

Open and Affirming at Rock Spring Church



First Forum on
Equal Marriage Rights for All

September 24, 2006

Chronology of Events

- ❑ Sermon “Pilgrimage toward understanding” on January 31, 1982
- ❑ And God Loves Each One—Search for Understanding: Part III, Understanding Homosexuality. 4 Sunday evening sessions in October 1996
- ❑ Ad hoc committee on Open and Affirming (ONA) created by Council, Nov. 1999
- ❑ Feb. 1999: Coordinating Committee on ONA Issues charged by Council to lead the congregation through a process of study of sexual orientation
- ❑ ONA evening forum series: 5 sessions
- ❑ Draft ONA statement approved by Council in March 2000 as a basis for discussion
- ❑ Further information sessions
- ❑ Vote on June 4, 2000: 94 yea, 12 nay.

Evening Forum Series

1. Exploring sexual orientation and homosexuality, September 1999
Speaker: Dr. D.H. Hammer from NIH
2. Homosexuality and issues relating to youth and family, October 1999
Speakers: Del and Caroline Hufford-Anderson, Rock Spring; and Anderson couple, Silver Spring
3. Homosexuality and the Bible, November 1999
Speakers: Revs. Gregory Kenney and Jim Ross
4. What does becoming ONA mean? January 2000
Rev Todhunter (Silver Spring UCC)
5. The Rock Spring Way – considering the church's stance on becoming an ONA congregation, February 2000

Sequence of questions asked to help think through the process

Is sexual orientation a choice?

No

Is it similar to being left-handed, or more like being a kleptomaniac?

Left-handed

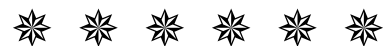
If it is not a choice and like being born left-handed, why is the Bible so negative, or is it?

Hermeneutics

- ❑ What are the main and unchanging messages of the Bible?
- ❑ What did Christ focus on?
- ❑ How did the cultural norms at the time of writing influence the Bible, and how do we judge?
- ❑ Are there other examples where messages taken as moral commands from God earlier have since been deemed to be culturally conditioned and discarded?
 - Slavery – “Slaves, obey your earthly master in everything” (Col. 3:22)
“Accept your master’s authority, even if you suffer” (1 Peter 2:18)
 - Women’s subordination – “Wives, subject to your husbands, as you are to the Lord” (Eph 5:22)

Sermons on Open and Affirming

- “Open and Affirming—Journey to Understanding”, September 19, 1999, Chuck Wildman
- “What Would Jesus Say? Homosexuality and Key Biblical Texts”, January 9, 2000, Chuck Wildman
 - Sodom and Gomorrah story, Gen. 19
 - Leviticus 18:22
 - Deuteronomy 23:17-18
 - Romans 1: 26-27
 - 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11
- “Open and Affirming Faith,” January 30, 2000, Phil White



- Also, “Homosexuality and Our Use of Scripture,” November 11, 1999, George Booth’s panel presentation at the 4th “Sharing Our Rainbow of Light Celebration”

Two most debated issues in drafting ONA statement

- ❑ Can gays and lesbians be called to pastoral and other official church positions at Rock Spring?
- ❑ Will Rock Spring publicly commit to performing commitment ceremonies for same-gender couples?

⇒ Considered non-negotiable by the ONA Committee, a “no” answer to either question worse than no ONA statement at all.

Why didn't ONA statement refer to marriage ceremonies for all?

- ❑ Some argued for ONA but excluding commitment ceremonies
- ❑ Other churches had ONA statements that were less specific, and hence include marriage equality.
Example: First Congregational Church in DC - "We are open to all sexual orientations in our church's celebrations and sacraments"

Rock Spring's Open and Affirming Statement, April 24, 2000

IN LIGHT OF OUR

- UCC Statement of Faith, the Covenant of Rock Spring Church, and our steadfast belief in Christ's message of healing love;
- Deepening appreciation of the mystery of God's creation, in all its marvelous complexity;
- Long-standing advocacy of the principles of peace, justice, and equality, as evidenced by our designation as a "Just Peace" church;
- Mission of support and healing to those in need or pain;
- Abhorrence of hatred and violence against people based on sexual orientation;

WE, THE CONGREGATION,

Declare our church to be Open and Affirming, and we welcome people of every race, nationality, ability, sexual orientation, gender and age to join us in the full life and ministry of Rock Spring Church.

Rock Spring's Open and Affirming Statement, April 24, 2000

THEREFORE,

We invite all people to share fully in our life together; in worship and service, in employment, in lay and professional leadership and in affirmation of personal life passages, including ceremonies of traditional marriage and of committed union.

We promise our support to all individuals, children and families - traditional, extended, single-parent, gay, and lesbian. We continue to affirm human relationships and behavior based on love, support, responsibility and trust.

We pray for God's blessing and grace as we strive for renewal and, in the words of our Rock Spring Covenant, "the realization of our one human family".

Question asked in this and subsequent sessions:

Does marriage equality follow from open and affirming?