

Resolution Declaring the Potomac Association to be "Open and Affirming"

Whereas we, the Potomac Association, Central Atlantic Conference, United Church of Christ, believe that the inclusive nature of God's love extends to everyone; and

Whereas we believe that we are all one in Christ Jesus (John 17:21) and created in the image of God (Gen 1:26), and that as people of sacred worth we are incorporated into the beloved community and called to be imitators of God as beloved children, living in love as Christ loved us (Eph 5:1-2); and

Whereas we affirm that we are many members of the same body in Christ (Romans 12:3-5), that each has a particular gift from God (1 Corinthians 7:7), and that there are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4), and

Whereas we recognize that the United Church of Christ (UCC) has historically affirmed a rich diversity in its theological and biblical perspectives; and

Whereas persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions are members of our denomination through baptism, confirmation, or affirmation of faith, and are already freely sharing their talents and gifts with the UCC and its congregations; and

Whereas persons of some sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions have been at times excluded from full participation in the life and the leadership of the church, both clergy and lay, regardless of membership in the United Church of Christ; and

Whereas uncertainty as to welcome has also affected people, including young people, who are questioning, exploring or discovering their sexual orientation or gender identity, at a time when such people most need the support and love of the church; and

Whereas many parts of the church universal remain silent despite continuing discrimination and the senseless violence and denial of basic human rights to people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions; and

Whereas Christian churches through the ages and throughout the world have often perpetuated discriminatory practices and been unwilling to affirm the full humanness of clergy, laity and staff who are of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, many of whom, as a result, experience isolation, ostracism, violence and fear of (or actual) loss of employment; and

Whereas the Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ (1985) adopted a resolution to encourage "a policy of non-discrimination in employment, volunteer service and membership policies with regard to sexual orientation" and called on congregations to adopt a similar non-discrimination policy and affirm a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation within the community of faith, and the

Twenty-fourth General Synod (2003) adopted a resolution to affirm the participation and ministry of transgender people within the United Church of Christ; and

Whereas the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ, as a setting of the church, adopted a resolution in 1996 to declare itself Open and Affirming; and

Whereas the majority of individual churches of the Potomac Association have declared themselves to be Open and Affirming; and

Whereas we, the Potomac Association, Central Atlantic Conference, United Church of Christ, acknowledge that we are related via covenant to the local churches of the Potomac Association, to the Central Atlantic Conference, and to the national setting of the UCC; and

Whereas we, the Potomac Association, Central Atlantic Conference, United Church of Christ, are joined together as a covenantal community to celebrate and share our common communion and the reassurance that we are all indeed created by God, reconciled by Christ and empowered by the grace of the Holy Spirit;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Potomac Association, Central Atlantic Conference, United Church of Christ, shall adopt the following statement, and shall display this statement in various forms of communication including print, and on the Association web site, when the full statement is desired. This statement shall be considered the primary expression of our Open and Affirming commitment:

The Potomac Association values all of God's children and welcomes the gifts that each brings to the association and to the local church. Responding to God's still speaking voice and seeking to live out Christ's extravagant welcome to all, the Potomac Association of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ declares itself an Open and Affirming (ONA) association. We embrace persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions in all aspects of association ministry.

Where a more limited expression is required, such as in letterhead, on press releases and the like, the term "Open and Affirming" or "ONA" shall be used.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all expressions of the Potomac Association setting of the United Church of Christ, including but not limited to events, committees, meetings, worship services, hiring, leadership, and ministries, shall be open and available to and shall affirm and celebrate all persons; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that at appropriate times the Potomac Association shall make public its stand as an Open and Affirming setting of the church in the media, to governmental officials, and to legislative and regulatory bodies as part of the public dialogue on equality and civil rights; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, while this declaration is in no way binding on the local churches of the Potomac Association, which retain full autonomy, the Association encourages

all local churches to prayerfully consider the full inclusion of persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions in their local churches, acknowledging that there are a variety of ways that churches may practice inclusion; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Potomac Association, through its Social Action and Mission Committee shall help identify resources for local churches who are prayerfully considering the above request; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Potomac Association shall include, in its social justice ministry, advocacy for all persons who are vulnerable to discrimination due to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.