



June 12, 2024

# MESSENGER

## QUOTE FOR TODAY

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

1 Peter 5:7

## INFO

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## How Broad is Our Embrace?

Last Saturday ABC was the site of the "Spiritual Enrichment" program that was part of the 2024 *Altadena Pride*<sup>1</sup> experience. Over a hundred friends and neighbors gathered to focus on the spiritual journey of LGBTQ+ people in our community. Sadly, there were some predictable stories about the deep and lasting pain caused when churches shamed and condemned people who needed love and understanding. There were also some encouraging words about how powerful a church's ministry can be when they are open, affirming and accepting. You can watch the program [here](#).

For me, this was the culmination of a long journey within our church. It began more than a decade ago with sometimes harsh conversations among some young adults who had grown up in ABC. Their personal experiences were very revealing and provoked more discussion about sexuality and gender identification. This brought the Pastors into important studies and teachings about the meaning and application of Biblical teachings for people growing up in the modern world.

The result of all this conversation was that ABC seemed to be feeling God's call to be more open and sensitive to the journey of individuals who were increasingly aware that traditional gender patterns didn't fit them.<sup>2</sup> Some denominations (Episcopal, Lutheran, Congregational) have taken a strong public stand that they are "open and affirming." However, the majority of *Evangelical* churches (churches with a strong emphasis on Biblical authority, a clear focus on the Gospel and personal conversion), including most Baptist churches, have not taken that position. Some (thankfully a minority) have condemned LGBTQ+ people as open sinners hopelessly bound for hell. Others, including most popular megachurches, want to be seen as "welcoming" to all, including those who are LGBTQ+; but they draw a line at allowing them to be in leadership positions or entering same-sex marriages.

The leaders of our church have done a thorough study of relevant Bible passages and have concluded that there are no timeless teachings against the position that we should fully embrace people who are on a journey in discovering who they are in their gender identity and sexuality.<sup>3</sup> We have let this be known in our congregation, but so far, we haven't made intentional public proclamations. It seems to me that we did that last Saturday, loud and clear! It felt good.

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Where do we go from here? Well, first we have to acknowledge that our position is a relief to a number of ABC families in which one or more members have identified as LGBTQ+ and have had some trouble seeing how this relates to their faith connection. They should know that their church is with them, not against them. Then, at the Altadena Pride event, we invited LGBTQ+ people to attend our services, and we should expect them to come. We need to make their welcome clear and enthusiastic. To be honest, we should also anticipate some criticism from members of Evangelical churches that have been unwilling to take a similar stand.

Personally, I feel good about our open and affirming position. We're on the side of love, acceptance, salvation and renewal. I wouldn't want to be on the other side.

Pastor George Van Alstine

<sup>1</sup> Some Christians have objected to this name as glorifying *Pride*, which is listed as one of the "Seven Deadly Sins." This list doesn't come from the Bible; it was first developed in the Second Century by Christian theologian Tertullian. As the word *Pride* is used by the LGBTQ+ community, it contrasts with *Shame*, which they've experienced more often in society.

<sup>2</sup> Pastor Connie's statement to the ABC congregation can be found in her *ABC Messenger* article of February 12, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Call the church office if you want to receive a copy of Pastor George's study of the relevant Bible passages.