

Mount Zion's Board of Directors' Inclusion Priority: LGBT Inclusion Task Force Report to the Board

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I. Purpose of the Task Force

Mount Zion's Board of Directors identified "inclusion" as a priority for 2011. Over several months inclusion became focused in two areas: disability accessibility and LGBT inclusion. The Board thus created a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Inclusion Task Force in October 2011. Forming the Task Force was one of the recommendations to the Board in December 2010 by the task force considering sponsorship of a Boy Scout Troop at Mount Zion. The Board reaffirmed Inclusion as a priority for 2012.

Mount Zion's vision statement says in part: "We are a diverse and inclusive multigenerational community..." And, "As a home for acts of loving kindness and justice, we ...reach out with compassion and respect to underserved populations within our congregation and community."

II. What's Happened So Far

Rabbi Spilker and Bob Mast chose the members of the LGBT Inclusion Task Force from among the Board and congregation. Members include: Mike Bahr, Lisa Cohen, Maureen Davidson, Harriet Guthertz, Glenn Hardin, Sue Koch, David Nathan, Dan Rybeck, Laura Schauben, Dave Wark, Kirsten Welge, and Marcia Woods-Weisman. Rabbi Spilker chairs the group which has met five times since October, 2011. The group agreed that it would meet monthly through September 2012, and identified a range of exploratory activities related to LGBT inclusion. This document is a summary of those activities. They are sorted into three categories: activities that were already occurring at Mount Zion but that the group wanted to highlight or strengthen; activities that could be completed by the Task Force by September 2012; activities that would require additional time and/or staff and resources to complete.

III. A Vision for the Task Force

Our Task Force is working to make Mount Zion a congregational community in which people of all sexual and gender identities feel welcome and at home. Our vision requires that we remove barriers to inclusion where and when possible, and that we continually strive to understand the diversity within our congregation and in our larger community. Specifically, our Task Force is building Mount Zion's capacity to:

- Show steadfast support for the dignity and rights of LGBT people.
- Communicate both within and outside Mount Zion that we welcome LGBT people and their friends and families to our congregation.
- Have effective, loving (and sometimes difficult!) conversations about sex and gender identities and issues.
- Make a supportive space for people who are considering and/or re-considering their sex or gender identities, especially young people.
- Connect with LGBT organizations in our community and around the world.

IV. Highlighting and Strengthening LGBT Inclusion Activities That Are Already Happening at Mount Zion

- Include announcements of milestone events for LGBT members and children (commitment ceremonies, baby namings, anniversaries, etc.) in *Iton Tzion*, Mount Zion's Bulletin.
- Include photos of LGBT families in *Iton Tzion*.
- Conduct services devoted to inclusion (LGBT, interfaith, interracial, etc) with pulpit speaker
- Take public action on key LGBT-related issues (like the marriage amendment).
- Offer assistance and/or safe space training to teens. This currently happens through our Sacred Choices program in Mount Zion's Chai School and teen outreach work.
- Review/revise Mount Zion's forms, bylaws, and policies to be inclusive. These were reviewed by the Task Force, and a few changes made.

V. Activities to Be Undertaken by Task Force & Completed By September

- Review/revise existing content of the website to make it LGBT-friendly, including life cycle events. Add welcoming images, pictures, phrases and symbols, and include links to LGBT organizations.
- Conduct a survey of the congregation to assess attitudes toward LGBT issues, barriers to LGBT inclusion, and suggestions for future activities of the LGBT Task Force.
- Conduct a focus group among teens at Mount Zion to get their ideas about LGBT inclusion and identify barriers to inclusion that they have seen or experienced.
- Establish measures to define "success" and assess how we're progressing toward LGBT inclusion.
- Plan LGBT-themed events for the Fall. This will include a program surrounding Selichot, September 8th. It may include a speaker, LGBT film, and discussion, "*panim-el panim*" sharing of inclusion stories, etc. Follow up events may be planned after September.

VI. The LGBT Task Force's Recommendations for Activities To Be Undertaken after

- Become a venue for LGBT speakers/organizations in the Twin Cities
- The Task Force recommends that the Board re-invigorate the Personnel Committee and charge them with thinking about clergy and staff development related to LGBT issues. This could include training, review of HR policies, and periodic in-service events to keep skills up-to-date.
- The Task Force recommends that the Board look into ways to build LGBT awareness and support LGBT kids and teens, children of LGBT parents, and parents with LGBT kids. These could include:
 - Curriculum update to integrate LGBT concerns, emphasis on inclusion
 - Staff/teacher training to support inclusion; identify and stop bullying behaviors. The August, 2012 staff training could focus on LGBT issues;

after the training, Religious School's staff could meet to figure out how to incorporate the lessons learned in the training.

- The Task Force recommends that staff solicit LGBT participation in life cycle celebrations (anniversaries, Yahrzeits, etc) and for inclusion in the Bulletin.

How to Carry Forward the Task Force's Efforts– Three Possibilities being considered by the Task Force to discuss with the Board:

1. Identify an LGBT Outreach Coordinator who would serve on the Membership Committee. This person would be an individual liaison at Mount Zion for outreach to the local and national LGBT community. She/he could help organize Mount Zion's presence in events like the Pride Parade, AIDS walk, etc. He/she could also look into soliciting sponsors to add Mount Zion for certain national or local LGBT inclusive directories.

AND/OR

2. Establish an ongoing Mount Zion LGBT Inclusion Committee that would be responsible for monitoring inclusion efforts at Mount Zion including those listed in this document. One part of the committee's work would be to plan LGBT inclusion education and outreach. Potentially the committee might only meet every year in May and June to review this document, plan Pride weekend, and make recommendations to clergy and leadership. They might plan periodic classes for congregants and others, events, small group meetings at congregant homes to tell and listen to LGBT member stories, etc. They might review bylaws of the Congregation and look at forms/documents every few years. The group might also hold periodic meetings to assess the progress of inclusion activities and propose appropriate responses to the assessments.

AND/OR

3. Establish an ongoing Mount Zion Inclusion Committee that would be responsible for monitoring inclusion efforts at Mount Zion including those listed in this document but not limited to LGBT Inclusion.

We will return to the Board in September with a refinement of this recommendation.