



crossbeams

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A Journey to Open & Affirming in Indiana

[ed note: The following is excerpted from an article written by Rev. Rebecca Zelensky. For the complete article go to news.gladalliance.org]

On Sunday, June 25, 2006, Central Christian Church (DOC) in Terre Haute, IN passed a motion to join the official list of Open & Affirming churches. The journey that led to this momentous decision has been a long one filled with many struggles and even more Spirit-filled rewards.

Many at Central credit the beginning of this process to Phil Ewoldsen who joined the congregation in 1988. Ewoldsen, who left a successful and much-loved career as a Disciples minister, was very forthcoming with the congregation about his sexual orientation and his relationship with his life partner. He quickly became an active member of the church.

In 1999, Ewoldsen and others at Central chartered a local chapter of GLAD (Gay, Lesbian, and Affirming Disciples). Within a year the group grew from six participants to thirty-two, including several children who attended with their parents and five college students from Terre Haute institutes of higher education. Many of the people who attended GLAD meetings and events also became active members of the congregation.

At the same time, Rev. Linda Patrick-Rosebrock, former pastor of Augusta Christian Church in

Indianapolis, was asked to lead a study on the issue of homosexuality. Conversations were lively and positive even though people disagreed on the issue. In 2002 another study was organized using materials from *Listening to the Spirit: A Handbook for Discernment*, published by Chalice Press. The study was well received and the possibility of becoming an Open & Affirming congregation was discussed.

A Diversity ministry was created at Central in 2003 to name the areas of diversity within the congregation, to find ways to celebrate this diversity, and to identify those in the larger community who may need an intentional invitation to be part of the faith community.

In December 2004, after a great deal of time and discernment, the congregation adopted as its Vision Statement: *God calls Central Christian Church to be a welcoming and open faith community where Christian love, action, and discipleship unite.*

Following the adoption of this vision, questions continued to be raised about how the congregation could grow in its inclusiveness of all people.

In Spring 2006 the Board unanimously agreed it was time for the congregation to consider becoming Open & Affirming at its June meeting.

Plans were made to involve the entire congregation in the next step of this journey.

Communication was a top priority. The Elders discussed the motion and its impact at their

monthly meetings; and the Diversity ministry organized two Open Forums. The forums opened with prayer and questions or comments written on slips of paper were read and discussed.

Rev. Rebecca Zelensky, Senior Minister, preached a sermon early in the process that lifted up the desires of all involved to be faithful, regardless of how one understands homosexuality and the church. She encouraged the congregation to officially claim what they have been practicing for a long time, but also added, "The true test of our faithfulness in God and in each other is not whether we become Open & Affirming at this time; the true test of our faithfulness, the true test of our witness in Christ, is how we go about this process. Living and sharing Christian love is about being respectful of each other and caring for one another especially when we don't agree or when we are challenged to go the next step in the journey together

Worship on June 25 was a joyous occasion and the mood of the congregation was one of positive anticipation as the meeting began. The votes to become Open and Affirming were more than 80%.

Rev. Zelensky said, "I think this is one more step for us as we strive to fulfill the vision we believe God is calling us to.... I am very proud of the loving, respectful manner in which everyone conducted themselves. Of course, now we need to start praying and discerning what God wants us to tackle next!"

Discernment Ministry Team Provides Exhibits in Indiana, Nebraska, and Tennessee

The Discernment Ministry Team has been busy providing exhibits at various regional assemblies.

The Nebraska Regional Assembly, Oct. 13-15, for the first time had a discernment display and reports are that it was well received by those who stopped to talk.

At the Tennessee Regional Assembly, Oct. 20-22, Jan

MacKenzie reports that the discernment display had many visitors who were interested in talking. Brochures and order forms were handed out. Jan reports to us:

"The Regional exhibit went very well. I handed out more brochures than before and I put out the order forms for the material. Many people, after looking at the display, picked up an order form as well. I felt this was deliberate and not just a 'take one of everything' reaction. I used my original tri-fold display, the book, video and

brochures. I stayed close by and initiated a lot of conversations, usually by asking, 'Has anyone, or small group, in your church done the Discernment study?' I was fortunate to be across from a pottery display, an interest of mine, and 'helped' sell her stuff. There was a fun atmosphere in our area."

Indiana will be having their Regional Assembly in November and plans are underway for a GLAD display which will include information on the discernment process.

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Also On The Web:

There's more on the web than we can fit onto this page. Go to <http://news.gladalliance.org> for more:

- Gwen Gutierrez Honored by the GLAD Pacific-Southwest Regional Chapter
- National Religious Leadership Roundtable members issue strong reaction to United States Catholic bishops' proposed guidelines, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*.
- From the National Council of Churches: *Christian Principles in an Election Year*
- *And God Loves Each One* and *Dios nos ama por igual* are pamphlets that can be shared at an event or used to inspire discussion in your church and Sunday School class.

Saving Money

To reduce our Crossbeams budget for next year and spend the money where it's needed, we are going to mail the paper version of Crossbeams only upon request starting January 2007.

You will still be able to download and print the paper version to distribute to your congregation, office, family and friends.

You will continue to receive the paper version if we do not have your e-mail address or if you contact us and request the paper version. You can make that request to crossbeams@gladalliance.org, to our PO Box, or by calling Mark Johnston at 617 536 8185.