

July/Summer 2024 Open and Affirming Task Force Article in "The Caller"

THE OPEN AND AFFIRMING TASK FORCE

The Open and Affirming Task Force was called into being by our Church Council. In the current social and political environment, where 'otherness' becomes an acceptable basis for isolating, vilifying, and even violent physical abuse, the Task Force was created for the purpose of exposing all of us to the wide range of human sexuality and gender presentation. Among the goals: Increasing our understanding of that variety. Increasing our awareness of how very difficult it is for a person whose sense of who they are does not conform to what the world expects of them. Challenging things we have been taught, even the biblical sayings that do not fit with our understanding of the Christian ethic.

The work continues – a vote to adopt an Open and Affirming Covenant at a Special Church Meeting held in the fall of 2023 failed to achieve the three-fourths majority agreed to during the previous Annual Meeting. There are several possible reasons why some voted to oppose the adoption of that Covenant. The conclusion the Task Force drew from that vote was that we had work to do – information to provide, opportunities for dialogue, opportunities for members of the congregation to articulate their concerns.

In collaboration with our Pastor, we have invited guest preachers to the pulpit: To speak to the nature, structure, and history of the United Church of Christ, the denomination of which First Congregational Church Meredith is a part; the support provided to the local church by the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ. To tell their personal stories of being a person whose sense of their gender or sexuality was at variance with what the world saw and expected. We have attempted to address some of the concerns expressed by church members regarding one or more of the aspects of the LGBTQ+ community. We have provided suggestions for further study and exploration. We shared a 2007 Documentary entitled "For The Bible Tells Me So". During Lent, a study group explored our Christian beliefs and misconceptions, using the book "Shall I Stay Christian" by Brian McLaren. Out of the that study, some members of the FCC Meredith are reading "Mad Honey" by Jodi Picoult and Jennifer Finney Boylan, a well told story of a young transgender girl.

Perhaps a dozen of us remained after church to watch "For the Bible Tells Me So" on Sunday, June 16th. In addition to correcting certain well-propagated misinformation about sexuality, this documentary addresses the misuse of the bible to create a hostile social environment for and condemnation of LGBTQ persons. It notes at one point that use of the literal text of the Bible in this manner is historically a relatively recent practice, first evidencing itself in public speech and writing in the latter part of the eighteen hundreds. If you missed this opportunity, the DVD is available to borrow from our Pastor. You can also go to <https://watchdocumentaries.com/for-the-bible-tells-me-so> or YouTube.com. If you go to YouTube, adding "movie" or "documentary" after the title will focus the search a bit.

From your Open and Affirming Task Force, for continued pondering, as we seek to discern God's role for us in our wider community.