

## ONA INSERTION – OCTOBER 2024 CALLER

WHO ARE WE? WHO ARE WE BEING CALLED TO BE? WHO ARE THE NEIGHBORS WE SERVE?

*The following, while addressing ONA matters, is presented by the author. Time constraints prevented its review by the ONA Task Force, and it should not be understood to represent the position of the Task Force.*

These are the questions our soon-to-be appointed Search Committee will be seeking to understand and answer as they begin the process of developing our Church Profile.

**Who are we now?** Where do we stand on issues of inclusion? Of non-discrimination? Of acceptance? Try that question with a different emphasis on each word after “who”: Who ARE we now? Who are WE now? Who are we NOW? Think about that a bit, because changing the emphasis moves the question from an enquiry into our current state to a challenge to envision change and forward motion.

**Who are we being called to be?** Who is the God we worship and the Savior we proclaim calling us to be? Yes, we are called to be here for one another, to worship together, to study together and strengthen one another’s faith. But we are called, nay, commissioned, to be so much more. How do we understand that commission? What is the role of this body of Christ?

**Who are our neighbors?** How are we called to be present for them? In what way do we translate the love of Christ, the demand for justice, the work for peace, in meaningful ways to our neighbors? How do we do that while respecting their personhood and protecting their dignity and sense of self-worth?

These same questions underly our efforts at working toward becoming an Open and Affirming Church. Who are we NOW? And who ARE we to become? Who are WE called to be?

Much of what has been presented in this space over the last eight or so months has focused on the welcoming, safe space, sanctuary, and affirmation aspect of being Open and Affirming. That is a significant and important component of becoming Open and Affirming. There is more, however. Much more. What is desperately needed in this time, in our place, here in New Hampshire, here where we live, is the courage and determination not only to declare ourselves Open and Affirming, but say so loudly, to say it in the public square, yes, even put it boldly on our sign and to fly it on a banner!

Recent events surrounding a young transwoman and her desire to play on her high school soccer team, call us to loudly say no! Demonstrating against a child of God seeking to pursue their life as that person understands his or her or their gender to be is not acceptable. It is especially unacceptable because it uses that child to further a cause based on weak and self-serving Biblical interpretation without regard to the emotional harm done to that child. This is what we are called to do and be. To say, stop! Enough!! To say loudly, that we are all God’s children.

To remain silent, to avoid conflict over such matters, is to be complicit in gay-bashing, in bullying trans girls, boys, women, and men, just exactly as we have for years been complicit in accepting unequal treatment of women in the work place and elsewhere, and in systematic discrimination

against people of color and recent immigrants. It is to be complicit in the self-serving untruths and outright lies being promulgated against minority groups for political gain with callous disregard for the irreparable harm done to those groups. It is to pretend that we will not one day be one of those whose well-being and integrity is considered simply collateral damage.

Being a practicing Christian is difficult. It is challenging. It is loving without qualification. It is not exclusionary. It requires work. It requires compassion. It requires understanding that justice is not punishment, but making things right and fair for all. So may it be.

Larry Gooch