

## *Look to the interests of others!*

*Philippians 2: 1-13 Imitating Christ's Humility*

Rev. Karen Bridges

### *Statement of Welcome and Inclusion*

*We open our hearts and our church family to all people in our community  
Regardless of ethnicity, economic circumstances, sexual orientation, age,  
Gender, or differing abilities. Many people's lives continue to be devastated by  
Hatred, prejudice, and inequality, therefore we stand with  
those who are adversely affected by injustice, alienation and oppression.*

Our statement of welcome and inclusion has been the guiding principle of how we long to work together. We continue to strive to ensure that all people are not only welcome in our space, but are empowered to participate fully as the spirit of God calls them. Our DEAP pod (Discernment, Envisioning and Policy Pod) in the spirit of discernment and prayer we explore how we live out our call to be loving, and we take time to consider who's not present in our community. The role of the DEAP Pod is to listen for where the Spirit is at work in our midst. Where is the energy, where is the passion, where are the rubs...or challenges that we face as a community?

Both the wider church and our own congregation have been asking a lot of questions about what it means to be intercultural and affirming. So we invite you into a time of small group discussion. Take a look at the statement of welcome and inclusion and talk about who is not included in the statement.

The purpose of our statement of Welcome and Inclusion is to tell others in the world about what we value and who we are. In fact it has brought many people through our doors. This statement also challenges us to think about the language we use, who is in leadership, who participates in worship, do our documents reflect our statement, are all people able to fully participate in the life of our church? Do people truly believe they belong and that there is a place for them. This statement also holds us accountable. If we find that people are not behaving in a way that is welcoming and inclusive, that we can use this statement to call them to account. We understand that we are not perfect and there will be times when we fail to live up to this. The gospel message is not always an easy one. Jesus told us that we are to love one another as I would love

you. We are called to put other's interests first, as we heard from Paul in the scripture. AND we are to be of one mind. This doesn't not mean that we need to be the same. We need to work together. I have invited DEAP Pod members to share their reflections on how we live out this statement.

Robert Mah

For much of the past year the discussion within the DEAP Pod has been our statement of inclusion and why diversity is important. As a Christian community and individual followers of Jesus we are called to be welcoming and to loving our members. This is easy to do when my neighbours are like me with the same interests the same sense of humor and the same values. It can be less easy when my neighbours are not like me. For example I have very strong opinions about politics. I have let differing opinions change how I see other people usually to the detriment of the relationship. I need to try to understand why others think the way that they do so I can learn from their experience or their point of view and possibly change my own point of view. At our last DEAP Pod meeting we discussed how individuals within a community can disagree and how we should challenge one another. For instance calling somebody out for something they had done or said that was unkind. I was really uncomfortable with this because I avoid conflict and confrontation at any price and when I do try and challenge other people I normally don't say what I mean to say which is why I cling to my script so closely. Fortunately Reverend Karen was able to bring me back to the point. She reminded me that together we are the body of Christ. We each bring gifts, the gifts of our talents, labour, financial support and the gift of our loving presence. And the more different we are the more that we have. It may not be in my DNA to challenge someone if I witness something unkind or to Chair and organize one of the many pods, committees, or boards, but thankfully the committee includes people Colleen, Lisa, Rhonda, Derek, Neil, Susan and about 100,000 other people and you. To paraphrase Karen; if we were all the mouth of God, of Christ or all the feet of Christ we would be less effective. It is the sum of us that makes our community whole for all are frustrating and glorious differences.

Jill Lambie

From a different version of Philippians this morning, same chapter, same verses in his letter today Paul reminds us to cheer each other up, to help each other, to be truly happy by loving each other and agreeing whole-heartedly with each other, to be humble, to look to the interests of others and that our attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus.

And then my mind goes to a song by Leonard Cohen who reminds us that there is a crack in everything. There are times in the world; there are times here at the church when I have been hurt by someone, by words spoken by someone, by an action taken by someone. Sometimes I cannot look to the interests of others. Once I am hurt or I see someone else being hurt I want to lash out, to hurt them back, to take control. For me that is the crack in everything. What am I to do, what am I to say; I lose sight of my beliefs of loving, of inclusion, of hope, but then, if I

pause, take a time out take a deep breath, pray, ask for help, then usually I can react with love and caring. It might be that the love and caring happens quickly or it might be that it happens over a period of time, when I have had the time to reflect, to pray, to talk, and to receive the wisdom and love that I need. I know that there are people who believe in me, who trust in me to make a decision, looking to the interests of others who know that God is at work within me.

Leonard Cohen also says that it is this crack that lets the light in; the light, the love of Jesus, is how we remember what it is we believe, where the spirit is moving us and what it means to be welcoming and inclusive, how to be unified in our diversity, to shine brightly in Christ. In one of our hymns, 'I Am the Light of the World', we sing,

*I am the light of the world,  
You people come and follow me  
If you follow and love you will learn the mystery  
Of what you are meant to do and be*

As Jesus says, love one another as I have loved you.

Carol Anne Inglis

Diversity is our unity. In the words of Dave Mowatt who recently wrote an opinion piece in the Journal, "Our differences make us stronger as people, communities, societies, cultures and faith groups. This is true pluralism."

Ours is not a world where we simply tolerate one another, but one where we gain from one another. If you are pushing only your own ideas you are limited to what you can think of. To appreciate other perspectives opens us to possibilities that no one of us could think of, things that can be transformational. At Robertson-Wesley we are reminded again to open our hearts and our faith family to all people in our community; to the faithful Mary's and the doubting Thomas', to the smiling babies and the tantruming toddlers, to the mother's and others who are parenting, to the compassionate caregivers and the cared for, to the affluent and those with low or no income, to the leaders and to the supporters, to the newcomers and the elders, to the comforters and the bullies; think good Samaritan and Saul. To be included in this community is to be instilled with hope, to be included in this community is to dare to trust that you will be accepted and respected just as you are, God being our helper. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Karen Bridges

The Gospel is challenging and we are challenged to love one another as we would be loved. Remember to put others' interests first and know that it isn't easy and we will not always be successful. But what is most important that as a congregation and as a faith community we are called to engage in these awkward conversations in order to make this a loving community.

Amen.