

## Full Inclusion Task Force

# Report to the Congregation

### Task Force Members

Rev. Stuart Harrell (chair)   Danielle Adams   Rev. Roger Loyd   Rev. Laura Crosskey   Thomas Crichlow  
Erika Sasser   Meredith Willis   Kerry Vitkus Averette   Karalyn Colopy  
Ex officio: Ashley Hairston (Council Chair), Gair McCullough (Council Vice Chair)

### Our Aim & Commitments

The purpose of the Task Force on Full Inclusion was to make recommendations on how Duke Memorial might move towards full inclusion, specifically of LGBTQ+ persons. The survey results (reported below in the Appendix) indicated that a large majority of our congregation supports actions that move the congregation in this direction. These actions are consistent with steps taken by other congregations, the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, and conferences across the United States to illustrate the harm caused by the Traditional Plan enacted at General Conference 2019. In response, many conferences have ordained LGBTQ+ persons this annual conference season, and many annual conferences, including our own, have passed resolutions rejecting the Traditional Plan as harmful.

This Task Force was charged with identifying specific ways DMUMC could take action toward full inclusion. This report emerges from weekly conversations, prayer, and research. Our research included conducting a congregational survey (results attached), looking into the judicial processes of the United Methodist Church, gathering information about how other congregations and annual conferences are responding to the passing of the traditional plan, studying implications for our congregation, and holding many conversations with congregation members. Throughout our process, we have observed several important commitments in this congregation:

**Duke Memorial is United Methodist, shaped and formed by a United Methodist heritage.** As such, we long to be passionate followers of Jesus Christ, committed to a Wesleyan vision of Christianity, anchored in scripture and informed by tradition, experience, and reason as we live lives of personal piety and social holiness.

**Duke Memorial is committed to the inclusion and welcome of all.** We recognize our baptismal vow to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. The prevailing sentiment in the congregation, expressed in our welcome statement, is that we resist this injustice in all forms and toward all people and build a church which affirms the full participation of all ages, nations, races, classes, cultures, gender identities, sexual orientations, and abilities.

**The commitments of Church Council and the results of this survey indicate deep dissatisfaction with the traditional plan enacted at General Conference 2019.** While acknowledging individuals among us who disagree, the congregational responses indicate that we reject the Traditional Plan approved at General Conference 2019 as inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ and wish to resist its implementation by working towards full inclusion in our local context and to the extent of our influence.

**Our congregation is concerned that current policies of the United Methodist Church are harming LGBTQ persons.** A majority (81%) of our congregation sees these policies as harmful. Therefore, we will work to eliminate discriminatory language and the restrictions and penalties in the Discipline regarding LGBTQ persons. We affirm the sacred worth of LGBTQ persons, celebrate their gifts, and commit to being in ministry together.

### **Recommendations**

Our process resulted in several recommendations, and subsequent actions by Church Council. After presentation and discussion at Church Council meetings in June and July, the Council adopted the following recommendations.

- 1. We recommend that Duke Memorial pay our apportionments in full at the end of each calendar year (for the following year, when they are due) and include a letter of protest against the Traditional Plan. We further recommend that DMUMC use any financial gains on these funds towards outreach and missions to the LGBTQ+ community.** The finance committee agreed to place apportionment funds in an interest-bearing checking account and to use the interest on this account to fund LGBTQ+ missions for the 2020 calendar year.
- 2. Regarding planned interior renovations, we recommend that the private family bathrooms be labeled for use by persons of any gender identity.**
- 3. We recommend Duke Memorial United Methodist Church treat all couples seeking the blessing of marriage equally and that the sanctuary and facilities of DMUMC be available to all couples on an equal basis.** Clergy will retain their authority to determine the fitness of any couple to enter into marriage and whether or not to officiate any wedding. Our appointed clergy would be vulnerable to consequences levied by the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church. **Therefore, we further recommend that DMUMC support any of our pastors who are suspended for officiating a same-gender wedding, including financial support.** Specifics on how we would support pastors were assigned to SPRC and the Finance Committees, who are actively working on a plan of support.
- 4. We recommend that Duke Memorial UMC work to address mistrust that has been illuminated by this issue, particularly mistrust among members of varying viewpoints, and between members and leadership of our congregation.** We acknowledge that the mistrust runs deeper than a single issue and asked the Staff-Parish Relations Committee to address these issues.
- 5. Council requested that the Trustees develop and install permanent signage indicative of DMUMC's welcome statement. Further, during any interim period, temporary displays will be utilized in a rotating manner.** Trustees and staff, with others appointed by Council, will work together on the development of welcome displays.
6. Recognizing that people throughout the congregation support full inclusion, **Council requests that each ministry area conduct a self-assessment regarding full inclusion and determine what actions they will take toward full inclusion. Ministry team leaders will report back to Council by the October meeting** so that inclusive ministry activities may be publicized using a pew card that the Invite and Welcome committee will create to extend our welcome and inclusion.

7. **We recommend increasing the visibility of the Supportive Church Initiative Scholarship by: Taking up a special offering on Pride Sunday for SCI, and adding SCI to scholarship lists and databases at Duke Divinity School and at the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM).** This scholarship signals our support for LGBTQ+ seminarians and LGBTQ+ persons who wish to become ordained. Discussion of the special offering was referred to the Finance committee.
  
8. **Council recommends that DMUMC publicly announce via press release the planned congregational activities related to the Durham PRIDE celebration in September.** Mark Evans and Jennifer Ingold Asbill agreed to coordinate with each other to craft a press release.

### **Theological Basis for These Commitments**

The Task Force believes that Duke Memorial United Methodist Church can be part of a just and loving church—one that is relevant, growing, and ignited by the life-giving and world-changing power of the Holy Spirit. As people of faith, we believe that the Good News of Jesus Christ is for all people. As the Tower of Babel was broken down, the Spirit moves to break down every wall between us—making our languages, seemingly unintelligible, clearly understandable to one another.

We are proud to be members of a congregation that seeks to “lift up the lowly” by, for example, advocating for justice in schools and affordable housing through Durham CAN, helping with utilities and other expenses through our Good Samaritan Fund, providing a church home to unsheltered neighbors, supporting Families Moving Forward, and embarking on a journey towards understanding religion and race.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, in his *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” King’s letter, written to moderate white pastors, expresses his frustration at the lukewarm and unhelpful responses from a church fearful of moving too quickly towards racial justice. We agree with Dr. King, and long to move Duke Memorial toward justice for LGBTQ+ people. We believe this work is one vital and timely part of the Church’s justice work.

Inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons is the only issue of social holiness that we know of where discrimination is legislated at the denominational level. The denomination explicitly prohibits LGBTQ+ persons from being married or ordained in our churches or by our pastors, and names homosexuality as “incompatible with Christian teaching.” These words and the policies that flow from them are harmful to our LGBTQ+ siblings and are predicated on controversial interpretations of scripture.

Countering this, we hope and work for a grace-full church that embodies love and relentlessly and unapologetically pursues social justice and equity. Continuing to condone policies of exclusion does clear and immediate harm to LGBTQ+ persons. As a congregation, we fear the ongoing harm to LGBTQ+ persons (81% of survey respondents named this as a concern).

The Body of Christ at Duke Memorial is not monolithic, but diverse. While a majority of members support full-inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community, we recognize that we are not of one mind on these issues. We believe that diversity of opinion is part of our strength. John Wesley’s sermon, “A Catholic Spirit”, illuminates how we might be together in difference.

Every wise man [sic], therefore, will allow others the same liberty of thinking that he desires they should allow him, and will no more insist on their embracing his opinions than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs. He is patient with those who differ from him, and only asks him with whom he desires to unite in love that single question: "Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart?" (Paragraph I.6, A Catholic Spirit, from the 1771 collection of John Wesley's 53 sermons)

This has been the history of the United Methodist Church—the idea of a “big tent” where we make space for differences of opinion and remain together in love. The “traditional” plan, ironically, is not traditional in its exclusion of those who would include others.

We desire that all in our congregation would participate in these conversations, though all do not agree or feel the same urgency of action. We must prioritize the health and well-being of our LGBTQ+ siblings over a “unity” that harms, which would not be unity, after all. John Wesley’s “three simple rules,” as interpreted by Bishop Ruben Job, are “Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God.” As a denomination, we are doing harm, and must—without hesitation—stop.<sup>1</sup> In this spirit, we share the attached May 2019 results of the congregational survey that underlie our recommendations on moving toward full inclusion and a more just church.

### **Conclusion: Our Hopes for the Future**

This report ends the active work of the Full-Inclusion Task Force. We anticipate functioning in a consultative capacity as DMUMC moves forward to full inclusion. We anticipate that much of the work toward inclusion will be taken up by individual ministry areas and appropriate congregational committees. To that end, we urge the Council to consider:

- Establishing an ongoing group to address matters of inclusion as outlined in our welcome statement;
- Ensuring that LGBTQ+ members, specifically, will continue to have an active voice at DMUMC.
- Continuing to follow this inclusive path through our actions as a congregation, and not just our words;
- Inviting wide participation in the inclusion ministries of DMUMC, encouraging connection with others in the movement, and working for change in and outside the church;
- Finding meaningful ways to express repentance for harm we have done vulnerable populations as a congregation and as a denomination; and
- Demonstrating leadership through consistent advocacy in the NC Conference and connection to other congregations.

We have appreciated the opportunity to lead the congregation around matters of full inclusion, thank Church Council for their trust, and support the steps they have taken towards Wesley’s vision of social holiness. May we continue in the wideness of God’s mercy and in the inclusive spirit of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

***We are pleased to continue the conversation begun in this report. For more information on this report contact Ashley Hairston (Chair, Church Council), or Gair McCullough (Vice Chair, Church Council).***

<sup>1</sup> For example, the mental health of LGBTQ youth is in jeopardy. 39% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months, with more than half of transgender and non-binary youth having seriously considered. Other measures are equally sobering. Access the full report at <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2019.pdf>

**Full Inclusion Task Force**

## Congregational Survey Results

**Participation.** We are grateful for the participation of the congregation in the survey. We received 260 responses. The results are a good sample of the congregation, with feedback from all age groups. In proportion to the ACS database, participation was higher among older members (over 50 years of age) and slightly lower for younger members. Members (including Members, Affiliate Members, Associate Members, Baptized Members and Clergy Members of UMC Annual Conferences who attend Duke Memorial) made up 84.6% of the respondents. The remaining participants were attendees, staff, and one respondent considering joining DMUMC. Results were not significantly different among members and non-members.

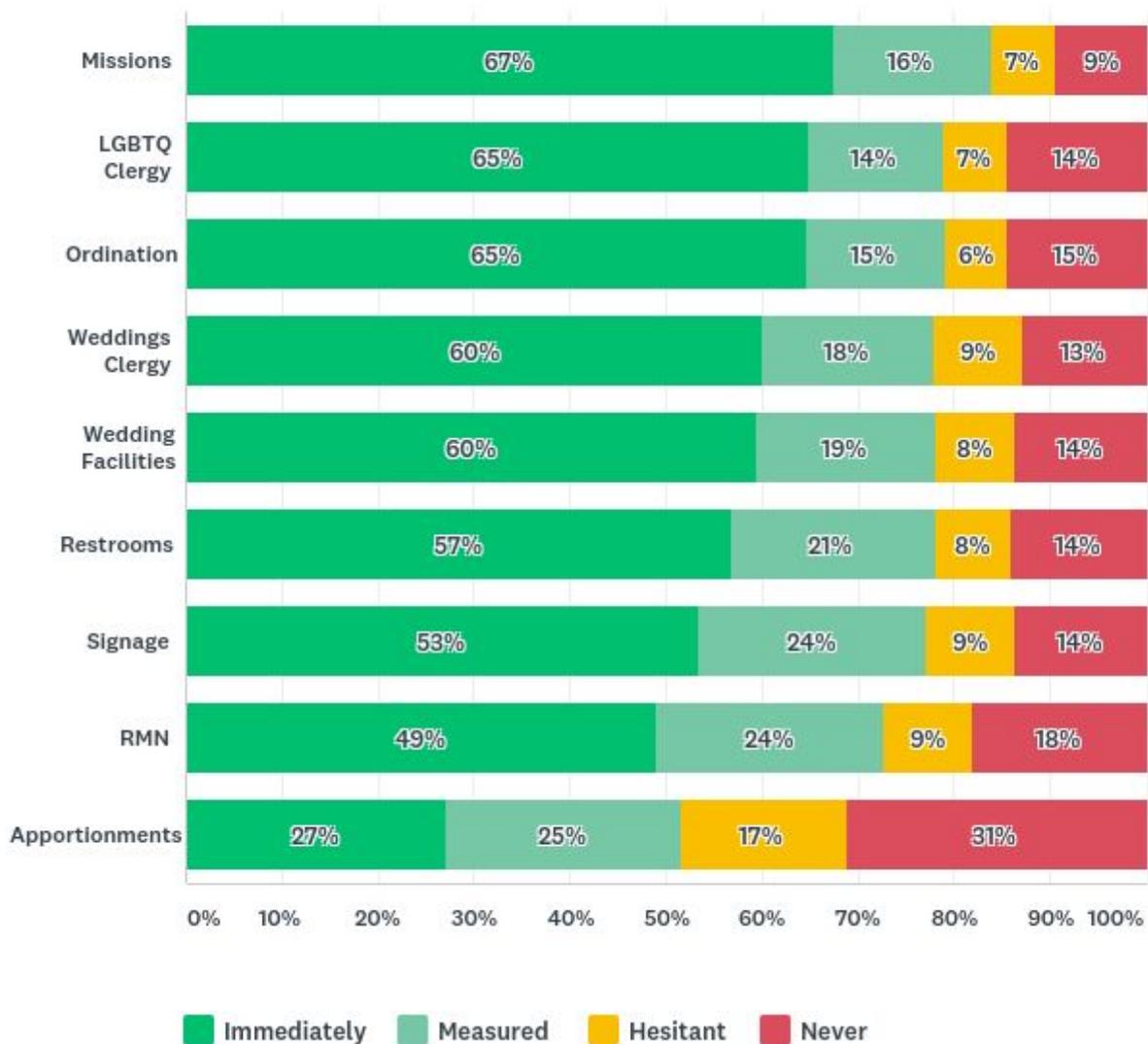
Member Type	Responses		Age	Responses	
Member	76.36%	197	Under 12	0.77%	2
Staff	6.20%	16	12-17	6.92%	18
Attendee	5.43%	14	18-30	8.85%	23
Baptized Member	3.88%	10	31-40	12.69%	33
Clergy (UMC Ann. Conf.)	2.71%	7	41-50	17.69%	46
Other	2.71%	7	51-65	23.85%	62
Associate Member	1.55%	4	66-75	16.15%	42
Affiliate Member	0.78%	2	76+	13.08%	34
New, Considering Membership	0.39%	1	<b>Total</b>		<b>260</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>258</b>			

**Priorities.** We asked respondents to rank, in order of importance, their commitment to the ministry of the United Methodist Church (the denomination), the local church (Duke Memorial UMC), and the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusion. Though this was a difficult question for many, as it is not truly possible to separate these priorities, it helped us understand the priorities in the congregation.



Overall, the commitment to the United Methodist Church is the least important to respondents, and the priority for LGBTQ+ inclusion and commitment to Duke Memorial is about evenly split, with the commitment to the local church slightly higher.

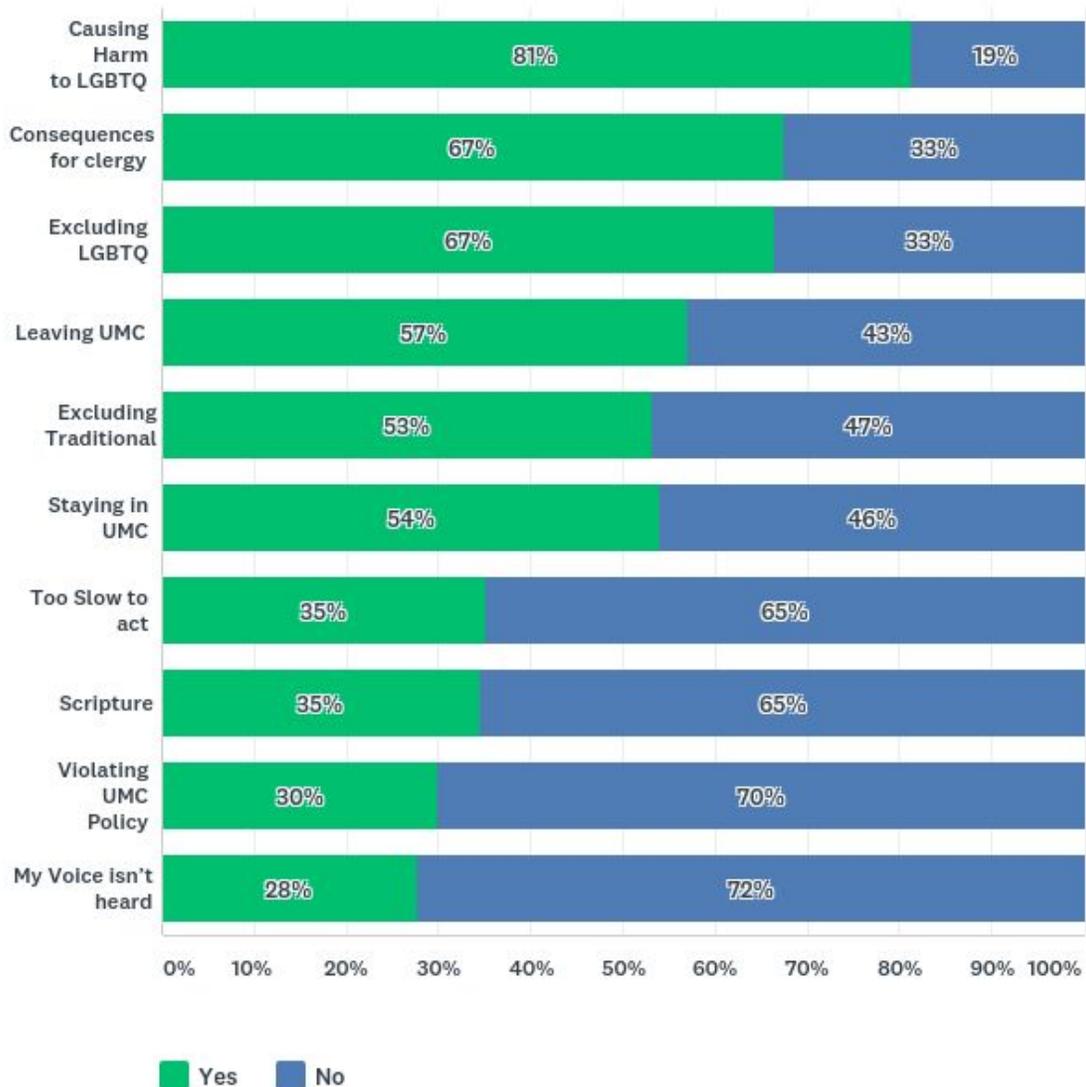
**Action Ideas.** We asked the congregation about nine ideas that might make our congregation more inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals. These ideas were: Displaying permanent **signs** of welcome for LGBTQ+ persons at DMUMC; Becoming a reconciling congregation by joining the Reconciling Ministries Network (**RMN**); Advocating for LGBTQ+ persons in our **missions** and outreach Relationships; Providing gender-neutral or private **restrooms** for gender-nonconforming /transgender persons; Withholding **apportionments** in protest of UMC policy; Using DMUMC facilities for same-gender **weddings**; Supporting our **clergy** in conducting same gender **weddings**; Sponsoring and supporting LGBTQ+ candidates for **ordination**; and Welcoming **LGBTQ+** persons to **clergy** positions at DMUMC. (Bold type indicates how the issue is labeled in the chart below). **Overall, DMUMC has a clear desire to include the LGBTQ+ community, especially on matters of direct consequence to that community.** On matters of protest using apportionments the congregation is more divided.



In all cases except joining **RMN** and withholding **apportionments** in protest, greater than 50% of respondents favored immediate implementation of the idea. When including persons who would like a measured approach to implementation, nearly 80% of congregation members would support most ideas,

with the exception of joining **RMN** (73% support) and withholding **apportionments** (52% support). 9% of respondents think that advocating for LGBTQ+ persons in our missions and outreach relationships is something we should never do.

**Concerns.** We asked the congregation what their concerns were related to issues of “full inclusion.” We named nine concerns, and invited respondents to name further concerns in the comments. An analysis of the comments is included later in this document.



The concerns are listed here in descending order with the most common concerns listed first. The most common concern is that recent denominational policies are harming the LGBTQ+ community (81%), and the least common concern is that “my voice isn’t heard” (28%). 67% of respondents are concerned that we are excluding LGBTQ+ persons, while 53% are concerned that we are excluding traditional persons. Concern about leaving the denomination (57%) is nearly equal to concern about remaining in the denomination (54%).

**Trends by Age.** Age is highly correlated with responses. On priorities, when combining the first and second choices, the local church is most important for both groups. LGBTQ+ commitment was the number one choice for more than half (61.1%) of respondents under 50.

On the ideas we presented, the majority of both groups wanted to move forward with ideas of full inclusion, either immediately or in a measured fashion. Younger respondents overwhelmingly want to move forward on these issues, while a more narrow majority of older respondents desired to do so. The most popular ideas for those under age 50 were moving forward in advocating for LGBTQ+ persons in missions and outreach relationships (94% immediately or measured), welcoming LGBTQ+ clergy to DMUMC (91%), sponsoring LGBTQ+ candidates for ordination (89%), and conducting weddings by our clergy (87%) and in our facility (88%).

For those over age 65, the most popular items were again missions (70% immediately or measured), and providing restrooms for all genders (60%). Several other items were similar (Welcoming LGBTQ+ clergy, 59%, installing signage 59%, sponsoring LGBTQ+ persons for ordination 58%, weddings by our clergy 58%, etc.), with the exception of withholding apportionments, which was not popular (30% for withholding).

In regards to concerns voiced by respondents, these were also correlated with age and varied. It seems significant to us that nearly all persons under 50 (96%) are concerned that harm is being done to the LGBTQ+ community, and that 76% of persons over 65 are concerned that we might leave the UMC. A majority of those over 65 believe that we are excluding LGBTQ+ persons (51%) and that we are causing harm to LGBTQ+ persons (65%).

It is significant that a large portion of our senior population, nearly 50%, feels that their voice is not heard. We believe that this is an issue not only related to full-inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals, but extends beyond this issue into other forms of inclusion, especially inclusion of persons of any age. As a group, it appears that seniors feel less-included than younger persons. Though historically this is not a novel dynamic, it is one that needs to be addressed, but not at the expense of the LGBTQ+ community or seniors. Nearly everyone who responded to the survey is concerned that we are excluding someone: either the LGBTQ+ community, more traditional members, or both.

**Comments.** Half of all respondents did not provide comments; half did. Among those who did, the comments reflected a wide range of views and concerns:

Denominational concerns:

- Concern that the UMC will split or be destroyed due to divisions over full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons
- Importance of following the Book of Discipline, working within the processes of the UMC, and abiding by General Conference decisions even when we disagree, given that we are a global denomination
- Deep frustration with the UMC conflicting with a sense of duty or desire to stay involved to push the denomination toward full inclusion
- Exclusion of LGBTQ+ persons consistent with Methodism's past failures on other critical social justice issues (e.g. slavery, racism, and feminism)
- Desire to separate from the UMC, either as an individual or as a congregation, due to the UMC's stance on LGBTQ+ issues

Inclusive welcome:

- Importance of welcoming all persons to Duke Memorial and into the life of the UMC
- Duke Memorial's culture of welcome is a strength of our congregation; welcome statement and inclusive culture supplant the need for specific policies supporting full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons
- Given exclusive language in UMC Book of Discipline, unclear whether all are truly welcome; Duke Memorial should expressly welcome LGBTQ+ individuals
- Welcome should be broader: emphasis on LGBTQ+ issues is preventing us from addressing other types of exclusion and ensuring other individuals are welcome

### Alternative voices:

- Certain voices, particularly more conservative views, are excluded from the conversation
- No room for discussion with those whose views do not support full inclusion; others should be more patient and accepting of conservative viewpoint
- People are struggling with this issue, and while personal views may change over time, it is difficult to embrace full inclusion because it goes against past teachings
- Homosexuality is a sin and full inclusion is not an appropriate step

### Scripture:

- Need for greater attention to scripture as a guide
- Bible prohibits same-gender relationships; homosexuality is a sin
- Scripture requires us to love and accept all persons, and the stance of the UMC contradicts Jesus's teachings

### Leadership:

- Discomfort attending worship and/or Duke Memorial
- Too much emphasis on LGBTQ+ issues; worship should be reoriented toward scripture, and should focus on other topics and viewpoints
- Leadership at Duke Memorial is too political in nature and has failed to engage with members who disagree; behavior of staff is divisive and inappropriate
- Gratitude for strong leadership on the issue of full inclusion, a critical issue for the church

### Priorities:

- Overemphasis on full inclusion; dominates the conversation at Duke Memorial
- Exclusive focus on LGBTQ+ issues is preventing Duke Memorial from tackling other priorities (e.g., poverty, racism, mental illness affordable housing/homelessness)

### Process:

- Concerns about Duke Memorial's process for pursuing full inclusion, including critiques of the survey
- Praise and gratitude to the Church Council for pursuing full inclusion, with encouragement toward further, decisive action
- Emphasis on the importance of taking a careful, measured approach and not moving too quickly

### Consequences:

- Possible implications of moving toward full inclusion; need to anticipate consequences for the staff (particularly senior pastor), facilities, and congregation of Duke Memorial before taking action
- Vulnerability of the LGBTQ+ community and concern over how path forward will affect LGBTQ+ persons

### Urgency of action:

- Importance of moving to full inclusion immediately, given harm caused daily by UMC's policies for LGBTQ+ persons, especially gay and transgender youth
- Moral imperative of fighting for inclusion and love; importance of being brave despite the consequences
- Need for Council to take clear and decisive action immediately and show strong leadership on this issue

***We are pleased to continue the conversation begun in this survey. For more information on this survey or its results contact Ashley Hairston (Chair, Church Council), or Gair McCullough (Vice Chair, Church Council).***