

## WE ARE A CHURCH...

Welcome to the beginning of the sixth year for Christ Church of Peace! Today, on the dawn of our new year I want to speak from the topic *We are a Church...* We are a church on mission. We are a church with a vision. We are a church that takes seriously Jesus' teachings and life-examples about love. We are a real church, even though we are not our momma's church!

In the gospel of John, when Jesus is considering his death, he is recorded as saying, "*When I am lifted up I will draw **all** people to myself.*" All people! The last time I looked, the word all means all—not a select few. All is inclusive not exclusive. Friends, Jesus did not just talk a good game about all people, Jesus lived what he said by loving and associating with all kinds people—the socially and religiously acceptable and the not so acceptable.

**We are a church on mission.** Our Mission Statement reads: *Christ Church of Peace is a worshipping and ministering community of believers on a spiritual journey of discovery and growth with a Christian foundation, embracing aspects of other faiths, and welcoming people of **all** races, nationalities, genders, sexual orientations and disabilities.*

Worship and ministry are the primary focus at Christ Church of Peace. Through worship we discover community and we commune with God. In worship we are challenged, strengthened and encouraged in our spiritual journey so that we can minister, care for, each other and even the stranger. Remember, that Jesus said as we do for the least among us it is as if we are doing for him.

Friends, we are a church where all people are welcome! And I do mean all! The prim and the proper. The hustler and the ho! Those who live uptown and those who live downtown. The PhD's and the no D's. The well fed and the hungry. The confused and the certain. The one's with all of the questions and the one's with all of the answers. The gay and the straight. Friends, we are a church where people are more important than the institution. Jesus did not say, "*When I am lifted up I will draw all institutions unto myself.*" Jesus did not live and die for an institution—he lived and died for people! Christ Church of Peace exists for people!

**We are a church with a vision.** Our Vision Statement reads: *Christ Church of Peace will be known best for innovative ministry in service to God, and will be the church of choice for **all people** seeking a spiritual home. We will be a role model for others to follow, growing stronger through diversity, becoming a tool for social change.*

At Christ Church of Peace we desire to become more and more diverse. We honor and respect differences. Not just differences in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity but in every way—life style, philosophy, political opinion, dog

lovers and cat lovers.

I do believe that it is possible for diverse people to sit at the same table. However, there is a caveat, those at the table must be willing to learn as much as they are desirous of teaching. Renita Weems in her book *Listening For God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt* writes, “*There's no way to take away other people's truth and have your own not be damaged in the process.*” Sitting at the table together requires a certain degree of open-mindedness and a definite respect for the belief and the truth of others.

A part of CCOP's vision is to be a tool for social change. It is inappropriate for a church to become involved in politics. It would be unacceptable for me to tell you who to vote for. Yet, at the same time it would be inappropriate and unacceptable for the church not to take a stand on social issues that involve injustice and inequality.

A few months ago I received an anonymous letter from an individual that does not want the church to take a stand on same-sex marriage stating that not everyone in the church is a democrat and believes in same-sex marriage. I have no doubt but that both these things are true; however, as far as I understand it, same-sex marriage is not a democrat or republican issue it is an equal rights issue, it is a social justice issue. And just as progressive churches have always stood on the side of justice and equality for all, so will Christ Church of Peace. Personally, I may never choose to get married but those who desire it, ought to have the right to do so.

**We are a church that takes seriously Jesus' teachings and life-examples about love.** Listen as I read from Luke's gospel. (Read Luke 10:25-28) The other gospel writers refer to loving God and others as the two greatest commandments; however, Luke identifies them as the way to meaningful abundant life.

A couple of weeks ago we ended a series on the Beatitudes, which are a description of how to love—of how to have meaningful life. Listen as I read one individual's imagined reflection about the Beatitudes and Jesus' disciples. (Read—*The Lesson* by Jim Clark, summer CPE Student, Berkshire Medical Center.)

Our Mission Statement says we are on a spiritual journey of discovery and growth. Friends, spiritual growth does not just happen, you have to desire it and nurture it. And one of the main ways spiritual growth occurs is through loving relationships—with God and with others. At Christ Church of Peace we take seriously Jesus words about loving God and *all* people, for to do otherwise would be participating in bringing tears to Jesus eyes!

Last year when Michael Piazza and I were discussing church he made a comment to me that I simply cannot shake. He said that many people who attend

predominantly GLBT churches do not see them as “real” churches. Unfortunately, I believe he is right. Still, I am choosing to loudly say, **We are a real church even though we are not our momma’s church.**

Friends, we may not in many ways look like our momma’s church—yet we are real. Unless of course being a real church means excluding some of the *all*—then we are not real. And if being real means placing the institution above the people then we are not real. And further, if being real means everybody has to believe the same ways about everything in order to be included, and loved and respected then we are not real. But friends, if being real means that we respond by saying “Amen” with our voice and our actions when Jesus says, “*I will draw **all** people unto myself*” then by all means we are real!!!!