



## SLT Report, May 2016

### Orientation Review

Over the last four years, GOWC-C has been exploring what it would mean to be an affirming church for LGBTQ+ people. We have explored our use of language, scripture, culture, and our own thoughts and ideas. Our journeys have been long, short, simple, complicated, filled with new learning and wrestling with old assumptions. This has resulted in reflection on who we are and who we are choosing to be corporately and individually. The statement we have accepted states:

**“GOWC-C is an affirming church that welcomes all people that identify as LGBTQ+ into all aspects of Grain of Wheat Church-Community life.”**

In this, we are choosing to accept one another as created by God, to walk together as disciples of Jesus, valuing diversity of belief and tradition. When we began this discussion our goal was to listen well and hear one another’s stories. As a community, we have worked deliberately at consensus building – desiring to hear and value all perspectives. As we journey let us continue to learn and grow together:

- *As an intentional community*: place to transform into the people God created us to be. A place to explore the edges of our faith and beliefs, while continuing to share Christ’s table with one another. Community is the support system that says, together we can journey to the best life God has for us, following Christ to the best of our understanding.
- *With a sense of generous spaciousness* - a way of being together in the midst of our diversity. Faith communities are not intended to be homogeneous groups of people who all think and act in exactly the same way. Rather, healthy churches are made up of people who might never imagine themselves together if it weren’t for the love of God calling them to be family. Encountering difference, tension, paradox, and even conflict is fertile soil to grow into the fruits of the Spirit. Generous spaciousness helps us to acknowledge that people who are committed to Christ and committed to honour the scriptures and arrive

at different interpretive conclusions on any number of theological, moral, or philosophical dilemmas.

- *With a sense of compassionate curiosity* – a path of gentleness towards ourselves and towards our story. With a kind, inquiring attitude, we open doors. With curiosity, there are no dead ends and with compassion there is no shaming judgment, but rather openness and acceptance.
- *As Beloved Children* - We are all uniquely created in the image of God. Each of represents the hands, feet and face of Jesus to the other. Richard Rohr says, "We can only love others as we have allowed God to love us." Let us ask each other and ourselves ~ *Am I allowing God to love me wholly? Can I be "God with skin on" to my family, friends and the stranger?*

We believe the Spirit has journeyed with all of us as we have processed this decision – those of us who are strongly supportive, those who have reservations and those who are uncomfortable. The ability to be unified and hold a diversity of opinions is one of the gifts of GoWC-C; we have heard a resounding desire to continue to live into this part of our identity. Let us rejoice together at the opportunities that await. New learnings may be hard and the holy grinding may leave us confused, but Jesus' love will guide us.



## **SLT Responsibilities**

### ***A Time of Yearning and Reflection***

Over the last couple of months the Servant Leadership Team has been reflecting on which roles and tasks we each feel gifted and drawn to. As we reflected, we noted that leadership had become actively involved in almost every team in GoW. While there are likely many reasons why this evolved, this active participation no longer seems necessary and in some ways seems unhelpful. We are finding that active participation in so many areas has led to a diffused focus that doesn't leave enough room for connection and creativity.

We would like to find a way to create more space to envision, actively meet the needs of community, and connect with community members. We have been talking about the themes we want to unite all of our areas of work. From our conversation this working statement has emerged:

*The Servant Leader Team's Focus will be:*

Creating **spaces for spiritual growth** and **communal support**. This would include a focus on **pastoral connection, mentoring** of people growing into roles and **big picture thinking** around ways to facilitate community spiritual formation.

### ***A Refining and Deepening of Focus***

In order to live out this focus we are trying a new model. We are suggesting a refining and deepening of our main foci down to four broad areas: Worship, Seed Groups, Children's Ministry and Community Connections (between ourselves and beyond ourselves). By doing this we see ourselves:

- Creating space to spend more time working alongside people
- Using and growing our pastoral gifts
- Having more unity and synergy in our work and doing fewer tasks that feel piecemeal and disconnected from a grander narrative of what we are called to do as Servant Leaders

### ***Servant Leadership Team priorities:***

Seed groups – Tessa, Andrew

- SLT focus: at least 2 one-on-one meetings a seed group year with leaders and two all leader gatherings with a topic that emerges as pertinent from the one-on-one meetings
- Providing intentional support to new seed group leaders (as desired)

Worship - Andrew, Tessa

- Andrew chairs the committee, Tessa would focus on increasing practices that are intergenerational and meet children's needs
- Focus on mentoring and helping others mentor people into new roles
- Teaching Team (homilies)– Paul, Andrew
- Looking for someone to coordinate worship and communion leaders

Children's Ministry – Linda, Tessa

- Sunday School
- Integration in Worship
- Events outside of worship

Community Connection and Hospitality: connecting ourselves and beyond ourselves – Linda, Andrew

- Common Meals
- Intergenerational Activities
- Winter Camp (a committee)
- MAST
- West End Commons (Linda)
- St Matthew Maryland Community Ministries (Andrew)

Leadership would liaise with:

Finance (Finance Team reports to the DMC and consults with SLT), Youth/Sarah (Linda), Emmaus (Andrew), Refugee Committee (Tessa), Ways to Engage Committee (Andrew), Pastoral (Tessa)

### ***Creating Space for Community Leadership***

In order to facilitate an increase in focus we will be looking for others to take on three areas that do not require active leadership participation.

Service Initiative Fund

- Need three people to review yearly applications
- Leadership is in a process of streamlining the application process

Safe Church

- Tessa would ensure that the safe church program was functional prior to having leadership step back into liaison role.
- The Safe Church committee would be responsible for ensuring the policy was being followed and yearly trainings occurred
- Leadership remains as a liaison and likely actively involved each Sunday to ensure that enough adults were present in Sunday School classes to meet safe church requirements

Pastoral Team

- Leadership does not currently chair the pastoral team, but has one member on the team. This team is looking for additional members.



### **Youth Report** (from Sarah Deckert)

The first thing I thought of when asked to write this report is, "I need to talk about our youth." I have been absolutely blown away by the youth that consider themselves part of Grain of Wheat Church-Community. These youth are thoughtful, fun, intelligent, kind, and talented. It's amazing to me to watch this diverse group of teenagers all enjoying each other, teasing each other, competing against each other, and talking to each other, all with an attitude of kindness and respect. And every time I tell them that I've volunteered them for another event, they come and they help with joy and willingness. These teenagers see the fun in service; they just enjoy doing things together, and helping others is a natural part of that.

For me, this first year as Youth Connector has been about exploration, experimentation, and building relationships. I'm trying out different ideas and seeing what works and what doesn't. I'm also exploring goals for next year. One of the things that I have zeroed in on as a priority is our mentorship program. We have this incredible vision of having a mentor matched to each child in our church when he or she turns 12. I cannot think of a better way to support our youth as they navigate all of the decisions and trials of adolescence. Having worked with at-risk youth as a teacher, I have seen so many teenagers who did not have a stable, caring adult to talk to. They gravitated to teachers who were open and good listeners as someone to get feedback from or even just to sit with them as they struggled through life. Our youth are so, so fortunate to have an interested adult in their lives; often they know multiple caring adults! Sometimes mentor-mentee relationships flourish naturally, and sometimes they need a bit more encouragement. My goal is to find ways to encourage mentors so that both youth and mentor can get the most out of the relationship; so that they can have fun together, laugh together, talk about the hard things together, talk about church things together, and even serve alongside each other. I also want to help make our mentorship program a bit more visible in our church, believing that like a plant, the more sunshine it gets, the more it will flourish.

Some people think the title "Youth Connector" is pretty silly. I certainly have to do some explaining when I tell friends and family my job title. I do, however, really like it because it is so apt. I have felt more connected in Grain of Wheat since starting the job. The youth have made connections with St. Matthews-Maryland Community Ministry through their volunteering. The youth connect with each other all of the time, and have maintained connections with the young adults who have graduated out of youth group at Craig's "Can I Ask That?" youth lunch series. They've connected with church policy through the orientation discussion (as a side note, when I texted out the news that we accepted the orientation statement, I got the same response over and over: "Yay!"). They've connected with God through their acts of service, Craig's lunches, and our discussions about the orientation statement. I truly believe that a connected teenager stands a far, far better chance of being a healthy teenager, and when it comes down to it, a spiritually, relationally and physically healthy teenager is our greatest goal.

