

The Tolland Association Council United Church of Christ

The Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gallagher, Chair, jgallagher@ucctolland.org

February 20, 2024

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Grace and peace be with the churches of the Tolland Association, United Church of Christ.

We, the members of the Tolland Association Council, write in response to a range of disruptive, abusive, dangerous, and offensive actions taken against some Tolland Association and other nearby churches. These actions came in opposition to these churches' full welcome of LGBTQ+ persons into their communities and ministries.

Such behavior against our churches is an outrage. No church or its leadership should face disruption, threatening actions, vandalism, or abusive language because of their commitment to live the love and justice of Jesus with LGBTQ+ persons as faithfully as they know how.

Certainly, fellow Christians who disagree with the witness of our churches ought to do so in ways that show the fruit of the Holy Spirit they are called to bear, showing love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). As for those who do not follow in the Way of Christ – they still owe their Christian neighbors the respect and human dignity we all ought to accord one another as fellow members of one community.

Again, disruptive, abusive, dangerous, offensive words and actions are not warranted and have no place.

Here are three ways you and your church might join the Tolland Association Council in response:

1. **Pray.** Prayer is powerful (Jas. 5:16). Prayerfully support our churches as well as the broader LGBTQ+ community with your individual and

communal prayer. Ask God to be present with them, to enrich them in all goodness, and keep them safe from those who hold ill will against them. Pray likewise for those for whom hate is consuming them. Ask God to show them a better way so that they may be freed for a more abundant life.

2. **Take steps to be more secure in your own church.** Note that the State of Connecticut has created the “Nonprofit Security Grant Program” to assist such efforts. More information can be found through the Connecticut Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, the division of our state government administering the grants. Note that the 2024 application deadline is Friday, March 1st.
3. **Reach out with a word of solidarity to LGBTQ+ persons** and their public allies even before you learn that something bad has happened. Encouragement of one another is a good work commended to us in the scriptures (cf. Phil. 2:1-2). Additionally, for all the accounts of abuse, harassment, threats, attacks, and offense we hear about, there are many others we do not. That is even more reason to reach out with the compassion of Christ to those who may be targets of hate.

The Tolland Association Council is grateful for and humbled by the many and diverse ministries of our churches and their members. We pray that your congregation may continue to boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in the ways the Spirit leads you, and we hope that you will know we seek to support you.

Faithfully yours,

The Rev. Robin Bird

Elizabeth Cottle

Amy Destine

The Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gallagher (chair)

The Rev. Rose Nilson

The Rev. David Nutt

Denise Parmenter

The Rev. MaryAnn Purtil

Graham Van Keuren

(The members of the Tolland Association Council, United Church of Christ)