

OPEN AND AFFIRMING STATEMENT

The First Congregational United Church of Christ of Billings, in accordance with its congregational heritage of members coming together in covenantal agreement, wishes to make public this statement of belief and commitment. Our statement is made in response to the call of the Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference to enter into honest and open explorations of biblical, theological and spiritual issues regarding human sexuality in order to determine whether we should become an inclusive and affirming congregation. It is further a response to the recommendation of July 1985 of the 15th General Synod of the United Church of Christ that congregations declare themselves Open and Affirming churches.

We, the members of the First Congregational United Church of Christ of Billings, in considering this issue, take our lead from Jesus, who called us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). We understand this to mean that we are to love one another as God loves us, freely and without reservation. We also endorse Paul's notion that we are many members with diverse gifts, but we are one body in Christ (Romans 12:4).

We understand ourselves as Christians to be called to emulate this unconditional love Jesus displayed to all persons, including those excluded from conventional religious circles (for example the Samaritan, the tax collector, the prostitute).

*Consequently, we denounce acts of discrimination and violence against any person.

*On the other hand, we celebrate the family in all its diverse forms, and we affirm all loving, committed and just relationships.

*We welcome all people into our community of faith, regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religious or ethnic background, socioeconomic status or physical/mental abilities.

Therefore, we the members of the First Congregational United Church of Christ of Billings, declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming Church. By endorsing openness and affirmation, we understand ourselves to be embracing the following ways of viewing and engaging others:

*We affirm that each person, a child of God created in God's image, deserves our respect and support.

*We affirm that we have a responsibility to deal with others openly and honestly, rejecting stereotypes or categorizations which obscure each person's uniqueness.

*We reject any behavior that exploits others and denies their dignity.

***We affirm the importance of individual conscience, especially insofar as it is attuned to scripture, our denominational heritage and objective evidence. Thus we expect that as a diverse people we will differ in our ideas about what actions and belief are appropriate for followers of Jesus Christ. We affirm such diversity, and we celebrate all who seek to discern the will of God for our church, our conference, our world and our daily lives.**

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
BILLINGS, MONTANA

Adopted January 25th, 1998
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