**Leadership Team Votes to Accept Recommendation of LGBTQ Task Group**

By Matt Snider, Chair, Leadership Team 2013

This week, after 18 months of church-wide conversation and prayer (see “Process” below), the Leadership Team took up the issue of affiliating with the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN).

The team considered the two “5-Finger Vote” straw polls, comments offered before the scheduled meeting, and heard opinions from those who, though not on the Leadership Team, attended this open meeting on Tuesday, May 28th. The discussion was lively and respectful as the team strove to understand the thoughts of others with similar and differing opinions.

After deliberation, the team voted unanimously, by written ballot, to become affiliated with RMN as an additional ministry of the church. This means that our church will be listed on the RMN website as a congregation that fully embraces the LGBTQ community.

**Why did we take this action?**

Greenland Hills UMC is an inclusive church that welcomes and values all people.

Our website puts it this way: “We are an eclectic bunch of all ages; we are singles, couples, seasoned theologians, returning religious refugees and families of all kinds. Greenland Hills is an inclusive church seeking to share God’s love in concrete ways through outreach activities that extend across the city and the world.”

Under the heading of “Our Values,” we say: “We think all people are God’s beloved. Yes we mean those who are LGBTQ … and everyone else you may have in mind.”

The Leadership Team believes this affiliation will be another expression of our already inclusive church, affirming the “DNA” that already exists in our congregation. It will also be a public witness advocating for justice for those who are currently not fully embraced by our denomination. Finally, it will allow those in the LGBTQ community, who may need an extra measure of assurance, to know where we stand.

On this particular issue, we stand in a different place than the broader United Methodist Church, which states in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*:

* “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching” (*Book of Discipline* (2012), ¶ 161(F).
* “Therefore, self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church,” (*Id.*, ¶ 304).

Rather than being labeled by this stance taken by our denomination, we choose to network with other progressive, mostly Methodist churches that believe in the “full inclusion of all God’s children regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity” (<http://www.rmnetwork.org/about-us/>) and want to be available to those who are seeking such a church.

**What will happen as a result of this decision?**

Don’t look for anything radical to happen because of this choice. Our Missions page will include RMN along with all of the church’s other missions, and our name will be listed on RMN’s website as an inclusive church. Our affiliation with RMN will be but one ministry area of several that seek to live out our current missional focus as defined by our Planning Committee in 2012: “…To be in ministry with, and advocates for, those who are poor in spirit and poor in resources.” Our website will look the same; our welcome will remain the same; our church continue to be diverse.

**Are we making a financial commitment to RMN?**

There is not a requirement to financially contribute to the ministry of RMN and our decision is not financially or politically driven. Although we can contribute to RMN if we want, our affiliation is solely to express and communicate our ongoing belief in the inclusive church.

This is not the end of our journey to better embrace and support the LGBTQ community, both within our church walls and outside of them. The Missions and Social Justice Committee will continue its work in this area as an outreach of Greenland Hills UMC.

Please join me in celebrating a bold step in the life of a bold church. And please, do not hesitate to call or email for further conversation at 214.966.9022 or msnider@shwgroup.com.

**What process did we follow to make this decision?**

Here’s a timeline of our process ----

**2011**

* October: Congregation gives spontaneous standing affirmation to LGBTQ community during sermon.
* November — December: Prayerful consideration of the above “Holy Spirit moment.” What does God want of us?

**2012**

* January: Viewed and discussed the film *For The Bible Tells Me So (FTBTMS).*
* February — March: FTBTMS Study groups held during the Sunday school hour to go over curriculum designed for the movie.
* April: Open invitation to anyone interested to meet for discussion on next steps.
* May: What does it mean to be a Reconciling Church? Two visiting churches discuss their journey (one affiliated with RMN, the other did not).
* June: Members of GHUMC told their stories and hopes for reconciliation within the UMC.
* July: Took a month off, digesting and discerning the information we’d shared and received.
* August: Distributed “5-Finger” survey (straw poll) to assess congregational attitudes and questions.
* September: Survey tallied and results shared. LGBTQ house meeting to discuss needs and concerns of the community.
* October: Newsletter article sharing views of LGBTQ gathering. Open call for volunteers to continue to work on the Task Group.
* November: RMN representative leads RMN Q&A session to address survey questions.
* December: Took a month off.

**2013**

* January — February: Task force meets to discuss RMN issue with open invitation to all to join in the conversation and discernment.
* March: “5-Finger” straw poll vote taken. Results: 82% were in full support or supportive of affiliating with RMN; 4% were leaning towards being supportive; 2% were leaning towards being opposed; 12% were opposed. There were 76 respondents.
* April: Task Group makes recommendation to the Leadership Team that GHUMC become

affiliated with RMN.

* May: Leadership team votes to affiliate.