to make to all we encounter.

Voice 3: It is a dream and a hope calling us beyond our fears to face the world according to this love we know can best carry us forward.

People: It is a dream we can transform into reality, a reality we live.

Reflection: "We are all made glorious, wonderful, individual, imbued with different gifts, graces, abilities, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Too often we are tempted to hide those parts we believe are unacceptable, unworthy of the light of day. Too often we have been told to do so, for fear of raising questions about the accepted status quo around us. Too often have we allowed pressure to conform to hide our inherent diversity, when we could have rejoiced in it. It is a difficult thing to stand up and open ourselves to the world at large, saying, 'This is me,' for all the world to see."

"This Is Me" (Keala Settle-The Greatest Showman)⁴

I am not a stranger to the dark.

"Hide away," they say,

**"Cause we don't want your broken
parts."**

I've learned to be ashamed of all my scars.

"Run away," they say,

"No one'll love you as you are."

**But I won't let them break me down to
dust.**

**I know that there's a place for us,
For we are glorious.**

**When the sharpest words wanna cut me
down,**

**I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown
them out.**

I am brave, I am bruised

I am who I'm meant to be, this is me.

Look out 'cause here I come,

And I'm marching on to the beat I drum.

I'm not scared to be seen.

I make no apologies. This is me.

⁴ Copyright ©2017 Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, Atlantic Records.

Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh

Another round of bullets hits my skin,
Well, fire away 'cause today, I won't let
the shame sink in.
We are bursting through the barricades
and
Reaching for the sun. We are warriors,
Yeah, that's what we've become (yeah,
that's what we've become)!

I won't let them break me down to dust.
I know that there's a place for us,
For we are glorious.

When the sharpest words wanna cut me
down,
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown
them out.
I am brave. I am bruised.
I am who I'm meant to be. This is me
Look out 'cause here I come,
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum.
I'm not scared to be seen.
I make no apologies. This is me!

Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh,

Oh-oh-oh-oh, Oh-oh-oh-oh,
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh
This is me!

(Oh-oh-oh-oh) And I know that I deserve
your love,
(Oh-oh-oh-oh) 'cause there's nothing I'm
not worthy of.
(Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh)
When the sharpest words wanna cut me
down,
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown
them out.

This is brave. This is proof.
This is who I'm meant to be. This is me!

Look out 'cause here I come (look out
'cause here I come),
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum
(marching on, marching, marching
on).

I'm not scared to be seen.
I make no apologies. This is me!

When the sharpest words wanna cut me
down,
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown
them out.
Oh, this is me!

Benediction

Voice 1: This is who we are in all our diversity.

Voice 2: We are broken.

Voice 3: We are bruised.

Voices 1, 2, & 3: We have feared to face our demons, our faults, our failures.

Voice 1: And yet,

Voice 2: those failings are essential

Voices 2 & 3: to our shared human experience.

Voice 1: They are part of how and why we belong to one another.

Voice 3: They are part of how we can lean upon and support each other to become that community in which we so yearn to live.

Voice 1: May we join together in this shared purpose of belonging together.

Voice 2: May we grow together to build this dynamic and diverse community that finds strength and purpose in belonging together. May our welcome, inclusion, and love transform our lives, our community, our world as this hope of belonging transforms us and becomes a contagion of goodwill, love, and care for all the world of humanity in all our diversity.

Voices 1, 2, & 3: May we join together in all our diversity to build a new community in which all are seen, heard, and valued – where all fully belong.

Voice 1: So let it be. So let us be.

People: Let us be one community, undivided, where everyone belongs.

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