

The Decision about the Reconciling in Christ Program

Our congregation will soon be asked to make a decision about its mission and ministry—whether or not we are ready to make an Affirmation of Welcome to gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people.

The decision our congregation makes about hospitality and welcome, of course, needs to be done in an orderly way (using parliamentary procedures). But Rules of Order or majority votes aren't much help in discerning our mission as a Christian congregation, and planning our ministry in the community. What are some good ground rules for this decision?

+ We are a family in Christ, and we have Christian family values. For example, open, patient and loving discussion will shape our opinions and guide our decisions. A family decision is one which listens to and honors every member of our family.

+ If we are uncertain what God desires through this decision, we should be guided by the law of love—that we should love God above all else, and love our neighbors as ourselves. (Mark 12:28-34; Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:9-11; 3:11,16-20)

+ Not all decisions are either “right” or “wrong.” We try to understand what is best for our community, and which courses of action are most faithful and have the greatest integrity. A decision of integrity means that our plans and actions are based on positive motives tied to the Gospel—not negative motives tied to fear, expedience, or control.

+ The Holy Spirit is with us! Rather than see hard questions or new issues as threats, we can also see them as opportunities or signs from God to discern where the Spirit is leading us. A faith decision is one which reflects our confidence that the Holy Spirit is

at work in the decision-making process. (John 16:13; Acts 5:29-32; 15:28-29)

+ In Christ, we have made commitments to love one another, take risks for one another, and bear one another's burdens. (John 13:34, 15:12-17; Galatians 6:2) As Christians, we do not put ourselves first, but others. (Romans 12:3-10) When we make a decision, we should give the benefit of the doubt to others who are most affected by our decision.

+ We value the growth and enhancement of life for each and every person which the church's ministry reaches. A growth decision means that we face new opportunities, challenges—even dangers—in a way to help people grow in faith and commitment.

+ Our process reflects faithfulness to one another as well as to Christ. There should be no “losers” after a decision is made, if we all make care and support for one another our highest priority. Not everyone will get his or her way, but everyone remains committed to peace, unity and reconciliation throughout the process.

We hope that, in your own household, you will make time for discussion, prayer and reflection before you come to a personal decision. For more information, contact a member of GA's RIC Task Force. Contact information for task force members is listed on the back side of the letter from council president Gary Anderson.