

CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**HONEST, HEALTHY, AND WHOLE:
QUEER INCLUSION AND THE BODY OF CHRIST**

**A PROJECT IN MINISTRY PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
FACULTY IN THE CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**BY
JOHNATHAN C JONES**

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

April 23, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by Johnathan Jones

All rights reserved

To my best friend and mother of choice, Captain Bailey

and

To Dave and Lynn Barber, thank you for two great years of mentorship, spiritual
guidance, and support.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| ILLUSTRATIONS..... | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | vi |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | vii |
| ABSTRACT..... | viii |
| CHAPTER 1. | 9 |
| CHAPTER 2. | 27 |
| CHAPTER 3. | 53 |
| CHAPTER 4. | 68 |
| CHAPTER 5. | 82 |
| APPENDIX A. CHURCH PROFILE OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF ANCHORAGE..... | 95 |
| APPENDIX B. 2025 SACRED STRATEGIES SURVEY RESULTS ON CHURCH HEALTH..... | 105 |
| APPENDIX C. REQUEST TO USE FCCAK AS A CASE STUDY | 107 |
| APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM | 110 |
| APPENDIX E. POST INTERVIEW LETTER TO INTERVIEWEES..... | 111 |
| APPENDIX G. STANDARD ENGLISH STOP WORD LIST | 113 |
| APPENDIX H: THEMATIC ANALYSIS CODES | 114 |
| APPENDIX I. INTERVIEW-BY-ATTITUDE CLUSTER MATRIX..... | 115 |
| APPENDIX J. MINISTRIES WITH LGBTQI2S INCLUSION RESOURCES AND DISCERNMENT PROCESS..... | 118 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 119 |
| PROJECT DELIVERABLE/ CONGREGATIONAL INCLUSIVITY IN PRACTICE TOOL..... | 126 |

ILLUSTRATIONS

Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table A. Percentage distributions of the FCCAK Inclusivity Measure (n=21)..... | 72 |
| Table B. Bar Chart Summary of percent distribution of FCCAK Inclusivity Measure... | 73 |
| Table C. Most frequent and least frequent meaningful words (lemmatized)..... | 75 |
| Table D. Thematic cluster distribution of interview responses with definitions (n=13)... | 76 |
| Table E. Scoring table of FCCAK values by Adlerian building blocks..... | 89 |
| Table F. Chart of value scores of FCCAK..... | 90 |

Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure A. What is your age? | 41 |
| Figure B. Do you consider yourself to be? | 41 |
| Figure C. Are you?..... | 42 |
| Figure D. What gender are you?..... | 42 |
| Figure E. Thematic coding and cluster map..... | 81 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank First Congregational Christian Church of Anchorage for being so gracious with your absent-minded, often late, and very exhausted full-time minister who was also a full-time student. Thank you to those who shared their stories with me, encouraged me along the way, and those who took part in surveys and interviews.

Thank you to my committee - academic advisor Dr Jose Morales and Dr Kate O'Dell (officially unofficial - a strong support for the past six years as I pursued my education).

Finally, with a heart full of thanks to an inspiring, funny, organized, and efficient church secretary, colleague, and friend, Amber Garrison.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LGBTQI2S: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, two-spirit

FCCA:K: First Congregational Church of Anchorage

NACCC: National Association of Christian Congregational Churches

ONA: Open and Affirming Congregation

UCC: United Church of Christ

ABSTRACT

Author: Jones, Johnathan, C
Institution: Chicago Theological Seminary
Degree Received: March 9, 2026
Title: Honest, Healthy, and Whole: Queer Inclusion and The Body of Christ
Supervising Professor: José Morales

The absence of exclusion does not create inclusion. Inclusion is the active, ongoing, and intentional practice of incorporating all people into the life of the church. First Congregational Church of Anchorage is a member of the Open and Affirming coalition; but are they as inclusive as they claim to be. This ethnographic case study of First Congregational Church of Anchorage utilizes a congregation-wide survey, semi-structured interviews, and auto-ethnographic reflection to assess the congregation's inclusion of queer people of faith. This research provides a rubric for assessing a congregation's practices of inclusion grounded in Alfred Adler's *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*. Focusing on democracy, community, and belonging, this research determines the three lived values of FCCAK; exposing the tension of being an Open and Affirming congregation that allows homophobia in their community. The ultimate outcome of this research is the Congregational Inclusivity in Practice tool, a practical resource that any church can use to assess their own practices of inclusivity.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

North American churches are not nearly as inclusive as they claim to be. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and two-spirit individuals still ask themselves if a house of worship or community of faith is a safe space for them. If there is still one church standing that does not celebrate LGBTQI2S people, then the Church has failed to follow the instruction of Christ, that is, love God and love your neighbor.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”.¹ Martin Luther King Jr argued that the Church was failing its call when it allowed racism to continue without standing against it. Unfortunately, the battle for racial equality still exists today, and sadly, the battle for LGBTQI2S equality in civic society - and the Church - also continues today. The words King wrote 62 years ago still ring true, and hollow, today.

The contemporary Church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the archsupporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the Church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the Church’s silence and often vocal sanction of things as they are.²

It is time for the Church to reassess its practices of exclusivity. With a spirit of openness and an eye toward growth, churches have an opportunity to enter a time of guided, quality self-assessment. The Church has failed to fulfill its mission because it continues, in one way or another, to exclude. The Church will never be holy, healthy, and whole until all of God’s children find their place in the Church.

¹ Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 289–302.

² Martin Luther King Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”.

Rationale

The purpose of this thesis is to call attention to the continued exclusion of queer people of faith from full inclusion in the life of the Church. This research aims to bring the battle to the front lines of the local church. This research invites the local church to ask themselves if they are excluding or including queer people in their community.

By exploring the opinions and theological reflections of the members of First Congregational Christian Church of Anchorage (FCCA) regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and two spirit (LGBTQI2S) people, it is hoped that other churches will see how life giving it is to assess who they are, how they treat others, and consequently make the necessary changes to welcome all people into the life of the church.

It is hoped that the opinions gathered will provide insight into how the congregation as a whole views LGBTQI2S inclusion in the Church, providing a snapshot into how the wider Church in Alaska and North America thinks about inclusion. As a result of this research, a “Congregation Inclusivity in Practice” assessment tool will be developed to guide other congregations in assessing how effectively they include LGBTQI2S individuals in the life and leadership of their churches. This research is a reminder to the Church Universal; He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?^{3 4}

Within the past year, the United States has experienced a shift away from the values of diversity and inclusion. Within the United States of America, legislatures are voting for the exclusion of transgender people, and we see the United States Supreme Court potentially

³ All biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVUE).

⁴ Micah 6:8

reconsidering its previous ruling upholding same-sex marriage. With this shift away from equality, how is the inclusion of LGBTQI2S people of faith in the life of the Church altered?

By hearing and collecting the stories and opinions of the people of FCCAK, this research will explore how Congregationalists have viewed and accepted LGBTQI2S over time. Further, this research will ascertain if FCCAK is more inclusive and how that inclusion reflects the inclusion of queer Congregationalists and Christians throughout North America. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the growing understanding that LGBTQI2S people must be equal members of the Ecclesia, which, in turn, will enable a more honest, healthy, and whole Body of Christ.

Context

History of Exclusion

The Christian Church has historically been an unsafe space for queer folk. From ancient sacred text declaring, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their bloodguilt is upon them.”⁵, to more recent efforts to cure homosexuality utilizing reparative therapy, also known as conversion therapy⁶, The church has not exerted its resources in welcoming individuals outside of the heterosexual norm.

The last twenty years have seen a change in how many North American church members view queer folks. With the advent of a more welcoming and inclusive secular culture when it comes to queer individuals, the church has been forced to adopt a more welcoming attitude

⁵ Leviticus 20:13

⁶ Ketchum, R. “Reparative Therapy is Legal for Adults. Here is why it Shouldn’t Be.” *Harvard Civil Rights Review*, April 27, 2020. <https://journals.law.harvard.edu/crcl/reparative-therapy-is-legal-for-adults-heres-why-it-shouldnt-be/>

toward its homosexual adherents.⁷ However, recent political events like the election of President Donald Trump to a second term and a flurry of legislative bills targeting trans rights across the states point to the possible erosion of equal rights for LGBTQI2S people.

The wider Church continues to be an unsafe space for many queer individuals. Pew Research shows that 52 percent of LGBT adults are religiously unaffiliated, which is almost double that of heterosexual adults in the United States who are unaffiliated at 26 percent. 17 percent of LGBT adults say that religion is very important to them, whereas 46 percent of non-LGBT adults say religion is important to them.⁸ The fact that twice as many LGBT people are not religiously affiliated - or view religion as unimportant in their lives as their straight counterparts- reflects the reality that the majority of the Church continues to ignore and exclude LGBT people.

By conducting qualitative, phenomenological, ethnographic research as an openly gay senior minister and member of a local Open and Affirming congregation, this research will explore whether Congregational churches are following the national trend of ignoring and excluding LGBTQI2S people. By listening to the opinions and beliefs of the members of FCCAK concerning LGBTQI2S people, this research will paint a picture of how Congregational Churches across the United States are treating LGBTQI2S people.

This research will ask if the Church of today is any more accepting of queer individuals than it was in the past. What future exists for queer people in the Church, and how does the inclusion of queer people in the life of the Church benefit the Church? This research will also

⁷ Marci, D. National Congregations Study finds more church acceptance of gays and lesbians, *Pew Research Center*, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2014/09/25/new-study-finds-a-greater-church-acceptance-of-gays-and-lesbians-2/>

⁸ B Alper And a Kallo. "Religion and spirituality among LGBT Americans". *Pew Research Center*. Aug 22, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/22/religion-and-spirituality-among-lgbt-americans/>

explore the journey, the struggles, and the blessings of intentionally welcoming queer individuals into the church.

For research for a Doctor of Ministry, it is expected that a deliverable be offered that can benefit the ministry of others. This research will develop an assessment-tool—the “Congregation Inclusivity in Practice” (CIP) tool—for churches to determine how inclusive, or not, they are when it comes to including LGBTQI2S people in the life and leadership of their churches.

Objective Statement

The goal of this study is to promote the full inclusion of LGBTQI2S people in the life of the Church by acknowledging past hate and celebrating new love. This study will challenge the binaries of gender, sexuality, and gender identity, sacred and secular, holy and sinful, human and divine, priesthood and laity, faith and doubt, sinner and saint, spiritual and immoral. Finally, this research aims to show that the inclusion of LGBTQI2S people in the life of the Church is a positive addition to the Church and provides an opportunity for the Church to experience new growth and relatability in society and the public square. The final product offered to those in congregational ministry will be the “Congregation Inclusivity in Practice” assessment tool. It will allow congregations the opportunity and ability to assess their effectiveness in including LGBTQI2S in the life and leadership of their churches.

Research Question

How accepting of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Two-Spirit people are the members of First Congregational Church of Anchorage?

Background

Sexuality and the Church

On June 26, 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States of America finally ruled that homosexual couples could no longer be denied the opportunity and privileges of marriage.⁹ Since 2013, the United States has become a much more open and accepting country. The United States has had gay mayors, governors, and members of Congress. There are famous gay rappers, lesbian movie stars, and bisexual performers. There have been chart-topping queer singers and songs about acceptance by both male and female performers. LGBTQI2S actors and characters are now a mainstay in cinema, daytime television, comics, talk shows, radio, and children's books.

Some Christian denominations in the USA have embraced the change and have ordained openly queer individuals. However, often, ordaining openly queer clergy has led to disruption, conflict, and denominational schism.¹⁰ There are still churches in every state that believe that homosexuality is a sin. Today, conservative far-right advocates use fear, what Judith Butler calls phantasms, to slowly erode the rights that queer folks have fought for in the name of God.¹¹ Not all churches fear being inclusive; some churches are openly accepting and are actively embracing a more inclusive culture in the name of a loving God. How inclusive is the local church, and is there room for the local church to become more inclusive without causing further harm to non-heterosexual believers?

⁹ United States v. Windsor, 570 U.S. 744 (2013).

¹⁰ Jimenez, K. "Historic Methodist rift is part of larger Christian split over LGBTQ issues", *USA Today*, Updated Jan 19, 2024, Accessed Nov 8, 2025. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2024/01/19/united-methodist-christian-split-lgbtq/72208440007/>

¹¹ Judith Butler "*Who's Afraid of Gender*", Farrah, Straus and Giroux, Kindle edition, (2024).

First Congregational Church of Anchorage is a member of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) located in Anchorage, Alaska. I am the Senior minister of the church, and I am openly gay. There have been gay members of the church in the past, there have been other queer ministers (though closeted), they have been celebrating same-sex marriage ceremonies since the 1980s and have had frequent trans guest preachers. The members of the church would call themselves very welcoming of all kinds of people. Unfortunately, the number of openly queer people attending the church is one, and that is me, the minister. FCCAK may believe they are a very inclusive church; however, the facts may indicate a different reality. This research will explore why the church is not as inclusive as it believes itself to be and provide positive feedback that will lead to a more thorough inclusivity, one in which the church is more than just welcoming, but a church that is honest, healthy, and whole.

Previous Efforts

In 2020, the senior minister of FCCAK at the time, Rev. Poindexter, led the congregation through a period of discernment in which the church explored becoming a member church of the United Church of Christ's Open and Affirming coalition. This two-year period of discernment included several roundtables on what it means to be open and affirming, some very frank and open conversations on issues of human sexuality, and a series of classes on Sexuality and the Bible (Rev. Poindexter invited me to participate and teach some of the classes).

Beyond this period of discernment, there have been no other concerted efforts to ascertain FCCAK members' beliefs regarding human sexuality and the Church or on developing a tool to assess FCCAK's inclusivity. This is the first academic qualitative study of FCCAK and the creation of an inclusivity measurement tool.

On issues of sexuality within the State of Alaska, there have been two studies sponsored by Identity Inc, a local non-profit originally founded to advocate for gay and lesbian Alaskans. The studies are “One in Ten: A Profile of Alaska’s Lesbian & Gay Community,” by the volunteers of Identity, Inc. (1986), and “Identity Reports: Sexual Orientation Bias in Alaska,” by Melissa S. Green and Jay K. Brause (1989).¹² The reports provide a comprehensive, yet undoubtedly incomplete, profile of prejudice and discrimination against LGBT individuals in the state of Alaska during the 1980s.

A third survey was conducted in Anchorage, the largest city in Alaska and home to FCCAK. The “Anchorage LGBT Discrimination Survey” by Melissa Green was carried out in 2011, published in March 2012, and then re-released as a “Revised Version” in July 2015. The survey revealed significant findings regarding violence, intimidation, and discrimination faced by its 268 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender respondents. All three reports fail to include the perspectives of church members at that time.

There are already several tools designed to evaluate the inclusivity levels of various organizations, including large multinational corporations, governments, and non-profit groups. Additionally, numerous denominational, corporate, and non-profit assessment toolkits exist to help churches with discernment and to become more welcoming to LGBTQI2S individuals. However, to the author’s knowledge, there are no assessment tools specific to Alaska or NACCC churches to support their re-evaluation of inclusivity after becoming Open and Affirming. This research highlights that being an inclusive church is not a one-time achievement but a continual process that requires ongoing assessment and improvement.

¹² Both reports can be found via <https://alaskacommunity.org/about/more-about-identity-reports/>

Research Design and Methodology

This qualitative research will use ethnographic methods to explore how inclusive FCCAK is of LGBTQI2S people. By conducting an ethnographic case study, with interviews, journaling, and historical records all being utilized during research, it will be revealed to what extent the church is indeed inclusive. Hermeneutic thematic analysis will be used to explore the stories found in the data and how they reflect relationships within the church, throughout the public square, and with the divine. The research will conclude with an analysis, a summary, and a “Congregation Inclusivity in Practice” measurement tool for assessing congregation inclusivity, which can be used by FCCAK and other US churches should they choose to assess their level of inclusiveness. This research will use Adlerian organizational psychology as the measure of inclusivity. That is, does FCCAK embody and practice mutual respect, social interest, and a sense of belonging?¹³

By focusing on my own narrative as a gay minister leading a local congregation, I will prioritize my experience. This prioritizing will involve the analyzing, interpreting, and meaning making of my own narrative in relation to the cultural narrative of my faith community. I will explore the discourses that have developed between myself and my community, highlighting the benefits gained and lessons learned. Through self-examination, reflection, and analysis, I will recognize, understand, and use my own feelings, beliefs, ideas, thoughts, preferences, prejudices, history, and identity in developing this research.

This research will also explore the role of the Church and human sexuality in the Public Square, how the Church shapes sexuality and how sexuality has shaped the Church, and how

¹³ Richard E. Watts, “La Psicología Individual de Adler: La Psicología Positiva original,” *Revista de Psicoterapia* Vol 26, no. 102, 2015: 81–89.

society views both and interacts with them. Knowing that the Church is as multifaceted as sexuality and the Church is, allows us the freedom to think outside of the normal narrative we have been led to believe, and it provides an opportunity to queer the Church.

By exploring the intersectionality of the Church, Sexuality, and the public square, we are allowing ourselves to explore the meanings of faith and sexuality, theology and experience, morality and humanity, experience and expression, identity and belief, acceptance and difference. This research recognizes that humans are social beings who exist in relationship to those around them. Church and sexuality are both public constructs that reflect the personal states of spirituality and sexual creativity.

With auto-ethnography, this research will also draw on my own experiences and the meanings I bring to them as sources of data. Drawing on journal entries, letters, sermons, and reflections, I will provide a hands-on reflection on the queering of a local church and how others can follow suit.

I will also use my own history, identity, and experiences to develop a shared narrative and analysis of a religious community. As a gay man who identifies as queer and has valued questioning norms, opposing religious dogma, exploring alternative ways of living one's faith, and questioning Christian orthodoxy, I value the contribution of queer theory to this research.¹⁴

Queer theory invites us to question and unsettle the status quo; it makes its subject uncomfortable, prompting reflection and necessary change. To quote McCann, “[Q]ueer methodology is about troubling the subject, employing a queer reading approach, and drawing from multiple perspectives and traditions, all in order to challenge ‘dominant logics’”.¹⁵

¹⁴ Brad R. Braxton, *Open: Unorthodox Thoughts on God and Community* 2023, Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, Kindle Edition, location 8.

¹⁵ Hannah McCann. “Epistemology of the Subject: Queer Theory’s Challenge to Feminist Sociology.” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 44 no. 3–4 (2016): 224–243.

A queer approach to my research also means that I will employ Halberstam's Scavenger methodology. By drawing on several cultural paraphernalia, such as popular culture, special events, archives, and fragments.¹⁶ By examining historical events and the community's own valuation of them, we may discover how past events have shaped the present culture. This research will also utilize Halberstam's assertion that Queer Methodology allows it to break away from academic disciplines. The freedom to not adhere strictly to academic expectations will allow me to explore in greater depth the many distinct reasons my church believes as it does.¹⁷

Significance of this study

It will be argued that the church in Anchorage, while unique, reflects the wider NACCC associations and congregations throughout North America, therefore the lessons learned from FCCAK will be lessons that other churches can benefit from. This research will provide data on what ecclesial life is like for queer Congregationalists in Alaska. Due to its remote location and extreme climate, research on queer life and church life in Alaska is minimal. This research will provide data that has heretofore been nonexistent. Furthermore, this research will provide background for future researchers on the lives of queer people of faith in Alaska, while also offering current Alaskans a glimpse of the future of ecclesial life for queer Alaskans.

This research will also provide valuable data on what currently exists on church growth and inclusivity. The research will provide information on how Alaskan people of faith view inclusivity and inclusion in the life of the Church.

Another significant contribution will be the Congregation Inclusivity in Practice assessment tool, which can be used by any church in North America to determine how inclusive

¹⁶ Jack Halberstam, "Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy", *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, no. 2-4 (2003): 361-364.

¹⁷ Halberstam, "Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy", 361.

it is of LGBTQI2S people. There exist several denominational networks, programs, curricula, and resources designed to help a church undergo a discernment process regarding LGBTQI2S inclusivity. Many of these resources are readily available for free download on the internet. Some of the resources available include the Reconciling Ministries Network of the United Methodist Church,¹⁸ the Living the Welcoming Congregation of the Unitarian Universalists¹⁹, and the Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ²⁰. Many churches use the ecumenical Building an Inclusive Church resource published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources.²¹ See Appendix J. on page 119 for a table of ministries working with congregations.

The major limitation of these resources is the material's general nature, which leaves application of the resources to the local congregation to the leadership's expertise and experience. Furthermore, some of the resources were originally published more than two decades ago; the Unitarian Universalists published their resource in 2004,²² while Building an Inclusive Church by the Gay and Lesbian Task Force—used by many churches and denominations across the United States—was originally published in 2009.²³

The most condemning criticism is the lack of references to, or stories that address, the issue of failure or stagnation. Most resources focus on starting the process, becoming an Open

¹⁸ <https://rmnetwork.org/who-we-are/>

¹⁹ https://www.uua.org/files/documents/zz.private/obgltc/welcoming_living.pdf

²⁰ <https://openandaffirming.org/resources/>

²¹ National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources. *Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit 2.0*. Washington, DC: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources, 2013. PDF, Accessed April 6, 2026. <https://www.gaychurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/building-an-inclusive-church-a-welcoming-toolkit.pdf>.

²² Unitarian Universalist Association, Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns. *Living the Welcoming Congregation: Resources for Continuing the Welcoming Congregation Journey*. Edited by Keith Kron and Barb Greve. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2004.

https://www.uua.org/files/documents/zz.private/obgltc/welcoming_living.pdf

²³ National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources. *Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit 2.0*.

and Affirming church or a Welcoming Congregation, and then celebrating with a special worship service, but none of the resources address churches that have gone through the process and, after several years, have lost sight of their goals. This thesis will address that need in an easy-to-understand and implement format that will be readily applicable to local churches.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Boundaries

This study assumes that the members of FCCAK understand the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and two-spirit. Each word has been defined in the present chapter of this thesis. Another assumption is that individual members of the church will have inclusive attitudes that mirror those of the church. It is also assumed that the members of the church interviewed will respond openly and honestly in their interviews and give answers that are consistent with their actual views rather than what they may think I want to hear.

Limitations of this research will be most acute in the sample size, which will reflect the size of the congregation. FCCAK is a small church with 150 official members and regular worship attendance ranging from 40 to 60 people. Due to the small sample size and the low numbers of members at FCCAK, strong boundaries will need to be established that maintain the efficacy and integrity of anonymization efforts. Names will need to be replaced, roles will need to be combined, and demographics will need to be overly broad in order to prevent any form of deductive identification of research participants.

Another limitation is that much of the data collected will come from people's memories. It has long been established that human memory is not always effective. As Sigmund Freud noted, "our memory really knows no guarantees, and yet, much more often than is objectively justified, we yield to the pressure of lending credence to its statements".²⁴ Combine that with the

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913, Project Gutenberg eBook, p 409. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/66048/66048-h/66048-h.htm>

amount of time that has passed between the founding of FCCAK in 1961 and the present, and some of the data will be biased and somewhat altered. I will need to match any stories and recollections against historical data, such as bulletins and announcements, to determine authenticity.

The word “*inclusive*” itself carries a lot of baggage and will bring assumptions and limitations to this research. Of particular note is that “*inclusive*” is used by and within several segments of society. For example, disabled individuals would use the word in reference to including those with disabilities, those within Asian American communities may use the word in reference to race, whereas this research will be using it exclusively in reference to the queer community. The limitation of using this word is that not everyone will see the word “*inclusive*” as exclusively referring to the queer community.

Clarification and Definition of Language and Terms

Church and church: “Church” (capital C) ordinarily refers to the whole Christian community or a particular denomination or tradition (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church or the United Church of Christ), while “church” (lowercase c) often refers to a local congregation, building, or specific worshiping community within the larger Church. Otherwise known as the Universal Church or Church Universal.²⁵

Congregationalist: A Congregationalist is a member of a Reformed Protestant church in which each local congregation is autonomous and self-governing (congregational polity), rather than being ruled by bishops or higher church courts.²⁶

Conservative Christianity: designates movements within Christianity that seek to retain orthodox and long-standing traditions and beliefs, emphasizing biblical authority, historic doctrines, and

²⁵ Alister McGrath E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 6th ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017.

²⁶ “Congregationalism.” *In Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Accessed March 9, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com>.

resistance to liberal or progressive reinterpretations. A conservative is a person who tends to preserve established traditions, values, and institutions, and is generally resistant to rapid or radical change in society or politics.²⁷

Exclusion: To exclude or prevent a person, or a group of people, from a particular group, gathering, or activity. In a church or theological context, exclusion refers to formal or informal practices by which certain people or groups (for example, LGBTQI2S people, women, or racialized communities) are denied full participation, leadership, or recognition in the life of the church or society.²⁸

Far right: The far right refers to individuals or movements whose political positions lie at the extreme end of the right-wing spectrum, typically marked by strong nationalism, xenophobia, and hostility to liberal democracy, and often associated with reactionary, authoritarian, or supremacist ideologies. Far-right activists often deny the Holocaust and advocate making homosexuality illegal and punishable.²⁹

Inclusive: The opposite of exclusion, it involves the inclusion of groups and people who are often excluded from mainstream groups and activities. In church and theology, inclusive describes communities and practices that intentionally welcome and affirm people of diverse backgrounds (including race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class) as full participants and leaders, rather than merely tolerating their presence.³⁰

²⁷ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “conservative,” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed March 9, 2026, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservative>.

²⁸ Forst, Rainer. *Toleration in Conflict: Past and Present*. Translated by Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

²⁹ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “far right,” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed March 9, 2026, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/far%20right>.

³⁰ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “inclusive” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed March 9, 2026, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inclusive>

LGBTQI2S: LGBTQI2S is an umbrella acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Two-Spirit people, used especially in North American contexts to recognize both sexual and gender diversity and Indigenous Two-Spirit traditions.³¹

Liberal/progressive: Liberal or progressive Christianity is characterized by willingness to question tradition, acceptance of human diversity, emphasis on social justice and care for the oppressed, and a central stress on Jesus' command to love one another. It often supports inclusive practices toward LGBTQ+ persons, women's leadership, and interfaith cooperation, including for the full inclusion of historically marginalized individuals within the church and society. Indicates an embrace of change and inclusion. The word can be applied in politics and religion.³²

Mainstream churches: In the United States, mainstream (or "mainline") churches are the older, historic Protestant denominations such as the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), and others rooted in 18th–19th-century American Protestantism.³³

People of faith: People of faith are individuals who identify with a religious or spiritual tradition and whose beliefs and practices significantly shape their worldview, often including participation in organized worship or communal rituals.³⁴

Same-sex relationships/marriage: A relationship between two or more members of the same gender. Same-sex relationships are intimate or romantic partnerships between people of the same

³¹ "LGBT." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Accessed March 9, 2026. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/LGBT>.

³² Terry Mattingly, "How Do We Define 'Progressive Christianity'?" *Religion Unplugged*, July 24, 2022, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2022/7/25/what-is-progressive-christianity>

³³ Robert D. Woodberry and Christian S. Smith. "Fundamentalism et al.: Conservative Protestants in America." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 25–56.

³⁴ Catherine Cornille. *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*. New York: Crossroad, 2008.

gender; same-sex marriage refers to the legal or religious recognition of such relationships as marriages.³⁵

Queer: Queer is an umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual and/or not cisgender and also a critical stance that challenges heteronormative assumptions; historically a slur, it has been widely reclaimed by LGBTQIA+ communities and queer theorists. For this researcher Queer indicates something that is outside of the norms and expectations of society.

There exists several current and thorough free to download glossaries online that cover most, if not all, words and phrases that pertain to human sexuality and religion. One such resource is the Reconciling Ministries Network's LGBTQ+ Glossary of Terms, which you can download for free at <https://rmnetwork.org/resources/become-a-reconciling-united-methodist/>

Summary of the Chapters

Chapter 1 has outlined the research question and objectives of this doctoral thesis for the reader. The reader was also introduced to the primary subjects of this research, in particular, First Congregational Church of Anchorage and the author, while at the same time providing the background on the relationship between the Church and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and two-spirit individuals.

Chapter 2 will provide the author's social location and offer a more in-depth analysis of First Congregational Church of Anchorage, drawing on previously gathered church data, such as results from previous church surveys and meeting minutes. It will include a literature review on the topics of inclusivity and the church, delving more thoroughly into the history of the Church and inclusive practice within the Church, making note of leading scholars- past and present- and their thoughts on the Church throughout history. It will end by touching on other tools that

³⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. *Same-Sex Marriage*. Accessed March 9, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/same-sex-marriage>.

churches can use to assess their inclusivity and the areas where such tools fall short as effective measures of inclusivity in the Church.

Chapter 3 will provide the theoretical framework for this research. The chapter will explore the role and influence of psychology, theology, queer theory, and ethnography in guiding and framing the author and the author's research.

Chapter 4 will outline the research design, discussing the qualitative, phenomenological, and ethnographic methodologies used in the study. Chapter 4 will also report on the research sample and participants, data collection methods, data analysis, and the research's validity and reliability. It will summarize efforts to maintain research integrity and produce a scientifically and academically acceptable research paper. It will end by describing each step of the research process. The chapter will end by providing the initial results from the data gathering.

Chapter 5 will provide in-depth observation and thematic analysis using a hermeneutic approach to the data. The researcher will begin with initial observations of the inclusivity of FCCAK and then explore how the research does or does not support those initial observations. I will present recommendations, significant findings, and possible applications of the data within the Church and throughout society, including the author's hope for future research on the topic.

The "Congregation Inclusivity in Practice" assessment tool is presented at the end of this thesis as a separate and different work within this research. The tool provides a step-by-step process, presented in five short chapters, for any church to use as a guide as they journey through the discernment process of becoming an inclusive congregation.

CHAPTER 2.

BACKGROUND

The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches and Homosexuality

The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) was formed over 60 years ago in opposition to the 1955 merger between the Congregational Christian Church and the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The individual congregational churches that opposed the merger believed it marked the beginning of another denomination. The opposing churches believed it diluted congregational independence, identity, values, polity, and purpose. The primary argument against the merger that would establish the United Church of Christ (UCC) was the loss of local church independence to the UCC bureaucracy.³⁶ The opposing churches “recognized no spiritual hierarchy from people to priests to bishops.”³⁷ and “formed, in part, to ensure the continuation of this core Congregational principle, local church autonomy.”³⁸

Theologically and doctrinally, the NACCC is a diverse association, with each local congregation free to develop its own set of beliefs. “There is no creed or statement of faith that is required for membership in the NACCC”.³⁹ This means that as an organization, the NACCC does not officially take a stand on any issue, including gender and human sexuality. With the local church free to develop its own doctrine regarding issues surrounding human sexuality and gender, there is no guarantee that LGBTQI2S individuals may find a welcome at a congregational church in North America, but should the local church wish to they may ordain a

³⁶ National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. “About Us: The Congregational Way”, *Internet Archive*, Accessed Nov 9, 2025.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130121001415/http://www.naccc.org/AboutUs/CongregationalWay.aspx>

³⁷ Arthur Rouner. *The Congregational Way of Life*, Milwaukee, WI: Hammersmith-Breithaupt, 1972, p. 4.

³⁸ Elizabeth Mauro. *The Art and Practice of the Congregational Way: A Church Guide*, Oak Creek, WI: National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, 2019, p 10.

³⁹ Elizabeth Mauro. *The Art and Practice of the Congregational Way: A Church Guide*, p 23.

queer minister, bless a lesbian union or marriage, or hold a renaming ceremony for a trans individual. Many congregational churches throughout the United States of America are LGBTQI2S friendly and have long histories of being welcoming to those whom most mainstream denominations would exclude; one such congregation is First Congregational Church of Anchorage.

First Congregational Church of Anchorage and Homosexuality

First Congregational Church of Anchorage (FCCA) is affiliated with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC). FCCA is a Congregational church in Anchorage, Alaska, and exists to be a progressive church that preaches the inclusive love of God and offers an alternative to the right-wing and conservative Christian voice in Anchorage. FCCA was founded in 1960 and grew from four people to over 150 in its first year. FCCA is an independent, non-denominational, self-governing church with associations with the Interfaith Council of Anchorage, California West Association of Christian Congregational Churches (Cal-West), the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, and member 1700 of the Open and Affirming organization of the United Church of Christ.

It was once a large and thriving congregation, known for its distinctive architecture and its welcoming policy toward marrying mixed-race couples. Today, some of the original members are still active congregants, although the church is much smaller, and most of its members are over the age of sixty-five and retired.

FCCA mirrors the current decline in church attendance, membership, and donations currently being experienced by many churches throughout the USA. According to Pew Research, since 2007, the number of adults who identify as Protestant has dropped from 51 percent to 46 percent, while the number of adults who identify as Catholic has dropped from almost 24 percent

to just over 20 percent.⁴⁰ Between 2009 and 2019, those who attended church monthly or more dropped from 52 percent to 45 percent.⁴¹

Throughout its history, the FCCAK has had several gay members; I am one such member. Most queer members of FCCAK have been active participants and contributors to the life of the church who have held lay leadership positions, although same gender loving individuals have always been in the minority, with 99 percent of the members being heterosexual. I have been a member of FCCAK since 2016 and have served the church as Interim Senior Minister from 2016 to 2017, Locum Minister in 2022, Interim Senior Minister from 2023 to 2024, and Senior Minister from 2024 to the present.

In 2024, FCCAK installed its first gay senior minister. The fact that FCCAK had chosen and called their first gay minister was not the topic of conversation one may have imagined twenty years ago; it seemed as though some folk had forgotten about it altogether. In 2020 and 2021, the church went through a discernment process and voted to become an Open and Affirming congregation. At an informational meeting where the author of this research shared with the members of FCCAK a summary of the research proposal, several people in attendance were not aware that a discernment process had taken place.⁴²

The Ministers of First Congregational Church of Anchorage and Homosexuality

In August 1960, Bob and Agnes Hampton ran a notice in the Anchorage newspaper seeking people interested in forming a church in the Congregational Way. At about the same time, they also made the acquaintance of Dr. Howell Davies, then Secretary-Treasurer of the

⁴⁰ Pew Research Center. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." *Pew Research Center*, October 17, 2019.

⁴¹ Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace."

⁴² Unknown speaker (attendee), in conversation with the author during a Zoom Information Session on this research, December 10, 2024. First Congregational Church of Anchorage.

Mission Board of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. Dr. Davies had been granted \$1,000 by his former church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, to go to Alaska to see about establishing a new church. Dr. Davies came to Anchorage on August 14th and met with the founding group of five individuals. Three days later, on August 17th, First Congregational Christian Church of Anchorage officially became a church, and founding members Bob Hampton and Carol Tisdell were elected moderator and secretary, respectively.

In 1961, FCCAK called their first minister, the Rev. Gerry Churchill, a graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary, from Redlands, California. Rev. Churchill served as minister until 1964. During his tenure, Rev. Churchill helped prepare the way for the building of a permanent church home. In 1965, the church called Rev. David Carmen, who saw it through its building phase. The building was completed in 1967, and Rev. Howard Conn gave the first sermon. Rev. Carmen remained until 1969.

In 1970, the Rev. Gerry Churchill returned to the pulpit, where he remained until 1975, when Rev. Don Lindsay became the senior minister. Rev. Lindsay was heavily involved in the community. He was a coach, a chaplain for the National Guard, a therapist, and the choir director. Rev. Lindsay officiated at and allowed mixed-race couples to be married at FCCAK when no other churches in Anchorage would, keeping Rev. Lindsay very busy during the summer months. Rev. Lindsay saw the church grow with many young families. Members included many highly educated, highly trained community and industry leaders. This paved the way for a more open and accepting approach when it came to dealing with those who would be considered different and of alternative relationships or sexualities. Rev. Lindsay also led the church through the difficult time that followed the church mysteriously burning down in the middle of the night in 1982. Several rumors exist about what or who started the fire, including an

unextinguished cigarette left behind in a classroom, a member of a wedding party who kicked a cigarette into the basement, and more. After the church was rebuilt, Rev. Lindsay retired in 1985.

From 1985 to 1986 Rev. Robert Young was the senior minister, and his tenure would see FCCAK experience its first major church conflict. Rev. Young proved to be more conservative than the progressive congregation that had grown under Rev. Lindsay. Rev. Young left after a congregational vote on whether he should remain was won by a very slim majority. Rev. Young considered all people wretched and sinners until baptized. When Rev. Young left, the church experienced its first church split.

The Rev. Elizabeth Bingham came to the church in 1987 and served until 1992, when she was called as Sr. Minister for Pilgrim Congregational Church in Pomona, California. Rev. Beth Bingham would officiate at the first same-sex wedding at FCCAK, with the congregation's full support. Rev. Bingham was approached by a lesbian couple who asked if they could be married at the church. Rev. Bingham agreed but decided that she needed the support of the congregation. The next Sunday, during the church announcements, Rev. Bingham announced that she was going to be holding a lesbian wedding in the coming week, asking for folks who were concerned to speak with her. The wedding was successfully held, with many members of the church in attendance to show their support.

From January 1993 to June 1994 Rev. John Bury was the Senior minister of FCCAK, and his tenure was as short as Rev. Young's. There are none who can recall why Rev. Bury's tenure was so short. Though there is a story that mentions a minister of the church who was forced to resign due to losing a leg in a boating accident in Seward, although no one can remember who the minister was.

Rev. Bury was followed by the Revs Rick and Mary Koch, who came in the summer of 1994 to share the senior minister position. Revs Koch adopted several children from Russia during their tenure, and many members of the church followed suit. This could be one reason FCCAK has become very open to non-traditional families. In 2005, the Revs Koch left to pursue other opportunities – Rick in the Alaska National Guard and Mary with Providence Hospital as a chaplain. Although the Kochs had a long tenure at the church, their departure was contentious, with several families leaving at the same time.

Rev. Mark E. Long was called to First Congregational Church in January of 2006 and served through June 2010. His time was not especially contentious, and his leaving was not considered very dramatic. However, being a single man who preached about his relationship woes from the pulpit was a little too personal for the members of the church, particularly for those who were once young parents with children but now older grandparents experiencing divorces and other relationship or familial worries.

In February 2011, members called Rev. George Edward Blair III to be the Senior minister. Rev. Blair began his ministry in the church in July 2011 and served until April 2016. Rev. Blair, originally a lawyer from New Jersey, was passionate about acting and, as such, had friends within the gay community. A result of these friendships was Rev. Blair becoming involved in the gay community of Anchorage and preaching or leading at several Anchorage Pride services, where he often spoke about having a bisexual family member. Interestingly, while members of the FCCAK knew that Rev. Blair supported several Anchorage Pride events, they did not know the extent of his involvement, including preaching at several high-profile events.

It was during Rev. Blair's time at FCCAK that Rev. Johnathan Jones, the author of this thesis, an openly gay minister who often spoke during the Anchorage Interfaith Council Annual

Thanksgiving Eve Service hosted by FCCAK, began leading worship when Rev. Blair was on leave. The first sermon Rev. Jones preached was his coming out story, titled “Keep on Swimming.” Rev. Jones preached for forty-five minutes, keeping the congregation engaged and leaving a lasting impression. When Rev. Blair resigned, Rev. Jones was asked to preach the very first Sunday after Rev. Blair’s departure.

Rev. Johnathan Jones first led the church as the interim senior minister, guiding the congregation through the transition from July 2016 to July 2017 as they searched for a senior minister. This was the first time an openly gay man led the church, while many members welcomed him and were excited by his ministry, several had reservations. Some of the individuals shared their reservations, and others simply left, some returning when Rev. Jones left, while others did not return at all. Departing members shared several different reasons for their leaving during Rev. Jones’s tenure, including the belief that the bible declares homosexuality to be sinful, others left because they felt the wider Anchorage community would think the church was becoming too gay, while others acknowledged they just felt uncomfortable with having a gay minister. Several new people started attending the church and later joined the church because they either knew Rev. Jones, had heard about him through his work in the Anchorage queer community, or his work as the previous senior minister of Metropolitan Community Church Anchorage, a predominantly LGBT congregation.

In July 2017, Rev. Jacob Poindexter was called as the senior minister and served until February 2022, when he was called to Wichita UCC; a return to his home state of Kansas and close to family. Rev. Poindexter was very passionate about social justice and actively sought to include members of the Anchorage queer community in the life of the church. This included having a gay couple as greeters and a former Southern Baptist trans person as a pulpit fill.

Pertinent to the research of this paper Rev. Poindexter led FCCAK through the process of becoming an Open and Affirming Congregation.

With the departure of Rev. Poindexter, Rev. Jones returned to lead the congregation first as the locum senior minister and then as the interim senior minister. In September 2024, Rev. Doug Gray (senior minister of First Congregational Church Salt Lake City) officially installed Rev. Johnathan Jones as the senior minister of First Congregational Church of Anchorage.

The Open and Affirming Coalition

The Open and Affirming Coalition (ONA) is a voluntary coalition of mostly United Church of Christ (UCC) congregations, para-ministries, and other church organizations that advocate for the full inclusion of all people in the life of the church, including those of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.⁴³ The Open and Affirming Coalition has been in existence since 1972 and describes itself as a “spur to the conscience of the United Church of Christ denomination, the Church, and the world”.⁴⁴ FCCAK began the process of becoming a member of the Open and Affirming Coalition in 2019, and in 2020, the members of the church officially voted to become member #1700 of the Open and Affirming Coalition.

The discernment process included a series of workshops discussing what it means to be Open and Affirming, specifically around welcoming lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, and intersex people. The author was fortunate enough to teach one of the workshops titled “Queer Theology 101”. One of the main topics discussed during the discernment process was the definition of inclusive. Many argued that inclusive meant the inclusion of more than just LGBTQ individuals, but rather meant the inclusion of all people, that is, people from all walks of

⁴³ National Setting of the United Church of Christ, *Open and Affirming in the UCC*. 2024. Accessed Nov 7, 2025. https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/wider-church-ministries/gsjm/lgbtqia/lgbt_ona/

⁴⁴National Setting of the United Church of Christ, *Open and Affirming in the UCC*.

life, people of different colors, races, nationalities, denominations, religions, and people of all shapes and sizes, family backgrounds, immigration status, and even family structure and genetic make-up. The members of the congregation agreed that all such people were welcome at FCCAK, but they didn't agree that their inclusion was specifically what being Open and Affirming indicated. To this day, debate continues over what it means to be an inclusive church.

Church Profile

The following are excerpts from a church profile of First Congregational Church of Anchorage, along with other relevant details about the church. The original and complete church profile can be seen in Appendix A.

Location

Located in the popular UMED district (university and medical), there are plenty of churches within a one-mile radius. Church neighbors include St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Roger's Park United Methodist Church, St Mary's Episcopal Church, First Christian Church, Open Door Baptist Church, Greater Friendship Baptist Church, Grandview (American) Baptist Church, North Anchorage Church of God (Assemblies of God), and University Baptist Church.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

We speak these words so we remember that caring for this small corner of the Earth has been the sacred honor and purpose of the Dena'ina Athabascans for uncounted centuries. As a faith community, we owe a debt of gratitude to our Dena'ina neighbors for the beauty of this Ełnena where we gather to worship. We acknowledge that the ground on which our church is built was taken away from them and yet remains their ancestral homeland. With these words we pledge to join with our Dena'ina neighbors and live on this land because all our children's futures matter, and because all our lives depend on it.

Our Church Covenant

We covenant with You, God, and with one another, and do bind ourselves in Your presence, to walk together in all Your ways, according as You are pleased to reveal Yourself unto us in Your blessed Word of Truth. (Adapted from the Salem Church Covenant, 1629).

Vision Statement

The vision of FCCAK is to become a place where our freedom of faith supports community in a spirit of fellowship.

Mission

First Congregational Church of Anchorage is an open and affirming Christian community joining together in service as people learning, growing, and acting in faith. In the spirit of Jesus, we commit ourselves to justice and equity by welcoming and celebrating a diversity of age, ability, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, family circumstance, socio-economic status, and national origin. As an inclusive congregation, we seek to be a safe place to grow, free from judgment, where wounds can heal, and differences can expand our understanding. We invite all who are searching for God's presence in their lives to worship with us. We welcome you to participate in the life, ministry, and leadership of the church.

Church Motto

Guided by love, open to all.

Affiliations

- First Congregational Church of Anchorage is a member of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC).
- First Congregational Church of Anchorage is Member #1700 of the Open and Affirming Coalition, which is a ministry of the United Church of Christ

- Western California Congregational Churches
- Interfaith Council of Anchorage

FCCA Structure and Governance

- The Congregation (church members) make all significant decisions, including approval of annual budgets, and the election of the Senior Minister. They elect the Church Moderator (the chair of the Church Council), the Board of Trustees, and the chairs of each ministry (which compose the Church Council).
- The Church Council is responsible for supervising the Senior Minister, for pastoral care, visioning, worship, education, and social events. They also create ad-hoc committees, e.g. communications committee.
- The Board of Trustees manages the finances, legal affairs, and properties of the church. Including the purchase and sale of assets and properties, Entering into and ending contracts, wages, hiring and firing of all staff and vendors, and the annual review of the Senior Minister.
- The Senior Minister is the direct supervisor of all staff, oversees the daily operation of the church, and oversees all spiritual matters of the church in consultation with the Church Council. Plans worship and other events of the church in consultation with the Church Council.
- The Sounding Board is the mediator for any grievances, complaints, or internal conflict.

Ministries and Activities of the Church

Worship Ministry

- Sunday Worship and Deacons
- Oversee church seasonal decoration

- Responsible for pulpit fills
- Provide guidance to the minister
- Responsible for greeters, acolytes, liturgists
 - Music Ministry and Senior Minister
 - Supervise music staff
 - Northern Lights Ringers (Bell Choir)
 - Chancel Choir
 - Organist
 - Soloists
 - Special performances and events
 - Annual Thanksgiving Eve Service (with the Anchorage Interfaith Council)

Fellowship Ministry

- Potlucks
- Church functions and gatherings
- Picnics
- Progressive Dinners
- New Members
- Guest Speakers
- Movie Nights and Game Nights (initiated via the Senior Minister and later adopted by the Fellowship Ministry)

Outreach Ministry

- Kinship Brunch with Volunteers of America
- Friends in Serving Humanity Together

- Gathering items for the Anchorage Thanksgiving Blessing
- Gathering items for non-profits (focus on refugees and homeless)
- Covenant House (homeless shelter for youth)
- These Two Hands – emerging ministry feeding the homeless and providing cold weather gear

Life and Learning

- Sunday School
- Nursery
- Youth Group
- Library

Soup Group

- Social group
- Gathers weekly for lunch
- Decorates the social hall
- No official leader
- Not an official ministry and has no representation on the Church Council
- An unofficial small group

Property Rental

- Fa'avae Fou Congregational Church (UCC Islander Congregation)
- Hospice of Anchorage
- AA Groups
- Last Frontier Pipes and Drums

- Ole Bell Classes
- University of Alaska Anchorage, Alaska Native Cooking Class and YouTube Show
- General Public

Board Of Trustees

- Chairperson
- Vice Chair
- Treasurer
- Deputy Treasurer
- Clerk
- Two ordinary members

Staff

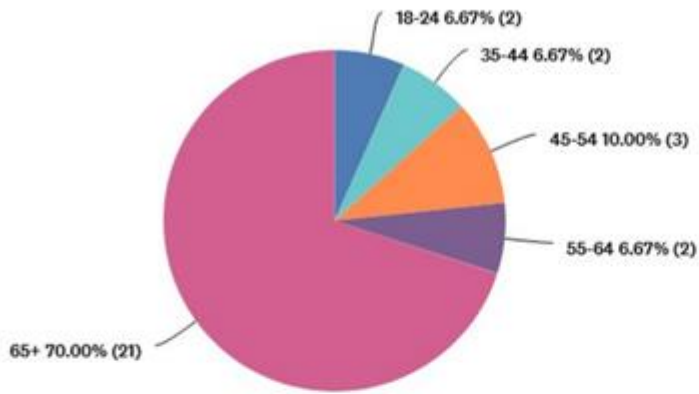
- Senior Minister
- Organist
- Choir Director
- Bell Choir Director
- Church Secretary
- Janitorial/Cleaning (contractor)
- Wedding Coordinator

Demographics

FIGURE A. What is your age? (The ages of FCCAK members)

What is your age?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 5

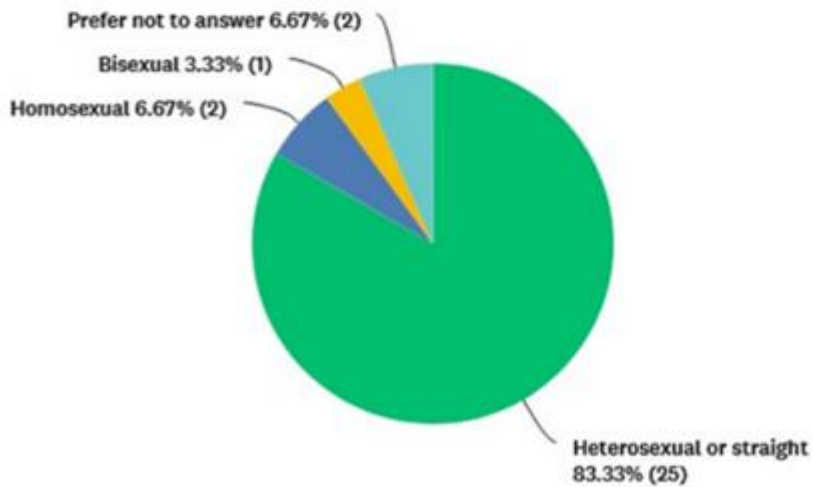


FCC AK Pastoral Search Church Survey

FIGURE B. Do you consider yourself to be? (The sexual orientation of FCCAK members)

Do you consider yourself to be:

Answered: 30 Skipped: 5

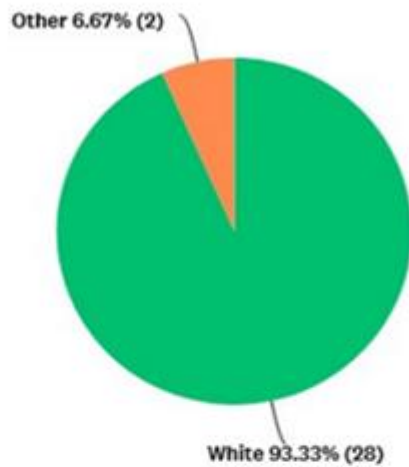


FCC AK Pastoral Search Church Survey

FIGURE C. Are you? (The race of FCCAK members)

Are you:

Answered: 30 Skipped: 5

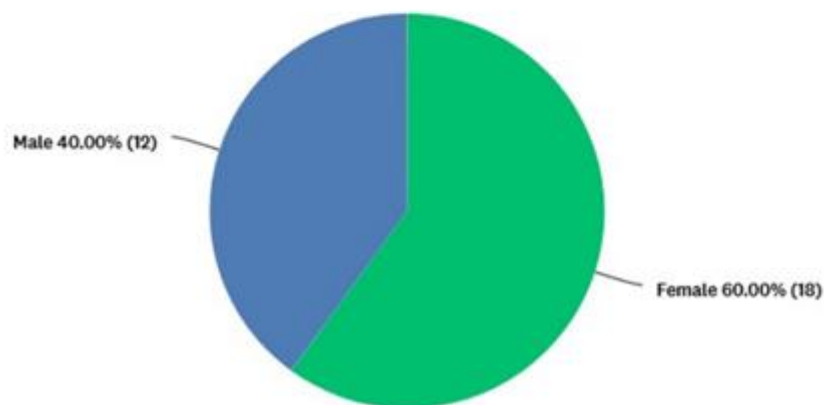


FCC AK Pastoral Search Church Survey

FIGURE D. What is your gender? (The gender of FCCAK members)

What is your gender?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 5



FCC AK Pastoral Search Church Survey

The Author

My social location places me in an advantageous position for studying the church and elucidating on its history with sexual minorities. The many intersections of my life make ethnographic research the most obvious choice utilizing queer methodologies. As a gay man who had been in the Church since the age of thirteen, I am a definite insider. However, after coming out at the age of twenty-one, I found myself ostracized from the only faith community I had ever known. While I have never been welcomed back, nor have I felt the urge to go back, I have discovered a new church home- several in fact. My social location allows me to explore what it means when discussing an inclusive church community and to provide the characteristics of its opposite.

I first attended FCCAK in November of 2004 for the Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Eve Service. Over the next ten years I would be an occasional substitute preacher and developed a relationship as a recurring pulpit fill with the members of FCCAK. In 2016 I was invited to apply for their position of interim senior minister. I served the church as interim senior minister from July 2016 to September 2017, during that time I became a member of the church and have remained an active participant in the life of the congregation since. I was the locum minister during 2022, interim senior minister from 2023 to 2024, and senior minister from September 2024 to present. I was a presenter at several roundtable discussions the congregation held during their discernment process to become an Open and Affirming congregation and I have journeyed with them as they explored welcoming queer folks. This is the perfect situation for auto-ethnographic research on the inclusive Christian Church.

My education also provides advantages for the topic of church and sexual inclusivity. I earned a bachelor's degree in theology from Sydney College of Divinity in 2003 and after a

twenty-year break from formal academics, I earned my master's degree in applied psychology with a concentration in sexuality and gender studies. Over the past 25 years I have preached, presented, or lectured, on homosexuality and religion at universities, churches, high schools, and even cruise ships. I have seen the wider Church struggle with welcoming its queer members, and I have firsthand experience of being both welcomed and excluded by the Church.

The Author as a Person of Faith

I am a first generation Australian, who immigrated to the United States of America in 2004, and now lives in Anchorage, Alaska. Both my parents were immigrants to Australia; my mother was born in Germany, though raised in Australia from an early age and my father was Lebanese. My biological father did not raise me; I was raised by a white man who had the name Jones. My mother was an alcoholic, and we had a very violent home. I am the eldest in my family, and I am the only one to finish high school and to go to college. I am the first of my siblings to travel internationally and have lived in Sydney, Singapore, Scotland, and Alaska.

I became a Christian at the age of thirteen because I saw a loving family the first time I went to church. Coming from a broken and abusive family; I wanted love. Augustine's *Imago Dei* has been core to my faith, as is Romans 8:38, "nothing can separate us from the love of God". My mission is to love my neighbor.

At the age of eighteen my pastor told me I should not have a girlfriend, either be single or married, married preferably. Six weeks later I married my high school girlfriend. On our honeymoon I realized I was gay. This was the worst thing I could ever imagine happening to me. I fell into a deep depression and spent my days praying for forgiveness and healing. I believed I was going to hell. I started seeing a Christian therapist and joined a reparative therapy group to be healed from my homosexual tendencies. A year later my wife and I separated.

I came out as gay at the age of twenty-one and at the age of twenty-three—after earning a bachelor’s degree in theology from Sydney College of Divinity—I was ordained a minister of Word and Sacrament at the Metropolitan Community Church of Sydney. I am an openly gay minister and proud of it. I am politically and theologically liberal yet liturgically conservative. I am very liberal in my thoughts around human sexuality and theology; I believe that sex is a gift from God and should be celebrated. Bradley Braxton summarizes my theology as a person of faith best, “I am an unapologetic and unorthodox progressive.”⁴⁵

My motto as a minister is, “Blessed are the flexible, for they will not be bent out of shape.” Flexibility is essential for leadership, Mikayla Wilkins writes that good leaders understand “the importance of empathy, flexibility, and adaptability in leadership.”⁴⁶ Rebecca Knight, writing in the *Harvard Business Review* notes, “Research suggests that the most effective leaders adapt their styles to different circumstances”.⁴⁷ Equally as important as adaption is the ability to listen and empathize, especially as a leader in the public square. Judith Butler argues that it is being vulnerable that can bridge the gap between differences. "Vulnerability is not a weakness to be concealed, but a shared condition that, when recognized, becomes a site of sociality."⁴⁸ Vulnerability is more than just bringing people together; vulnerability is a fundamental tool in being relatable and authentic as a leader in the public ministry and the public square.

⁴⁵ Bradley Braxton, “*Open. Unorthodox thoughts on God and Community*”, Fortress Press, Minneapolis. 2023. Kindle Edition, location 87.

⁴⁶ Mikayla Wilkins, “Embracing Diversity: Lessons from ‘Hidden Figures’”, *Leadership PSYCH 485 Blog*, April 15, 2024. Accessed Oct 9, 2024. <https://sites.psu.edu/leadership/2024/04/15/embracing-diversity-lessons-from-hidden-figures/>

⁴⁷ Rebecca Knight, “Six Common Leadership Styles and How to Decide When to Use Them”, *Harvard Business Review*, April 6, 2024. Accessed Oct 10, 2024. <https://hbr.org/2024/04/6-common-leadership-styles-and-how-to-decide-which-to-use-when>

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

The Author as Writer

Pearl Cleage clearly outlines the reason why she writes, and it has inspired me to do the same. Cleage declares, “I am writing to expose and explore”.⁴⁹ Cleage challenges me to think about the real reason that I write. It is easy for me to think that the reason I write is because I want to further my career, discover other sources of income, perhaps gain a level of fame. At other times I am prompted to think that the reason I write is because I need to complete my thesis, or because I need to write to have a sermon to preach every Sunday. Cleage challenges me to think about the reasons why I started writing the very first time.

I started to write because I felt the need to explain what it felt like to be gay and Christian. To expose the homophobia that existed in the church and to expose a lot of the hypocrisy I saw. I struggled to understand how people could love me yet hate something that I was and something that I felt. I struggled because hating something that I did felt to me like hating me. Over time my confusion and the need to expose the hypocrisy I saw in the Church transformed into a desire to inspire the people of the Church to become more loving. Instead of exposing, I began exploring. Exploring the love of God and the various ways that God’s love can not only be felt by, but also expressed, by the people of the Church.

This thesis is an effort to discover how the Church has shifted in its treatment and inclusion of LGBTQI2S people. Has the Church become more inclusive of people like me in the last twenty years or is it still the same, or even worse, more exclusive than it was sixty or eighty years ago? Is the Church expressing the love of God for the whole world, as described in John 3:16, or is the Church hiding the love of God and denying all people a place in the Body of Christ?

⁴⁹ Pearl Cleage, *Deals with the Devil and Other Reasons to Riot* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 7.

Literature Review

The Church on Gender and Sex

Over the past two thousand years, the Christian Church has undoubtedly been the most powerful and influential religious, political, and cultural power to exist. To this day, even though its influence has been greatly diminished over the past five hundred years, the church continues to assert influence and control over human morality and action, including human sexuality and how we understand gender. A brief overview of how the Church has understood gender, how that understanding has excluded those who did not understand gender the way the Church did, and how the Church has taught generation after generation of faithful adherents to hate their own selves, will reveal the necessity for the modern-day church to assess its inclusivity of those it has previously actively excluded.

The Church has for two millennia upheld and promoted a dual understanding of gender. That is, God created Adam and Eve, male and female (Genesis 1). There is no other gender, gender identity, or gender expression. This dual understanding can be found deep within the dogma and doctrine of the Church; it permeates all levels of theology, worship, and faithful living. There are many patriarchal and misogynistic beliefs and practices that exist in the Church, that result in harm and hurt.⁵⁰

The role of gender in the Church is easy to see, as is the way the Church used gender to reinforce and perpetuate its power and privilege; power and privilege that continues to be used today. Examples of how the gender binary is used by the Church include the Church's insistence that God is male. God's masculinity promotes and allows the argument against female priests,

⁵⁰Gayle Rubin. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Culture, Society and Sexuality : A Reader*, (Eds) Aggleton, P. & Parker, R. London, Routledge, 1999.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/adler/detail.action?docID=165449>

bishops, and popes. Man as the first created is used to promote the supremacy of men. This supremacy is found in worship; women must wear their heads covered and are not permitted to teach. Male supremacy is also found in the family unit; women are to submit to and make themselves appealing for their husbands.

Every single Christian (and many of those who are not Christian) have prayed the prayer that was taught by Jesus. It is known as the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father and traditionally begins with the words "Our Father"; the gospel of Luke 11 simply has "Father". The final sentence to the prayer added after the writing of the Gospels, similarly references God as masculine, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit".

The "Our Father" is most often the first prayer that new converts, and children raised in Christian homes, learn. From the very beginning of one's faith journey the idea of God as masculine is taught and reinforced. The absence of any feminine divine adds to the understanding of God as masculine, thus reinforcing patriarchal power and privilege. Furthermore, women are excluded from the priesthood, and thus any power, privilege, or position that could benefit women. This is further reinforced by excluding priests from marriage. A priest cannot be married as a woman will distract him and so inhibit his ability to perform his duties. This further reinforces the powerlessness and demonization of anything feminine or not male.

The Church's effort at demonizing the feminine has produced damaging outcomes. The Church was not content to simply eliminate feminine narratives but made the feminine the main villain in its very first story. Misogyny is promoted by placing the blame for sin, through the eating of the forbidden fruit, at the feet of Eve. Original sin, the need to procreate yetl not the

ability to control the urges of that need, is the result of Eve's desire for knowledge and willful disobedience of God's command.⁵¹

The Church has taught that not only are there two genders in the world but has also taught that one was holy and the other was evil. When it comes to gender non-conformity, that is, another gender outside of male or female, none exist in the biblical texts or in the list of saints. This has resulted in the church becoming an organization that holds "restrictively normative concepts of sexual and gendered life".⁵²

The Church has reinforced and continues to promote a society and culture that is fundamentally at odds with its own being. "The Christian West, notoriously, has seen in sex a terrain of moral anguish and conflict, setting up an enduring dualism between the spirit and the flesh, the mind and the body".⁵³ For those in the West the human body, gender, sex, and sexuality was the necessity that resulted in procreation, especially so (and because of) the Catholic Church.⁵⁴

For those who do not fit the prescribed restrictive normative gender roles there was, on the surface at least, no place for them. There was no place not only in the Church but in society at large for those who did not identify with their biological sex. The Church has created a dual and conflicting meaning to gender and sexuality, which has led to the unfortunate and inevitable result of creating a cultural configuration which disavows the human body while at the very same time being obsessively preoccupied with it.⁵⁵

⁵¹ BBC Teach. "What Is the Real Story of the Garden of Eden." *BBC News*, 2022.
<https://toybox.tools.bbc.co.uk/activities>.

⁵² Judith Butler. *Undoing gender*. 2004. Taylor & Francis Group.

⁵³ Jeffrey Weeks. *Sexuality*. 2nd ed. 2003. London: Routledge. ProQuest Ebook Central.
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>.

⁵⁴ Weeks, *Sexuality*.

⁵⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

This hatred of the self has led to dire consequences for those who do not or cannot conform to the restrictive normative rules of the Church. Judith Butler highlights that this has been the cause of many young people taking their own lives.⁵⁶ The topic of gender, and the theories surrounding it, has two or more distinct understandings. From Michel Foucault's understanding of gender and sexuality as being a historical event,⁵⁷ to the Changed Movement's insistence on traditional, biological, and biblical gender roles ([www.changed movement.org](http://www.changedmovement.org)). The differences in thought pose a very interesting academic discourse. Unfortunately, the outcomes of such discourse are not purely academic and are, often, played out in the daily lives of ordinary people. The unfortunate and deadly reality is that the Church continues to promote hatred of body and sexuality, with alarming and lethal consequences. It provides a clearly frightening picture of how the Church continues to reinforce its own privilege and power by promoting the masculine and heterosexual at the deadly expense of anything other.

The Church's hatred of sex and sexuality, combined with its strict adherence to sexual inhibition, is contrary to what one would find within the canon of scripture. The Christian canon of Scripture has many stories of human sexuality and relationships; furthermore these stories fail to adhere to the official doctrine of the Church. Alternative sexualities throughout history are evident. One can look through any history book and discover exceptions to the rule. It is not hard to find anomalies or once-in-a-million discoveries in science, biology, or geology. The world is abundant in diversity and difference. While modern day science and thought indicate that difference is abnormal, a study of any other time or place will reveal that sameness is the outlier.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

⁵⁷ Jennings, 2022, The Anglican split: why has sexuality become so important to conservative Christians? *Vox*, <https://vox.divinity.edu.au/opinion/the-anglican-split-why-has-sexuality-become-so-important-to-conservative-christians/>

Sameness throughout history and outside of modernity is in scarce supply. The history books, and the story of humanity, are littered with the tales of the extraordinary and the exceptional.

The history of human sexuality and relationships is no different. Much has been said about heterosexuality in modern academia, discourse, politics, religion, and media. Yet it is worth noting that heterosexuality and homosexuality are relative newcomers when placed within a much broader and wider timeframe. It was not until the 1800s that homosexuality, and as a by-product, heterosexuality as words and as concepts were even considered. Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the term in 1868 in Germany and spoke it in public a year later.⁵⁸

If homosexuality and heterosexuality are only recent inventions, as argued by Jonathan Ned Katz, what was human sexuality prior to their invention?⁵⁹ It may seem an unlikely place to look for evidence of human sexuality; however, the Christian Bible contains several stories of human relationships that were sexual in nature. A quick summary of the relationships found in the Biblical text, along with the main characters, and the purpose of the text (or moral of the story), all reveal and affirm the argument of a diverse human sexuality throughout history.

Examples of alternative relationships besides the monogamous and heterosexual norm we know today include the polygamous King Solomon, who loved many women and had many wives, as found in 1 Kings 11. There is the triad relationship between Abraham, his barren wife Sarah, and their bed maid (sex slave) Haggai, who provided their sons, found in Genesis 16. Genesis 19: 30 -38 provides the story of the two daughters of Lot who manage to get their father drunk and then have sex with him to produce offspring. The book of Hebrews lists Rahab as model of faith,⁶⁰ yet the Babylonian Talmud says the very mention of the name Rahab causes

⁵⁸ Amin Ghaziani. "The Reinvention of Heterosexuality." *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 17, no. 3 (May–June, 2010): 27-29, <https://glreview.org/article/reinvention-of-heterosexuality>.

⁵⁹ Jonathan Ned Katz, "The Invention of Heterosexuality." *Socialist Review* 20 (January–March 1990): 7–34.

⁶⁰ Hebrews 11:31

arousal.⁶¹ This is a very sexualized portrayal of a hero of the Jewish people. It is important to note that none of these individuals, nor their relationships, are condemned in the sacred texts.

Relationships between those of the same gender can also be found in the Bible. The two most famous examples included David and Jonathan, and Naomi and Ruth. The first example is found in 1 Samuel. Chapters 18 to 20 tell the story of David and Jonathan, who were naked together and would not be separated. David and Jonathan made promises to each other because “Jonathan loved David as much as he loved himself” (1 Samuel 20:17). David and Jonathan kissed each other” (1 Samuel 20: 41). In the end after Jonathan died David cried, “My love for you was wonderful, more wonderful than the love of any woman”. 2 Samuel 1:26.

The other example of same-gender love is found in the book of Ruth. Naomi makes the following promise;

But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” (Ruth 1:16-17)

These scriptures have long been used by biblical scholars as evidence of same-sex relationships in the biblical text.⁶² As such, they are ideal examples of alternative relationships that have existed throughout history. The world is diverse. So too is its history.

⁶¹ Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 15a.

⁶² Neel Burton. “Same-Sex Relations in the Bible.” *Psychology Today*, November 2017.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-and-see/201711/same-sex-relations-in-the-bible>

CHAPTER 3.
METHODOLOGY

Worldview

Judith Butler's concept of *critique* as a means of establishing a more inclusive environment where life can flourish, while at the same time resisting the pressures to assimilate, resonates with me.⁶³ As Cody Sanders explains, not all queer people of faith feel the need for a departure from the Church, and some may go on to fashion new modes of being people of faith.⁶⁴ I am one of those people; I have taken great pride in rebuilding my faith in such a way that out of the pain and depression of rejection, I found a God and faith of all-inclusive love. I associate with the phoenix who burns into ashes and then out of the ashes rises again to take flight and flourish.

When I came out, I lost everything. My home, my car, my friends, my work, my ministry, my sense of pride. I lost my health and became physically ill. For six months, I lived in a room in a hostel and did nothing but eat, sleep, and watch the same depressing movie over and over. I was miserable because I had lost everything, including my faith. I realized that if I valued my faith so much, I needed to rescue my faith. I was not being arrogant in such thinking- I just knew that there was more to God than the conditional, judgmental, rejecting, and hateful God I had been shown. I felt very much like Thomas in the book *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide, and the*

⁶³ Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge, 2006.

⁶⁴ Cody J. Sanders, *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide, and the Souls of Queer Folk: Emerging Perspectives in Pastoral Theology and Care*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), Kindle edition.

Souls of Queer Folk by Dr Sanders, “inside me, I know God loves me and outside me, I know God hates me.”⁶⁵

I began looking for the Christ present in the dirty and discarded, the Christ who existed in those people who had been rejected, just as I had been rejected. I knew that Christ could be found in the ugly, yucky, and realness of life. I knew that God loved me no matter where I was and what I did or whom I loved. And I knew that God loved others like me. By looking at myself through the eyes of God, I saw myself as beautiful, and I knew then that God loved me. Loving myself was a primitive form of Augustine’s *Imago Dei*; I loved myself because God first loved me.⁶⁶

I had, at the time, competing theological narratives, one of which was being loved and the other being unlovable. However, over time, I was able to re-see or re-write these narratives, to marry them, so that the loving Christ could be found in the unlovable. The power of the *Imago Dei*, the power of seeing myself as God sees me, allowed me to reconcile my competitive theological narratives.

Of course, at the time, I would not have been able to verbalize that; but what I could say was that God loved all of me, including the gay me.⁶⁷ Somehow, I had found that place where I could explore being a gay Christian without assimilating and losing the gay part of me. I could be gay, I could be Johnathan, and I could be a loved child of God. My theological narrative allowed me to rewrite my understanding of God in such a way that it became life-sustaining and would form my vocational journey, becoming the defining reason for writing this thesis. God

⁶⁵ Cody J. Sanders, *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide, and the Souls of Queer Folk: Emerging Perspectives in Pastoral Theology and Care*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), Kindle edition.

⁶⁶ St Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity* Books 8-15, Ed. Gareth B. Matthews. University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Cambridge University Press, 2002. Book 8, Chapter 7.

⁶⁷ Johnathan Jones, “God Loves the Gay Me,” in *When Our Children Come Out*, ed. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (Place: Publisher, Year), [page range].

loves all of us because we are God’s creation, created in God’s image, and as declared in the very first chapter of the Old Testament, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”⁶⁸

Ontology and Epistemology

The author recognizes that both gender and religion are social constructs and not universal truths. Wilcox writes, “To understand the concept of religion as a social construct is to understand that the idea of religion as a universally shared, identifiable, and comparable aspect of human culture is invented.”⁶⁹ My reality is based upon how I interpret and understand my lived experiences. Therefore, the meaning and value I give to my lived experiences as they relate to those around me reveal a reality shaped by social constructs. The meaning and value of those constructs are not void; they are just not universal. Wilcox further writes, “...when we say that religion, gender, or sexuality is a social construct, we don’t mean that it’s not real.”⁷⁰

I realize my research will result in a subjective research paper, which is sufficient for this research, as it will not pretend to be objective. Since I will be talking about my experience of my sexuality within my church community, it is not necessary for me to adopt an objective position. I will not suspend my beliefs to provide an objective report on how things appear.⁷¹ My work will intentionally explain my experience so that others may take what I have learned and use it to build inclusive church environments.

This research is more concerned with my own observations of my experiences with my congregation and with interpreting those observations, rather than with discovering any objective

⁶⁸ Genesis 1:31a

⁶⁹ Melissa M Wilcox. *Queer Religiosities: An Introduction to Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. Kindle edition. Location 456.

⁷⁰ Wilcox. *Queer Religiosities: An Introduction to Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion*. Location 418

⁷¹ Wilcox. *Queer Religiosities: An Introduction to Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion*. Location 474

truths. My observations will be influenced strongly by my understanding as a queer man and my desire to describe the world as I see it and not as dictated by others who have no true experience of being me. This is my story to tell. I hope that what I learn through my own experiences will be helpful for others in similar situations. My reflections will be a critique and a call to change.

This research will use thematic analysis post data collection to search for meaning from the data. Thematic analysis identifies, analyses, interprets, and reports themes within the data. For this research themes will be gleaned from the entire data set, after the corpus text has been cleaned. The data set will be made of all the data items in the corpus text that refer to the subject of this research. As Braun and Clarke note, “there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about it.”⁷²

Using the same principles of democracy, community, and belonging that Adlerian organizational psychologists use to determine the health of an organization, this research will determine just how inclusive a congregation is of LGBTQI2S people. The methodology of this research is rooted in constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. It recognizes that church inclusivity is not an objective or fixed condition, but a socially constructed reality shaped by relationships, shared meanings, leadership practices, and congregational culture. The themes present across the entire data set are not emerging themes but are rather reflections of the researcher and the subject. This research will begin with deductive thematic analysis. However, the themes gained from the data set may very well change depending on where in the self-assessment process the subject is.⁷³ Being inclusive in practice means an ongoing commitment to regular self-assessment, critical reflection, and growth. Inclusivity is not attained and placed on

⁷² Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology”, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2008, 3 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

⁷³ Braun and Clarke. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology”, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*.

the wall like a certificate; rather, it is an ever-growing reality based on the actions of the people who are the church.⁷⁴ Inclusivity is as fluid and flexible as thematic analysis is.

The practice of inclusivity is a lived experience, interpreted differently by the members within a congregation. Using Alfred Adler's principles of democracy, community, and belonging will provide a means of assessment. This framework for assessment, or Congregational Inclusivity in Practice Tool, will provide guidance for exploring participants' experiences and the interpretations of those experiences. Members will be asked to reflect on how their lived experience within the church promotes shared power, equal voice, mutual respect, authentic relationship, and genuine opportunities for creative contributions.⁷⁵

Self-assessment in this environment must involve the ability to critique oneself and to be open to the critique of others, not regardless of one's own perception but because of one's own perception. The evaluation of church practice against the Adlerian principles of democracy, community, and belonging invites a critical-normative dimension to this research.

Gathering knowledge about inclusivity through self-assessment means this research cannot rely solely on quantitative results. This research explores lived experiences, individual perceptions, and real interactions of church members to capture the complexity of church inclusivity in practice, or not. Being aware that I bring myself as a queer man, who has been an advocate for LGBTQI2S rights and have spent my career promoting inclusivity, adopting a qualitative approach allows for data to be gathered and understood through guided conversations, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic observations, assessments, and reflections.

⁷⁴ Lize Pretorius, "Demystifying Research Paradigms: Navigating Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology in Research," *The Qualitative Report*, Vol 29, no. 10 (2024): 2698–2715, <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2024.7632>.

⁷⁵ Mary C. McCluskey, "Revitalizing Alfred Adler: An Echo for Equality," *Clinical Social Work Journal*, Vol 49, no. 2 (2021): 161-171.

The overall goal of this research is to offer a constructive critique of an ancient institution that must change its practices if it wishes to remain relevant and survive in a rapidly changing world. By combining ecclesial assessment with Adlerian principles, this study will develop a strong theological basis for a new and faithful lived reality. A living reality of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* and God's Reign of Love here on Earth. This living reality, explored through the lens of Queer Theory, becomes the intersection where reconciliation between the Church and its queer members can flourish.

A queer approach to inclusive church practice does not mean a random and archaic approach to church life and polity. In many ways, a queer approach to church life is very much a Congregational approach; that is, the direction comes from within the people of the church, just as a queer approach to living comes from within the individual. Visit any Congregational church, and you will find something that you will find familiar; it may be the choir, the minister, the communion table, the meeting house, the gossip, the gatekeepers, the youth, or the sexton. In the same way, queer theory borrows and builds upon that which has come before. There is much in this research that will be familiar; most of my work will not be groundbreaking, but what will take your breath away is the honest and sincere efforts of a church striving to be as inclusive as it can.

An Adlerian Approach for the Future of the Church

Alfred Adler was an Austrian physician during World War I. One of the things he noticed during the war, and after, was that a doctor could treat the visible wounds and scars of the injured, but healing of the limbs did not equal healing of the mind. In a similar vein, Adler noted that mending a broken toe does not prevent the toe from being broken again if the worker has insufficient footwear; therefore, the appropriate course of action is to provide the correct footwear

in the first place, negating the necessity of mending the broken toe.⁷⁶ Adler was a contemporary of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, having spent time studying with both. The three psychologists were the most esteemed psychologists of their day, laying the foundation of what would become modern-day psychology. In their time, the three were the superstars of psychology; they were quoted in newspapers, advised presidents and prime ministers, and drew large standing room only crowds when giving lectures.⁷⁷

Today, Freud is more often associated with pop-psychology, the sexual drive, and war between the genders- there are relatively few psychologists or academics who take the work of Freud seriously. Jung, however, still enjoys a strong following among academics, students, and psychologists who adhere to the exploration of dreams as healing. Adler is barely remembered outside of those groups who continue to advocate his ideas. Out of the three men, Adler is the only one who continues to influence modern academia, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, social work, community management, judicial practice, and the Church. Adler's signature theory of Individual Psychology is practiced today much more than when he first started sharing his thoughts on the matter. Individual Psychology, Holistic Psychology, or Community Psychology is more commonly known as holistic practice or wholism. That is, "individual psychology is the study of interpersonal relationships. People are never considered in an isolated situation, but in light of their actions and reactions to each other".⁷⁸ Furthermore, Individual Psychology argues that it takes an entire village⁷⁹ or community to create healthy and whole individuals or Social

⁷⁶ Alfred Adler, "Health Manual for the Tailoring Trade," in *The Collected Clinical Works of Alfred Adler, Volume 2: Journal Articles 1898–1909: The Mind–Body Connection, Social Activism, and Sexuality*, ed. Henry T. Stein, trans. Cees Koen and Gerald Liebenau (Bellingham, WA: Classical Adlerian Translation Project, 2002), 1–14.

⁷⁷ Alfred Adler, *Understanding Life*, Edited by Colin Brett, OneWorld Publications, Oxford, England, 1997, IX.

⁷⁸ Adler, *Understanding Life*

⁷⁹ Adler, *Understanding Life*

Interest. Adler's approach is appreciated much more today, and in a larger variety of settings, than it has been previously.

Individual Psychology is akin to Crenshaw's Intersectionality. Where Adler advocates for the entire community in creating healthy people, Crenshaw advocates understanding and appreciating that there is more than one part of an individual. Crenshaw developed the understanding that no individual is static or a one-dimensional being; we are the sum of all our experiences and backgrounds. We cannot separate who we are depending on the situation or our preferences. Crenshaw developed this understanding in the United States judicial system during the civil rights era. Crenshaw argued that an African American woman can be discriminated against as both a woman and an African American; it is where the two experiences cross that Crenshaw coined intersectionality, and how that intersectionality led to further discrimination. This was groundbreaking because it allowed African American women to pursue legal protection for being both African American and female simultaneously. Crenshaw would also significantly shape how individuals, academics, sociologists, anthropologists, ethicists, theologians, and preachers see themselves and those they work with.

There is no social scientist today who would not consider the impact of intersectionality in their research. Intersectionality and Individual Psychology go hand in hand in that they both appreciate the whole individual and the totality of their social location, rather than focusing on just one aspect of what makes an individual the unique being that they are.⁸⁰ In the words of

⁸⁰ Kimberlé Crenshaw. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1, article 8.

Alfred Adler, “Individual Psychology recognizes, with other psychologies, that each individual must be studied in the light of his own peculiar development.”⁸¹

When Galileo started spreading the news that the Earth revolves around the Sun, he set in motion a chain reaction that continues to reverberate across the globe. Darwin would cause further disruption and solidify an idea that many today consider a fact. That is, science and religion are inherently at odds. In fact, today, science, which began in the Church and within great theological institutions, has surpassed theology as the queen of the academic disciplines, relegating it to a department within the humanities.

This so-called divide between Church and science has reinforced an even greater divide: the divide between the sexual and the divine. Beginning with the Apostle Paul’s admonishment that one should refrain from marriage if one can, which was then made popular by St Augustine with his self-imposed celibacy, is the idea that sex and sexuality must be separated from the holy. The separation between Church and science, divine and logic, superstition and reality, religion and secular, holy and human, reinforced the human aspect of sexual practice and firmly grounded human sexuality outside of the church. This has led to a general phobia around sex within the modern church.

This research aims to reconcile divine and human sexuality. There is a place within the church for the great diversity of sexualities, genders, and their expression. This research will hopefully Queer the Church by bringing together and blending what has previously been kept separated. Queering the Church will involve including all people of all sexual orientations and gender expressions within the life of the church. In the process of Queering the Church, it will be

⁸¹ Alfred Adler, “The Fundamental Views of Individual Psychology”, *Journal of Individual Psychology*, University of Texas Press, n.d. 185. “The Fundamental Views of Individual Psychology,” originally published in 1935 in the *International Journal of Individual Psychology*, Volume 1, Number 1, pp. 5–8.

clear that the Church is becoming a whole Church. That is, a Church that appreciates all members, no matter their background or social location.

The important thing with this research is helping the Church and its people heal from the divide that has been imposed upon it. Adler had a dream that the world would be made of communities that valued every person. Every person within these communities would have equal say, equal access to opportunity, each would be an active contributor, and each would feel useful and valued. Adler named this democratic community he envisioned *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.⁸² *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* does not have a corresponding word in English, but it has often been translated as “community feeling”; however, a more appropriate translation, as noted by Ansbacher when writing to Dr. Eriksson, is “feeling of community with all of life”.⁸³ Just as the prophet Joel prophesied that all people would know the Spirit, the Queering of the Church will be the fulfillment of that prophecy. In the Queering of the Church is the opportunity to fulfill that which was begun on the day of Pentecost- the coming of the Spirit for all the Church and the fulfillment of Jesus’ vision for the realm of God.

A Queer Church and Society

At this point in the research, it is important to acknowledge and make use of the freedom that comes with employing queer theory and methodology as tools. Rules should not inhibit my work. What if the world of human sexuality disappeared? What if all the creative constructs of gender that we have engineered were to disappear? Let us remove the word binary, strike it down and away, into oblivion. Let us make it so that no more is there man or woman, two-spirited, shaman, hymns, womyn, gentlemen, lord, goddess, sex, or sexuality. Let us get rid of the word

⁸² Heinz L Ansbacher, *Correspondence with Dr. Eriksson*, University of Vermont, February 22, 1993.

⁸³ Ansbacher, *Correspondence with Dr. Eriksson*.

gender and let us throw away all the useless words and ideas that seem to grow on and on, with no real destination in sight.

Essentialism says we all experience this or that. Let us not assume that what I enjoy will be enjoyed by you, the reader; nothing is guaranteed.⁸⁴ Let us not discuss gay men, anal sex, oral sex, any sex, orgasm. And let us pretend that society does not dictate those things that affirm and approve of my sexual activities, or the nouns that have become so popular for them.⁸⁵

Relationship, together, domestic, partnership, intercourse. Let us ban all words that allow us to compare. Single, alone, lonely, spinster, old man, bachelor, player, slut, untrustworthy. No more discourses on power, history, bodies, image, identity, and natural.⁸⁶

Adler reminds the physician, the psychologist, the priest, and the professor that humans cannot be departmentalized. Humans do not have just physical ailments or mental illness alone. Nor do they have just spiritual crises or only learning disabilities. Humans have humanity. Humans are social beings and so exist within the context, construct one may argue, of family, work, friends, and community.⁸⁷ It is crucial to highlight that when Adler discussed sex, it was in the context of the life tasks, that is, work, love, and relationships. Adler reminds us that there is more to us and sex than our genitalia. Yes, we all have genitals (in one form or another), but it is not wise or effective to devote all attention, effort, energy, time, or purpose to them. We must also pay heed to our spirits, intellects, bodies, and feelings. It is perhaps time that we started paying more attention to our entire being, rather than just one's testicles or clitoris.

⁸⁴ Mimi Marinucci. *Feminism Is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/adler/detail.action?docID=625225>

⁸⁵ Mimi Marinucci. *Feminism Is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/adler/detail.action?docID=625225>

⁸⁶ Michel Foucault. *Michel Foucault: Concepts*. Archived website, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20130723170825/>

⁸⁷ Maria Bluvshstein. "Individual Psychology as a 'Living Force of Progress'." *The Journal of Individual Psychology* Vol 76, no. 1 (Spring 2020).

Gender and sexuality are the products of humanity. As such, there is no need for them, other than that which we have created, which is nothing more than words. In 2020, only four per cent of the internet was pornography. There may be some in our society who would have us believe that the only activity humans take part in is the obsession with sex. However, 4 per cent of humanity spending less than 7 minutes watching porn does not make us an obsessed species.⁸⁸

Let us throw away the negative constructs around gender and sex. Let us create new constructs that set us free to enjoy all areas of our lives, in whatever way that may be, without hurting each other in the process. It would be a queer thing if we were to value life, all aspects of life; it would be an event worthy of celebration.

Measuring Inclusivity

Alfred Adler developed the concept of Gemeinschaftsgefühl, literally translated as “community feeling” or “social interest.”⁸⁹ Adlerian organizational theory emphasizes Gemeinschaftsgefühl and its characteristics as an indicator of a truly inclusive organization. Adlerian organizational theory holds that democratic leadership, community involvement, and an authentic sense of belonging are essential to an inclusive organization or church. To be an inclusive community means turning away from the Church's traditional hierarchies and abandoning traditional understandings of power. Adlerian inclusivity means giving every individual an authentic voice and opportunity; it involves power that begins and remains within the community, and it means that every member truly belongs and contributes to their community.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Michael Castleman, “How Much Time Does the World Spend Watching Porn? Depending on One’s Perspective, Porn Is Either a Black Hole or a Coffee Break.” *Psychology Today*, October 31, 2020. Accessed January 5, 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/all-about-sex/202010/how-much-time-does-the-world-spend-watching-porn>.

⁸⁹ Heinz L Ansbacher, *Correspondence with Dr. Eriksson*, University of Vermont, February 22, 1993.

⁹⁰ Karen John, “Adlerian Theory and Practice Wisdom Promote Democratic Leadership and Organizational Health.” *The Journal of Individual Psychology* Vol 76, no. 1 (2020): 84–98. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jip.2020.0020>.

This research and the Congregational Inclusivity in Practice tool will measure inclusivity across the three Adlerian principles of democracy, community, and belonging. Adler's concept of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* will serve as the ideal standard of inclusivity for churches aiming to welcome all God's children into the life of their congregations.⁹¹ A church that has reached *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* is one that, at its core, has an understanding of the priesthood of all believers, a theology rooted in *Imago Dei*, and calls every member into abundant life.

A church that has reached the inclusive standard of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* is best defined as a democratic community in which all have a voice, are valued, and contribute. Churches need to be places where;

We grow; we become; we love; we interpret; and we create ourselves, a style of living, and a meaningful place in the world for our time on earth. Socially useful individuals move toward others with a sense of self-worth that makes it possible for them to feel at home in the world and to be at least as concerned about the well-being of others as they are about themselves.⁹²

This is the hallmark of an inclusive church.

Gemeinschaftsgefühl: Congregational Inclusivity in Practice

For this research, the author will assess FCCAK by asking if the church exhibits—through the lived experiences of its members—the following Adlerian principles:

1. Democracy – does it value every individual as a child of God? Do all members have input into important decisions, the choice of leadership, the core values, and the mission of the organization? Can any member offer insight and initiate change without fear of rejection or ejection? Do members feel that their voices carry weight and meaning? Do all members feel heard, seen, and recognized? Are queer people encouraged to speak and be involved?

⁹¹ Amy E Preiss and Caroline Molina-Ray. "Leadership Training for Managers: An Adlerian Approach." *Journal of Leadership Studies* Vol 1, no. 1 (2007): 10–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.20003>.

⁹² James Robert Bitter and Jane Griffith. "Adler's 'The Fundamental Views of Individual Psychology': Context, Clarification, and Expansion." *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 75, no. 3 (2019): 195-204

2. Community- does the church create an environment that cares about the well-being of each individual and the world (physical space) they inhabit? Are church leaders genuinely concerned and driven to guarantee the health and well-being of their members for the members' advantage and not leadership's advantage? Simply put, does the church truly care about its members enough to do something about it? Does the church create a safe space for all its members?
3. Belonging- Are all members of the church able to contribute in meaningful ways, at all levels of membership and leadership? Do members have a sense of ownership? Are members involved in all areas of ministry? Do members feel a true sense of belonging due to the significant contributions that they have made to the life of the church? Do the members feel a sense of belonging because of the leadership's care and embrace? Are members truly integral to the life of the church, and does leadership acknowledge this?

These questions can be asked specifically with LGBTQI2S people in mind. Some examples are-

1. Democratic- Do queer people feel that they are encouraged to express themselves fully and to contribute to worship in meaningful ways that reflect their journeys throughout life? Does the church provide a truly safe space for queer people to worship, rest, heal, and play? Are the intention and specificity in wanting the voices of queer people to contribute to its identity? Do queer people speak for and on behalf of the church? Are there queer leaders in the church?
2. Community- Are queer people tolerated or are they celebrated? Do queer people play integral, vital, and visible roles within the life of the church? Can it be seen from the outside that queer people of faith are not just welcomed but also key members and stakeholders in their communities? Does the church actively strive to include and cherish its queer brethren?

Does the church call them to participate in authentic and life-changing relationships? Can queer parents have their children baptized? Are there same-sex marriages? Do queer members feel that they will be fully represented if they were to be buried by the church's minister? Does the church spend time and money on ministries specifically aimed at addressing the needs of queer individuals?

3. Belonging- Do queer people feel at home? Do queer people contribute in meaningful and sustaining ways? Can queer people offer who they are and their gifts without fear of being mocked, punished, or excluded? Does the church regularly feature liturgy by queer people and worship led by queer people? Are queer artists and writers featured in worship and fellowship? Are there queer staff members, volunteers, and leaders?

CHAPTER 4.

RESEARCH METHODS

To develop an overall understanding of the phenomenon of inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and two-spirit individuals in the life of the church. Rather than focusing solely on numerical analysis of data, the goal was to develop a holistic picture of inclusion within the church based on the lived experiences of both the researcher and the observed. I gathered data from my own reflections on the church's inclusivity and interviewed current members about their experiences and opinions on the inclusion of LGBTQI2S people.

My first task was to seek permission from the leadership of First Congregational Church of Anchorage. This involved writing an official letter to the Church Council and then to the Board of Trustees (see Appendix C). I met with both bodies and shared my research plans and how my research may benefit the church. I explained to them that I would still need to seek permission from any individuals that I interview, and that I would anonymize all data. I explained further that if my research was especially successful, I would publish my work and that the copyright and all financial proceeds would belong to me. Both bodies approved me to use my reflections from my time as the minister of the church, to seek interviews with church members, and to use the church email lists for surveys. I also explained that the research would take time away from the time I would be spending on church work, and they approved.

Prior to meeting with FCCAK leadership, I held two workshops on my research. I wanted church members to be aware of what I was doing and give them the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. The first workshop I held was a midweek workshop at 5 p.m. in the www.fccak.org Gathering Room via Zoom. Seven people attended, and we simply had a

conversation. I shared my research question, and they asked questions and gave feedback, suggestions, and some church history. The second workshop I held was in person, and after Sunday worship. It followed the same format as the Zoom workshop.

Data Gathering

Ethnography

Data collection for this research occurred in three stages. The first stage of data gathering began in 2016 when I first began preaching at First Congregational Church of Anchorage. From that moment on, I began observing this congregation. I noted the way they treated those who were different, those who were first-time visitors, and guest preachers. I particularly made note of how they treated me. My journal entries from the time reflect my initial thoughts.

It's a very middle-class and white congregation, a little older, and honestly, if I didn't know that they were gay friendly, I would have been nervous, being older and white, one could easily assume that they would be homophobic. But, that's so wrong! They actually applauded when I finished preaching today, and my sermon was my classic coming out story, and I accidentally went 45 mins!⁹³

One of the main sources of data for this research has been ethnographic. In addition to my own journal entries, I have also relied upon my memories of the many interactions I have had with members of the church over the years. During my research, whenever I remember an event or occurrence I could use, I record my thoughts and store them in a folder on my iPad. The ethnographic data I have gathered has been very important when analyzing other forms of data, as I have been able to analyze that data through the lens of my history and the ongoing relationship I have with the subject.

⁹³ Johnathan Jones, Journal Entry, December 27, 2015.

Other forms of ethnographic data gathered for this research include the notes I have kept from workshops and retreats I have led at FCCAK over the years. An example of this is my notes from the class I gave to the church during their discernment process to become an Open and Affirming congregation.⁹⁴ Other sources used were the results from a church survey on the demographics of the church taken in late 2025 for a church retreat named “Sacred Strategies: Voices and Vision.”⁹⁵ and the results from a church-wide survey used during a previous pastoral search process.⁹⁶

I have also used several historical documents from the time FCCAK was founded in 1961. I used a document from August 20, 1967, titled “Service of Dedication of the Church Building.”⁹⁷ Notes from sermons and minutes from board meetings and church council meetings have been especially helpful. The church website, www.fccak.org, also proved valuable when putting together the church profile.

Instrument – Online Likert-scale Survey

For two weeks, I posted an online Likert-scale survey on www.qualtrics.com that church members could complete. The survey link was shared in the FCCAK weekly email newsletter titled The Daily Update. The survey was brief, requiring just three clicks to finish. It started with a short introduction, followed by the question “Have you at any time worshipped at First Congregational Church of Anchorage?” If the respondent answered no, they were directed to a thank-you page and exited the survey. If they answered yes, they were shown seven statements

⁹⁴ Johnathan Jones, “Queer Theology FCC ONA Class,” lecture, First Congregational Church of Anchorage (Zoom), December 4, 2021.

⁹⁵ Johnathan Jones, “Sacred Strategies: Voices and Vision,” presentation, First Congregational Church of Anchorage, September 6, 2025.

⁹⁶ Johnathan Jones and M. Zimmerman, *FCCAK Pastoral Search Church Survey*, report for the Pastoral Search Committee, First Congregational Church of Anchorage, June 8, 2022.

⁹⁷ First Congregational Church of Anchorage, *Service of Dedication of the Church Building: Order of Worship*, August 20, 1967.

on a single page. For each statement, respondents were asked to indicate if they strongly disagreed, somewhat disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, somewhat agreed, or strongly agreed.

First Congregational Church of Anchorage is:

- Accepting of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals.
- Actively supports the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer community.
- Incorporates gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer topics or themes in worship.
- Offers specific programming for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people of faith.
- Is known throughout Anchorage for welcoming gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people of faith.
- Has publicly supported and advocated for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer rights and initiatives.
- Has a history of having openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer church members and ministers.

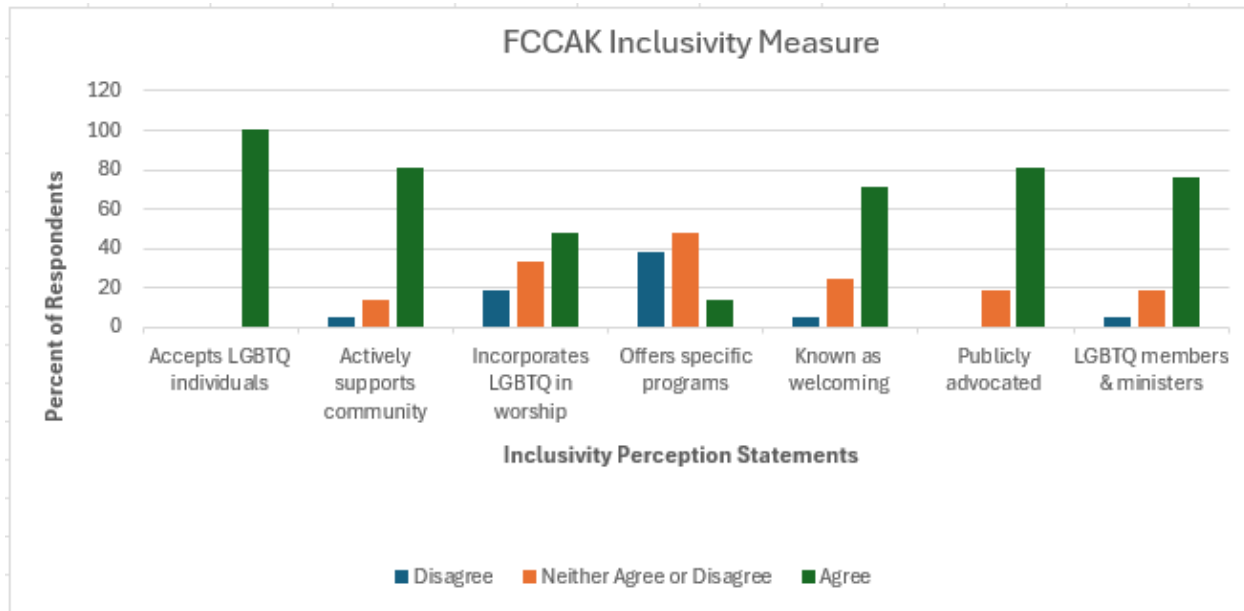
FCCAK Likert-scale Inclusivity Responses (%)

The survey received twenty-three responses. Two responses were excluded- one was incomplete, and the other was a preview answer- yielding a final sample of twenty-one completed surveys (n=21). Using Qualtrics, I exported and formatted the data. Table A (below) shows the percentage distribution of responses to each survey statement.

Table A. Percentage distributions of the FCCAK Inclusivity Measure (n=21)

| <i>FCCAK Inclusivity Statements...</i> | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Accepting LGBTQ individuals | 0 | 0 | 0 | 19 | 81 |
| Actively supports LGBTQ community | 0 | 5 | 14 | 33 | 48 |
| Incorporates LGBTQ themes in worship | 5 | 14 | 33 | 29 | 19 |
| Offers specific LGBTQ programming | 5 | 33 | 48 | 14 | 0. |
| Known in Anchorage as welcoming LGBTQ people of faith | 0 | 5 | 24 | 38 | 33 |
| Has publicly supported/advocated for LGBTQ rights | 0 | 0 | 19 | 33 | 48 |
| Has history of openly LGBTQ members and ministers | 0 | 5 | 19 | 19 | 57 |

Table B. Bar Chart Summary of percent distribution of FCCAK Inclusivity Measure



Interested members were invited to contact the church office secretary to make an appointment. Initially, the secretary received just two responses, and only one was to make an appointment. The church secretary shared this information with me, and we decided that we would need to approach people directly and ask whether they would be willing to take the interview. Over the next two days, the secretary recruited 14 individuals who would take part in the interviews. Out of the 14 appointments, we had only one cancellation. I successfully completed 13 interviews (n=13). The saturation point occurred around the tenth interview, however I continued to complete all 13 interviews to honor the appointments and just in case I might learn something new, which I did not.

Interviewees were encouraged to attend the interview in person at the church. Two people were out of state and requested to be interviewed via FaceTime. I conducted one interview in their home and another telephonically, as another member was ill. At the beginning of each interview, each interviewee received a consent form (Appendix C) and was asked to read and

then sign it. Initially, my plan was to record all the interviews; however, I found that the interviewees were more relaxed without being recorded, and the conversation flowed more naturally.

Before the first question I verbally reiterated several paragraphs from the consent form. I informed them that the interview:

- It could take 30 to 90 minutes.
- The interview was voluntary.
- We would discuss sex, and they may feel uncomfortable and that they could end the interview at any time.
- The information they shared would be kept confidential.
- Should they feel uncomfortable sharing something at any time, they would be offered an opportunity to submit their answers online anonymously if they chose.

The interviews were open-ended. I used some of the following prompts, rather than a standard set schedule of questions, to begin the conversation.

- a) What are your feelings around homosexuality and the Church?
- b) What would you say to a gay person who attended church for the first time and voiced that they were gay?
- c) What would be your response if someone said homosexuality was a sin?
- d) What does it mean to be an “Open and Affirming Congregation”?
- e) How do you feel about being an “Open and Affirming Congregation”?
- f) How inclusive do you think we are?
- g) How could we be more inclusive?

Most of the interviews were between 45 to 90 minutes long. However, after I reached the point of saturation (the tenth interviewee) the interviews became shorter and took between 30 and 45 minutes to complete. I did not record the conversations to avoid specifics being revealed and took notes throughout the interview and immediately afterward. I completed all the interviews over a two-week period. After I completed the last interview, I emailed all participants a link that led to a Qualtrics.com webpage. The webpage gave them three options to choose from:

Option A: If you feel you were able to answer all questions during the interview without hesitation and have nothing more to add, please select Option A to exit.

Option B: If you feel you were not able to answer all questions fully, but you do not wish to contribute anything further, please select Option B to exit.

Option C: If you feel you were not able to answer all questions fully and would like to provide those answers now, please select Option C to proceed directly to the survey questions.

All respondents selected Option A, and no additional data was gathered.

Organizing and Analyzing Interview Data

After completing the interviews, I began by rereading each transcript to familiarize myself with the material to begin the process of reflecting on the interviews. I then reviewed each interview for obvious errors or spelling mistakes. Afterward, I created a single master document that combined all the interview responses (I also kept the separate clean copies for potential future use).

For academic rigor, I removed standard English stop-words - common function words such as articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions (the full list can be seen in Appendix G) and stray tokens. I normalized all text to lowercase and lemmatized the corpus to focus on

semantically meaningful words. I also conducted a basic word-frequency analysis, identifying the word that appeared most often and the word that appeared least often.

After identifying meaningful words, which I found to be unhelpful, I rethought my approach, went through each interview again, and coded each data item. The process follows more closely with deductive coding- where I looked for the codes in the data. However, there were at times when during the analysis the codes came from the data.⁹⁸ I scored each interview by placing them within a cluster based on the overarching theme of the interview response.⁹⁹

I identified three clusters. Cluster A are those interviewees that showed obvious and explicit acceptance and support for LGBTQI2S individuals. Phrases from interviewees include, “we are all children of God”, “I just appreciate knowing people”, and “everybody is just a human being”.

Cluster B are those interviewees that showed ambivalence or a passive acceptance of LGBTQI2S people. Phrases include, “people are people, it’s not something I think about”, and “I don’t see sexuality as a religious issue”.

Cluster C are those interviewees that are resistant and express hostility or discomfort. Examples include, “I don’t care what a person does in the bedroom, except when doing the children’s moment”, “I didn’t like it being flaunted”, and “there was something that rubbed me the wrong way, she was a bit too pushy”.

⁹⁸ Tess Tsindos. “Chapter 20: Coding Approaches.” In *Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Health and Social Care Researchers and Practitioners*, eds Darshini Ayton, Tess Tsindos, and Danielle Berkovic. Open Education Resources Collective, 2023. <https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/20/>.

⁹⁹ Kate E. Littlewood and Dianne H. Gardner, “A Brief Guide to Qualitative Research in Veterinary Science: Interviews, Focus Groups, Surveys and Reflexive Thematic Analysis for Practitioners and Researchers,” *New Zealand Veterinary Journal* (February 2026): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00480169.2026.2614562..>

Table D. Thematic cluster distribution of interview responses with definitions (n=13)

| Cluster | Description | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------|-------------|
| Cluster A=ACCEPTANCE | Affirming of LGBTQI2S people | 5 | 39% |
| Cluster B=AMBIVALENT | Passive acceptance — supports in principle but considers the issue irrelevant | 6 | 46% |
| Cluster C=RESISTANT | Expresses discomfort or hostility. | 2 | 15% |
| Total | | 13 | 100% |

After conducting several reviews of the clusters, I began looking for latent meanings. I identified several key hermeneutical themes. These are themes that dominate the data and contribute to the story of the data. When I as the ethnographer apply those themes to what I have experienced as a gay member, and minister, of the church these themes begin to tell a story. These storytelling themes (with direct quotes) are:

1. **All are welcome.** This is key to the church’s identity and is non-debatable. “All people should be welcome”, “Everybody is welcome”, and “You are welcome”.
2. **Open and Affirming in theory, but not action.** This appears to be the main critique and failing as perceived by the members. Institutionally the church says that all are welcome, but there is a lack of corresponding action. This is a dominant concern. “More than words, but also action”, “just a statement”, “I thought we were open, but then...”, and “Not always accepted, people just go along with it”.
3. **When tension arises, members are non-confrontational or avoidant.** Members are comfortable expressing their feelings of acceptance, however, if confronted or challenged on the issue of acceptance members would prefer being polite and staying silent when hearing problematic comments or observing exclusionary behavior. “I

- probably wouldn't say anything about it", "I am a non-confrontational person", "Typically, I would avoid confrontation", and "I wouldn't make a big deal of it".
4. **Sexuality is irrelevant to worship.** A majority of members consider the issue of homosexuality and the Church irrelevant. "It doesn't matter", "It's between them and God", and "We are here for worship".
 5. **Visibility is important but don't flaunt it.** Some members express discomfort with LGBTQI2S people being too visible, while others counter and critique the discomfort by arguing for explicit visibility for growth. "Don't flaunt it" and "The pulpit isn't the place" in contrast to "Visibility is important", "I don't think the rest of the world knows", and "We are not effectively communicating to the LGBTQ community".
 6. **We have changed over time.** The church is more inclusive today than it was in the past. This change is seen as a result of the changing times and generational turnover. "Times have changed", "We didn't talk about it back then", "We are more inclusive now", and "It is an evolving thing".

Academic Rigor and Quality

Dependability

The researcher has at all times maintained consistent, transparent, and honest practices through the research process. This includes best practices for those working with human subjects, such as Institutional Review Board oversight, peer-review of written work, consent forms for all human subjects (see Appendix D), seeking permission from the community I was researching

(see Appendix C), diligently recording any modifications to the research plan, and hosting informational workshops with the community I would conduct my case study on.¹⁰⁰

Confidence and Credibility

The researcher has been proactive in providing information on the research to the subjects to guarantee transparency, foster confidence in the research process, and confidence in the truth of the research findings. Examples include hosting informational workshops on the research- one via Zoom and the other after a Sunday worship service of the church in question. The researcher also met with various members of the church leadership, in addition to the Board of Trustees and Church Council. At all these meetings time was set aside for questions in a conversational format.

Triangulation of data sources also adds credibility to this research. With the sample being limited to one small community of faith, diversity in data sources was essential to gaining a more thorough understanding of the church's practices of exclusion or inclusion. The data for this research spans the 60 years the church has been in existence. Data has come from interviews with members who have been with the church for 50 years and others who have been with the church for just two years. Data has also been collected via surveys and from the researcher's own experience with the church as a gay minister over the past 8 years. Prolonged engagement has also been achieved due to the researcher already being a member of the community since 2016 and the senior minister over the last 4 years. Being a member of the church has also been helpful as the researcher has been able to member-check the data several times with the very same people who were sampled.

¹⁰⁰ Darshini Ayton, "Chapter 22: Thematic Analysis" in *Qualitative Research: A practical guide for health and social care researchers and practitioners*. Eds. Darshini Ayton; Tess Tsindos; Danielle Berkovic, 2023, Open Education Resource Collective, <https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/22/>

Confirmability and Transferability

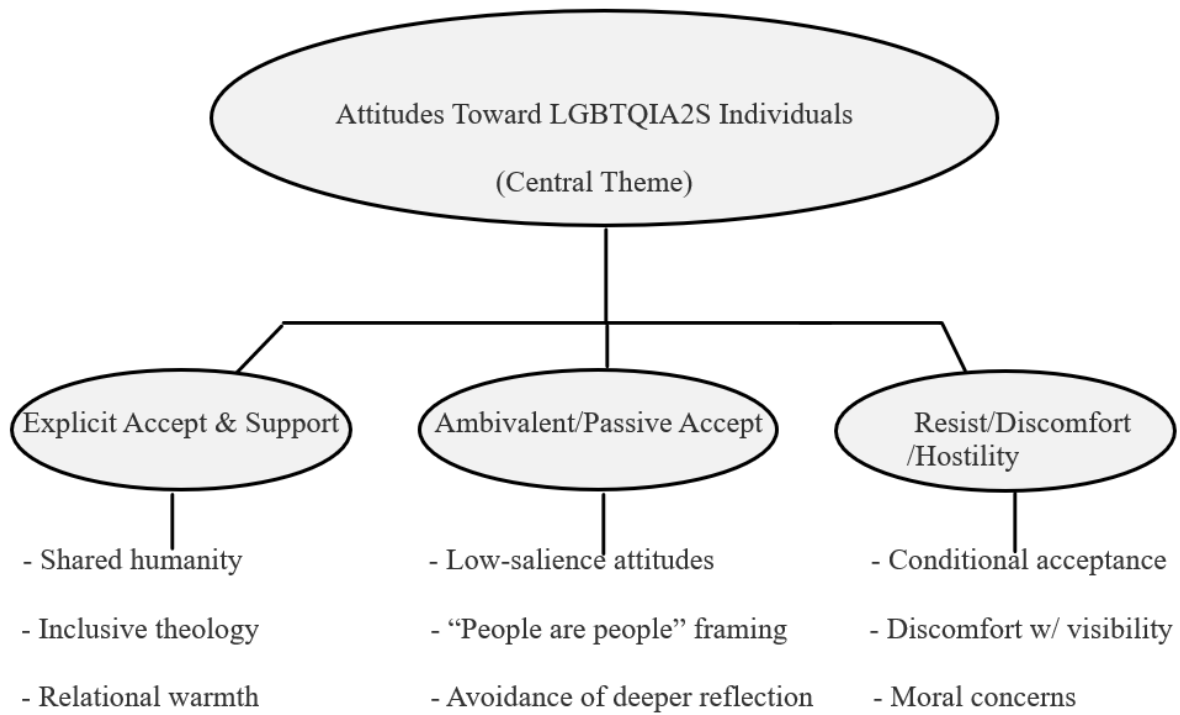
Confirmability can be demonstrated with the quotes that have been provided from the interviewees. The quotes can be found in the paragraphs of the current chapter that describe the thematic analysis process of this research. The level of detail provided regarding the collection of data for this research also adds further credibility. The level of detail and thick description provided in the church profile, with the step-by-step description of the interviews themselves, alongside copies of the consent form and the letters seeking permission to use the church as a case study serves a dual purpose of confirmability and transferability.¹⁰¹

Braun and Clarke note that one of the disadvantages of thematic analysis is that it depends on thick description to increase confidence in the research results, however more often than not the researcher fails to narrate adequately the coding process.¹⁰² Below is a thematic and coding cluster map (Figure E) showing my overall thought pattern that led to the current themes identified. The interviews were sorted (coded) into three cluster maps, and then sorted according to sub themes, which provided the opportunity to reflect on the data items at a deeper level, or discovery of the latent meanings that resulted in a data item being placed under a particular code, followed by inclusion in one of three clusters. For a table on the codes used and interview placement into clusters please see Appendix F.

¹⁰¹ Darshini Ayton, “Chapter 26: Rigour” in *Qualitative Research: A practical guide for health and social care researchers and practitioners*. Eds. Darshini Ayton; Tess Tsindos; Danielle Berkovic, 2023, Open Education Resource Collective, <https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/26/>

¹⁰² Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* Vol 3 no. 2: (2006) 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Figure E. Thematic coding and cluster map



CHAPTER 5.

HEALTHY, HONEST, AND WHOLE

What does a healthy, honest, and whole church look like? In this chapter, I, as author, will reclaim my voice from the role of researcher. Within the following pages, I will take auto-ethnographic liberty and share my own assessments, my opinions on inclusivity and the Church, and what role I believe exists within the Church for LGBTQI2S people. I will present the final findings of my research and discuss how the results call the Church and me forward. I will end the chapter with two primary takeaways. The first is my Doctor in Ministry project - the Congregational Inclusivity in Practice Tool. The second are the recommendations I have to offer to FCCAK on how they can become a more inclusive congregation. I invite you to journey with me as we discover just how inclusive First Congregational Church of Anchorage is, and by association, the rest of the Body of Christ.

Rev. JJ's Experience

I love being the first person at church on Sunday morning. The Narthex still has that stale, musty scent that lets you know the building has seen its fair share of decades. In the winter, the building is dark, I cannot see in front of me, and I challenge myself to make it to my office without banging my shins on a pew or falling down the stairs or letting the phantom fears of my youth take flight in my now, normally very adult and reasonable, brain. I love the darkness, the silence, and the solitude. Being alone in the dark gives me the chance to come before God just as I am. In the dark I don't see, I don't see my failures, I don't see my guilt, I don't see my anger, and I don't see my past. I don't see God, but God doesn't see me either. The darkness covers a multitude of things that I'd rather God not know. In the darkness, when it's just God and me, I

don't have to worry about saying the correct words, greeting people the correct way, I don't need to hold my tongue, or have patience, or even be loving; I only have to be me. In the dark, being me is being God's; becoming one with God and the universe in the dark allows me to grow bigger than the confines of my thought, my action, and my being.

In the summer, the sunbeams can shine on the dust as it slowly swirls around and around, like a dog circling its blanket before plopping down exactly where intended. The sun on the dust reveals the penetrating power of God's presence. It is everywhere; it reveals everything. There is no hiding; there are no secrets. In the sun, I remember that God is love, love is life, and life is for living.

When I worship, I am aware that I am often the only gay person in the congregation. I am careful when I preach because I don't want to alienate any members of my congregation. I don't want to be too gay. When a fellow gay person visits or attends for the first time, I become anxious. I don't wish for them to feel any form of discrimination or prejudice. I'm nervous because I know there are some in my congregation who would prefer a straight minister (with kids). There are some in my congregation who mean well but still think it would be inappropriate for two men or two women to hold hands during worship. There are those who think that because I am gay, that means I am alone, lonely, and unhappy. There are those who wish that I could be blessed, just as they are—blessed with a spouse, children, and grandchildren. None of these things are necessarily hateful, but they do harm.

Who is to say I must have kids and a spouse to be happy? And why? Is it the tax breaks? Is it the extra mouths that I will need to feed for the next 20 or 30 years? Is it the stress and worry of being responsible for the well-being of another human being? Is it the torn-up feeling I know I will have when my little one first falls in love and has their heart broken like mine was?

Is it the struggle of trying to tell my child I still love them even though they are queer, and I know they will face a world that will be just as harsh for them, as it was for me?

The world we live in is heterosexual. The church we worship in is heterosexual. The worship we conduct is heterosexual. Every action, ritual, thought, and belief that exists for the heterosexual but not the homosexual excludes the homosexual. This is because I am reminded that I am not the same, that I am different, and humans don't like difference, not too much of it anyway.

First Congregational Church of Anchorage is nowhere near as inclusive as they would like to think. I am not as welcoming of my queer family as I should be. My experience and my actions alone suggest that First Congregational Church of Anchorage—just like the Church and just like society—has a long way to go before being able to honestly say (and believed) that all are welcome, especially those who are queer.

Grace, Tension, and Lived Experience

I love First Congregational Church of Anchorage. At the age of 24, still in the first few months of being an Australian living in Alaska, not even able to say that I had a month of experience being the solo senior minister of a church, I saw First Congregational Church of Anchorage and wanted to be its minister. This means that I tend to overlook things I normally wouldn't. I am more forgiving of certain behaviors, behaviors that I would not have allowed in my earlier predominantly queer congregations. First Congregational Church of Anchorage is the first predominantly straight church I've ever pastored. I am aware of this. Just as a father loves his children yet is aware of and overlooks their faults, I do the same for my church.

The data from my research reveal three key values that exist in the life of the church. First Congregational Church of Anchorage,

1. Welcomes queer people.
2. Will tolerate or allow homophobic actions or speech.
3. Lives with the tension that exists from being an Open and Affirming congregation while at the same time welcoming members who are not fully Open and Affirming.

**You can welcome *some* of the people *some* of the time,
all of the people *some* of the time, and *some* of the people *all* of the time,
but you cannot welcome *all* of the people *all* of the time.**

Survey Results

81% of the people of FCCAK strongly agree that the church *accepts* LGBTQI2S people.

48% of the people of FCCAK say the church strongly *supports* LGBTQI2S people.

48% of the people of FCCAK neither agree nor disagree that the church offers *specific* programming.

46% of the people of FCCAK are ambivalent when it comes to supporting LGBTQI2S people.

15% of the people of FCCAK are resistant to fully including LGBTQI2S people into the life of the church.

Interview Results

Affirming Quotes

“My first meaningful relationship with a lesbian.”

“All people should be welcome.”

“Anybody is welcomed, they are accepted and loved.”

“Come and be my friend.”

“We welcome everyone, encourage each other to live more loving lives.”

“I liked that we had queer members.”

“Everyone should be heard and felt they belong.”

Ambivalent Quotes

“Not making an issue out of it.”

“I don’t think it’s appropriate to have an opinion.”

“People go along with it.”

“We could be more inclusive.”

“Typically, I would avoid confrontation.”

“I’ve never really thought too hard about it.”

Resistant Quotes

“Not flaunting it.”

“I don’t see us being open and affirming.”

“Not always totally accepted.”

“The pulpit isn’t the place to talk about yourself.”

“Didn’t like XXXX flaunting it.”

“Except when XXXX was doing the children’s moment.”

“I don’t have any friends that are gay.”

Ethnographic Vignette

One of our original founding members died after a yearlong battle. The family was tired, I was tired, and the church was ready to move on. I try to be welcoming and friendly to family of the church members who are with us for whatever reason. This particular celebration of life was hard because the death had been prolonged, so when their family member arrived from out-of-town who is an absolute charming person- they had a big smile, like to hug instead of shake

hands, always had a joke up their sleeve- we were ready for some fun. We liked this person, a lot.

On the morning of the celebration of life, I am getting ready in the social hall when the family member, accompanied by their spouse, comes to help. After 20 minutes of conversation, we start talking theology, which leads to the Bible, which leads to him saying, “The Word says what it says. Man and woman. Stone the sinner. If the woman is unclean, she must leave the city. If a man is a homosexual, he should be stoned”. I start laughing, thinking they are joking, but when I look at their spouse, I can see they were not. “Weeeelllll.....”

In that moment, I had a decision to make: do I say something, causing a whole lot of drama and potential conflict, or do I bite my tongue and deal with it later? I decided to bite my tongue, and I said something funny. But the full piece dining set they gave me as a thank-you the next day, still sits in the church library, waiting to be sold.

An Adlerian Approach

Leaning on and acknowledging the influence of Alfred Adler as a graduate of Adler University, the next question to ask when assessing the results of my research is, “How do the results fare when assessed from an Adlerian Organizational Psychology perspective?” As noted previously, three dominant themes or values came from the data concerning the topic of LGBTQI2S inclusion at FCCAK. These values are—accepting of LGBTQI2S people, tolerates homophobic members, and lives with the tension. The next stage in assessing the inclusivity practice of FCCAK is to assess each value according to how they fulfill, or not, the demands of all three building blocks identified in this Adlerian assessment: democracy, community, and belonging.

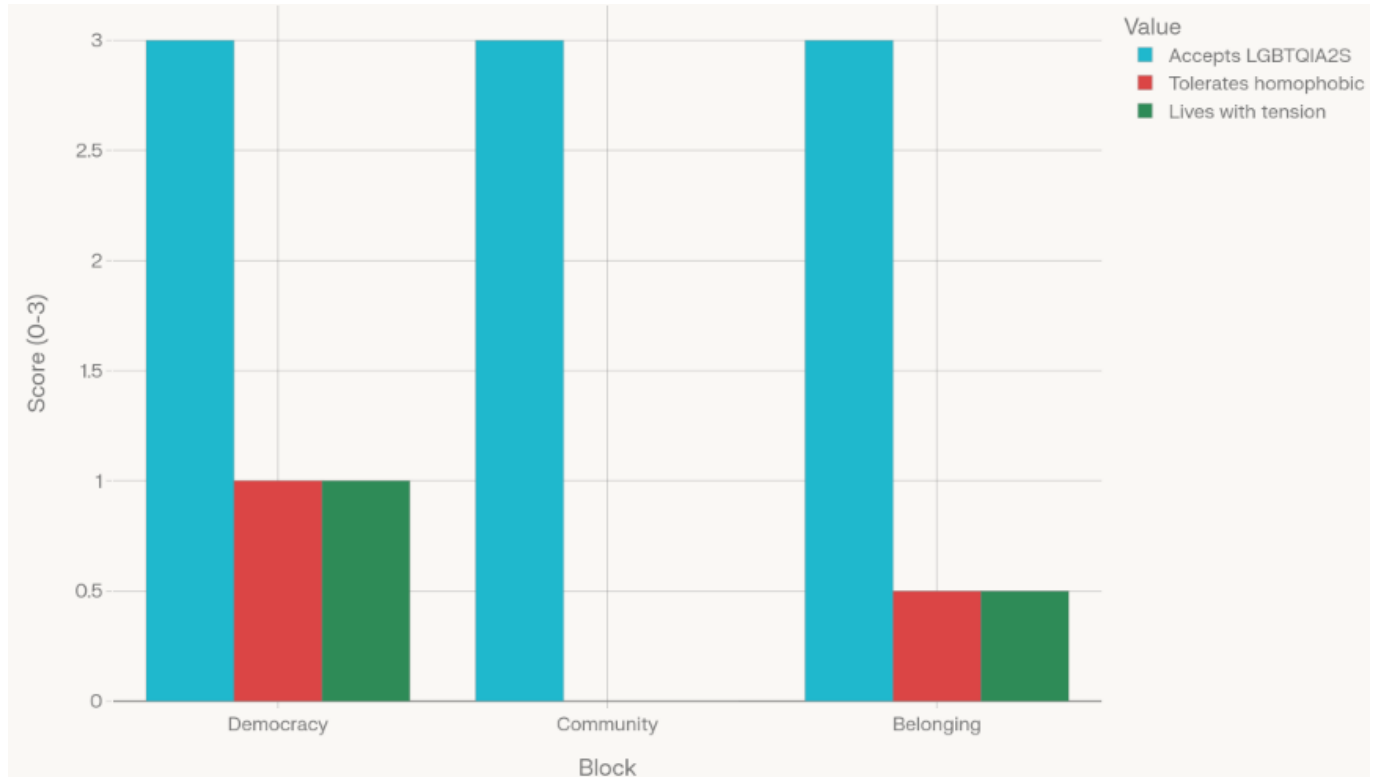
Scoring

Each church value has a possible 100% score of nine (9) points. Each value will be assessed on how well it fulfills all three Adlerian building blocks: democratic, community, and belonging. Each building block has a possible value of three (3) points, one (1) point for each of the three (3) demands. A full score of three (3) points for a building block means that the value fulfills all three (3) demands for the building block. If a value earns a score of nine (9) points, each building block of its value scored a perfect three (3) points. There are a total of three values with a possible value of nine (9) points each. A total score of twenty-seven (27) means that each value of the church fulfills all of the demands of all three (3) building blocks. A score of twenty-seven (27) means that the church's values align 100% with the Adlerian building blocks. The table below shows how FCCAK was scored, with an explanation for why the value was scored the way it did.

Table E. Scoring table of FCCAK values by Adlerian building blocks

| Adlerian Building Block (3 pts each) | Accepts LGBTQI2S people | Tolerates homophobic members | Lives with the tension | Notes |
|---|---|---|--|---------|
| Democratic (voice; horizontal leadership; opportunity) | 3 – Clear queer leadership; history of fully including queer members in all areas of church life. | 1 – Values all members but allows expressions that silence queer voices and discourage potential leaders. | 1 – Tension can support compromise, but prolonged ambiguity would harm minorities. | |
| Community (considerate of all; each called to be their best; healthy relationships) | 3 – Accepts queer people; calls people to live as they are; relationships are treated as valued and valuable. | 0 – Tolerates harmful words and actions; not considerate, does not encourage, and does not build healthy relationships. | 0 – Queer people would not feel considered, called to their best, or in healthy relationships with members who dislike them. | |
| Belonging (meaningful contribution; ownership; expression without fear) | 3 – Welcoming statement affirms involvement, ownership, and full expression for all. | 0.5 – Some can fully contribute, but vulnerable or powerless members may fear expulsion; fear undercuts ownership and contribution. | 0.5 – A few may contribute meaningfully, but ownership and belonging remain uncertain; tension is grounded in fear. | |
| Total score | 9 / 9 | 1.5 / 9 | 1.5 / 9 | 12 / 27 |

Table F. Chart of scores of FCCAK



First Congregational Church of Anchorage scores 12 out of 27 points. A score of 1 – 9 indicates that a church needs to begin the discernment process from scratch and determine what it means for them to be an Open and Affirming Congregation. A score of 10-18 indicates that a Congregation is making headway in its efforts to be more inclusive; however, it needs to address what is preventing it from achieving full inclusivity. A refresher workshop, retreat, or discernment period for the congregation would be highly beneficial. A score of 19 – 27 means the church is worthy of the label Open and Affirming. A church in this score range isn't perfect, but it has enough awareness of what it means to be Open and Affirming that it welcomes the opportunity for self-assessment and growth.

Hermeneutical Narrative

Taken together, the previous results paint a clear picture of a church in tension. Around the topic of inclusiveness, there are obviously differing views among the congregation. A trait that is somewhat unusual for a church or community organization in today's polarized and divided culture. Such tension prompts the question of how? How does a mostly white church in a country where 77% of white Americans identify as Republican or leaning Republican (a party often more anti-queer than pro) end up with 81% of the church accepting queer folks (it's important to note the difference between *accept* and *support*), or 48% supporting the inclusion of queer people of faith in their church? As Amanda Henderson of Iliff School of Theology writes, “some communities experience heightened internal conflict and fragmentation, others adapt by engaging in dialogue, story-sharing, and education.”¹⁰³ Is it because FCCAK engage in meaningful dialogue, or at least attempt to, that they have a strong acceptance of queer folks?

FCCAK excels at acceptance. Their acceptance is deeply entrenched and is most likely considered a given. For many, there is no question of acceptance; it is embedded in the church's culture and identity. The church affirms the equal dignity of all people, including LGBTQI2S people of faith. The church is democratic and promotes the full participation of all people. This is particularly evident in the election of an openly gay minister.

The high score awarded to the acceptance value demonstrates that the congregation centers on the marginalized and exhibit deep concern and action in the community. Theologically, the church leans toward, and practices, St. Augustine's *Imago Dei*, that is, all people are created in the image and likeness of God. *Imago Dei* has its foundation in Genesis 1: 26 and 27;

¹⁰³ Amanda Henderson. "Political Polarization and Christian Nationalism in Our Pews" *Religions* Vol 16, no. 4 (2025): 507. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040507>

Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

For St. Augustine, understanding humanity as made in the image of God is humankind’s ability “to remember, understand, and love Him by whom it was made”¹⁰⁴. We are not made in God’s image in the physical, bodily, sexual, or gendered sense, but in our capacity to love and see humanity in the same way that God does. Anselm confirms this understanding when he wrote that the mind was created “in order that it might love above all things the supreme essence and enjoy it. The rational creature was made to love the supreme nature more than all other goods... and therefore ought to devote its entire ability and entire will to remembering, understanding and loving the supreme good.”¹⁰⁵. If all humanity is created with this ability to love and be loved as a reflection of the divine then all humanity should be considered worthy to be treated with mutual respect and afforded the same affirmation as one would give to God, including queer folks.¹⁰⁶

The narrative of FCCAK is that they accept queer folks, they always have and they always will. It is who they are, and it is non-negotiable. FCCAK also has another value, all are welcome. This value has resulted in a tolerance that has become a double-edged sword. In welcoming all people, the congregation has also welcomed (or continue to welcome) those who do not agree with the institutional acceptance of queer people. Even though officially the church accepts and welcomes queer folks, the church also welcomes those who do not accept queer folks. A strong theme through the interviews and surveys, a strong part of the church’s narrative,

¹⁰⁴ Augustine of Hippo. *On the Trinity*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol 3*, ed by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887. (Accessed March 3, 2026.) <http://www.logoslibrary.org/augustine/trinity/1414.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion* trans. Jasper Hopkins, in *Anselm’s Monologion*, The Logic Museum, accessed March 8, 2026, <http://www.logicmuseum.com/authors/anselm/monologion/anselmmonologion.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity*.

is the lack of visibility and action around LGBTQI2S advocacy and action. One of the reasons for low visibility and action regarding LGBTQI2S advocacy could be the non-accepting members of the church who do not support such actions.

The last value identified in this research to be addressed in this paper is the tension that exists as a result of the discrepancy between the official Open and Affirming designation and the reality of having members who are not 100% queer affirming and celebratory. The reality is that should just one stray anti-affirming message or action be heard or seen by a queer person, the church would become a hostile place for that queer person. However, as reported in the interviews, many members of FCCAK are non-confrontational, or don't take sides, this lack of affirmation for the queer individual would further isolate them and tell them they are not welcome.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FCCAK is an Open and Affirming congregation who has lost sight of what it means to be Open and Affirming, it may be that the congregation did not fully understand what it meant to be Open and Affirming the first time they began their discernment process. Those interviewed and surveyed frequently defined Open and Affirming as meaning "We welcome all people, from different races, genders, faiths, and sexualities". While that is a correct understanding, it fails to specifically note that being Open and Affirming is a deliberate response to the homophobia present in the Church. That general understanding fails to see the need for a safe space of worship for queer people and as such fails to give a 100 per cent queer inclusive and friendly place of worship.

Before First Congregational Church of Anchorage takes any other action, it is important for the church to come to a more nuanced and specific understanding of what it means to be

Open and Affirming of queer folks in the life of their congregation. It is the researcher's opinion that FCCAK would benefit greatly by revisiting the educational resources that were provided during their discernment process and then determine if they wish to renew their commitment to being Open and Affirming. A new discernment process would then provide further opportunity and reflection on how the church should address those in the church who are less accepting and the resulting tension.

The final recommendation is that FCCAK needs to address the question of tension and its source. First of all, this form of tension is not healthy, it is tension derived from prejudice and homophobia. This needs to be named and the congregation needs to seriously think about how they would make amends. Until the tension is addressed FCCAK will fail to be a truly inclusive congregation.

Why has FCCAK not discussed the tension that stems from having non-accepting members of the church? Because the reason that FCCAK has failed to address it is because they are adverse to conflict. As evident in the interviews, if someone were to make homophobic comments at worship, only one respondent indicated they would challenge the statement and the person making the statement. FCCAK does not truly believe what they preach if they are unable to publicly affirm their beliefs, including when they may be uncomfortable because of possible conflict.

First Congregational Church of Anchorage has the immense task of practicing what it preaches, not an easy task and one that many have failed. However, the church has the history, culture, and values that make the task not only achievable but a very real possibility.

APPENDIX A. CHURCH PROFILE OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH
OF ANCHORAGE

CHURCH PROFILE
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF ANCHORAGE



LOCATION

2610 E Northern Light Blvd, Anchorage, Alaska. Located in the popular UMED district (university and medical). There are plenty of churches within a one-mile radius include St Mark's Lutheran Church, Roger's Park United Methodist Church, St Mary's Episcopal Church, First Christian Church, Open Door Baptist Church, Greater Friendship Baptist Church, Grandview (American) Baptist Church, North Anchorage Church of God (Assemblies of God), and University Baptist Church

OUR INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We speak these words so we remember to remember that caring for this small corner of the Earth has been the sacred honor and purpose of the Dena'ina Athabascans for uncounted centuries. As a faith community, we owe a debt of gratitude to our Dena'ina neighbors for the beauty of this elnena where we gather to worship. We acknowledge that the ground on which our church is built was taken away from them and yet remains their ancestral homeland. With these words we pledge to join with our Dena'ina neighbors and live on this land because all our children's futures matter, and because all our lives depend on it.

OUR CHURCH COVENANT

We covenant with You, God, and with one another, and do bind ourselves in Your presence, to walk together in all Your ways, according as You are pleased to reveal Yourself unto us in Your blessed Word of Truth. (Adapted from the Salem Church Covenant, 1629)

VISION STATEMENT

The vision of FCCAK is to become a place where our freedom of faith supports community in a spirit of fellowship.

CHURCH MOTTO

Guided by love, open to all.

MISSION STATEMENT

First Congregational Church of Anchorage is an open and affirming Christian community joining together in service as people learning, growing, and acting in faith. In the spirit of Jesus, we commit ourselves to justice and equity by welcoming and celebrating a diversity of age, ability, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, family circumstance, socio-economic status, and national origin. As an inclusive congregation, we seek to be a safe place to grow, free from judgment, where wounds can heal, and differences can expand our understanding. We invite all who are searching for God's presence in their lives to worship with us. We welcome you to participate in the life, ministry, and leadership of the church.

AFFILIATIONS

First Congregational Church of Anchorage is a member of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC).

First Congregational Church of Anchorage is Member #1700 of the Open and Affirming Coalition, which is a ministry of the United Church of Christ.

Western California Congregational Churches.

Interfaith Council of Anchorage.



HISTORY

In the beginning...In August 1960, Bob and Agnes Hampton ran a notice in the Anchorage newspaper seeking people interested in forming a church in the Congregational Way. At about the same time they also made the acquaintance of Dr. Howell Davies, then Secretary-Treasurer of the Mission Board of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. Dr. Davies had been granted \$1,000 by his former church in Wawatosa, Wisconsin, to go to Alaska to see about establishing a new church. Dr. Davies came with his wife to Metlakatla and to Anchorage where they met on August 14th with the founding group of five individuals. Three days later on August 17th First Congregational officially became a church and founding members Bob Hampton and Carol Tidel were elected moderator and secretary, respectively.

Gifts began to arrive from Sunday school children in Spencer, Iowa, and a Fellowship Guild in Beloit, Wisconsin. In addition, gifts were received from Cheyenne, Wyoming, the Church of the Messiah in Los Angeles, and from many other churches in the association totaling thousands of dollars.

This generosity enabled the small group to grow and a year later in 1961 they called their first minister, the Rev. Gerry Churchill, a graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary, from Redlands, California. Rev. Churchill served until 1964. During his tenure, Rev. Churchill helped prepare the way for the building of a permanent church home.

In 1965 the church called Rev. David Carmen who saw it through its building phase. Building was completed by many volunteers including a number of Congregational youth from around the country. It was completed in 1967, and Rev. Dr. Howard Conn gave the first sermon. Rev. Carmen remained until 1969.

In 1970, the Rev. Gerry Churchill returned to the pulpit, where he remained until 1975, when Rev. Don Lindsay became the senior minister. Rev. Lindsay was heavily involved in the community. He was a coach, a chaplain for the National Guard, a therapist, and the choir director. Rev. Lindsay allowed mixed-race couples to be married at FCC when no other churches would, keeping Rev. Lindsay very busy during the summers.

In the early morning hours of August 1, 1982, Rev. Lindsay and his family were awakened to the sounds of fire in the church next door to their home in the parsonage. Speculation is that a discarded cigarette, smoldering for many hours, used all the oxygen in the building until the building imploded and burst into flames. The building was nearly a complete loss. Rev. Lindsay conducted services the following morning from the back of a truck in the parking lot of the still-smoking building.

It was unanimously agreed to rebuild, making the new building a bit bigger to accommodate Sunday school classrooms downstairs and enlarging the worship space. The building was completed in 1983. Rev. Lindsay retired in 1985.

From 1985 to 1986 Rev. Robert Young was the Senior Minister, and his tenure would see FCC experience its first major church conflict. Rev. Young proved to be more conservative than the progressive congregation that had hired him. When Rev. Young resigned, several families left with him.

The Rev. Elizabeth Bingham came to the church in 1987 and served until 1992, when she was called as Sr. Minister for Pilgrim Congregational Church in Pomona, California. Rev. Beth Bingham would officiate the same-sex wedding at FCC with the full support of the congregation.

From January 1993 to June of 1994, Rev. John Bury was the Senior Minister of FCC. He left due to ill health.

Rev. Bury was followed by the Revs. Rick and Mary Koch, who came in the summer of 1994 to share the senior minister position. In 2005 the Revs. Koch left to pursue other opportunities – Rick in the Alaska National Guard and Mary with Providence Hospital as a chaplain.

Rev. Mark E. Long was called to First Congregational Church in January of 2006 and served through June 2010.

In February 2011, the members called Rev. George Edward Blair III to be Senior Minister. Rev. Blair began his ministry in the church in July 2011 and served until April 2016.

Rev. Johnathan Jones came to the church as the Interim Senior Minister, leading the congregation through the transition from July 2016 through July 2017 as they searched for a senior minister.

In July 2017, Rev. Jacob Poindexter was called as the senior minister and served until February 2022, when he was called to Wichita UCC; a return to his home state of Kansas and close to family. With the departure of Rev. Poindexter, Rev. Jones returned to lead the congregation first as the Locum Senior Minister and then as the Interim Senior Minister.

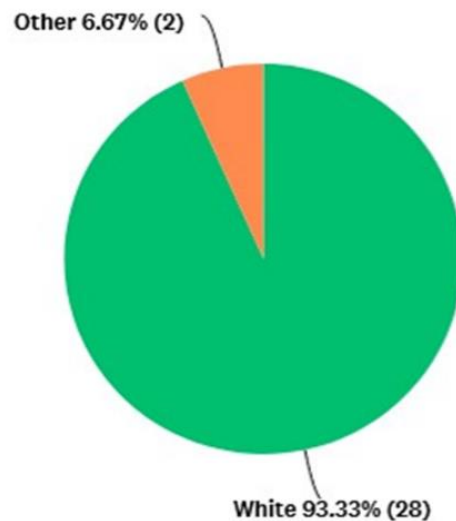
In September 2024, Rev. Doug Gray (Senior Minister of First Congregational Church Salt Lake City) officially installed Rev. Johnathan Jones as the Senior Minister of First Congregational Church of Anchorage.

Through the years the congregation has remained around 100-150 members, and there are a few of the early members still attending the church. First Congregational Church is active in the community, providing support to many of the charitable programs in Anchorage and around the world.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE

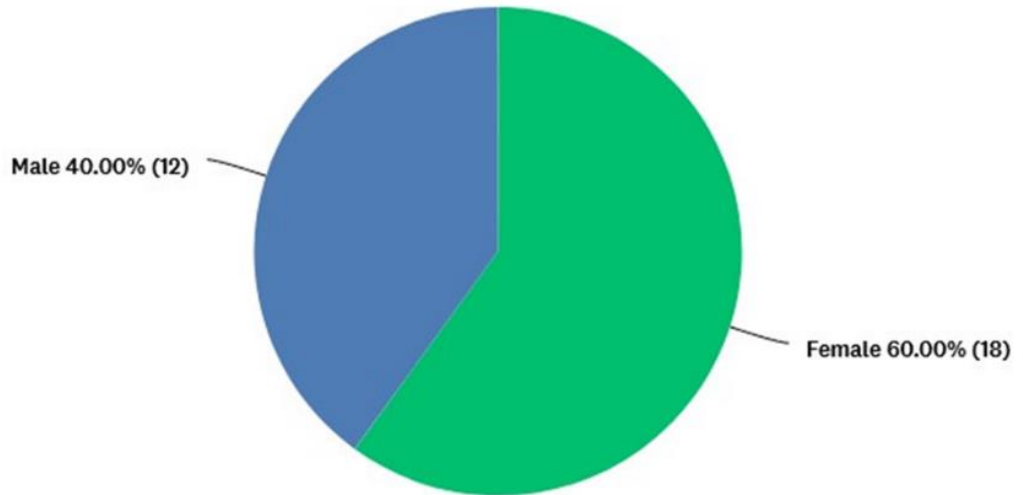
Are you:

Answered: 30 Skipped: 5



What is your gender?

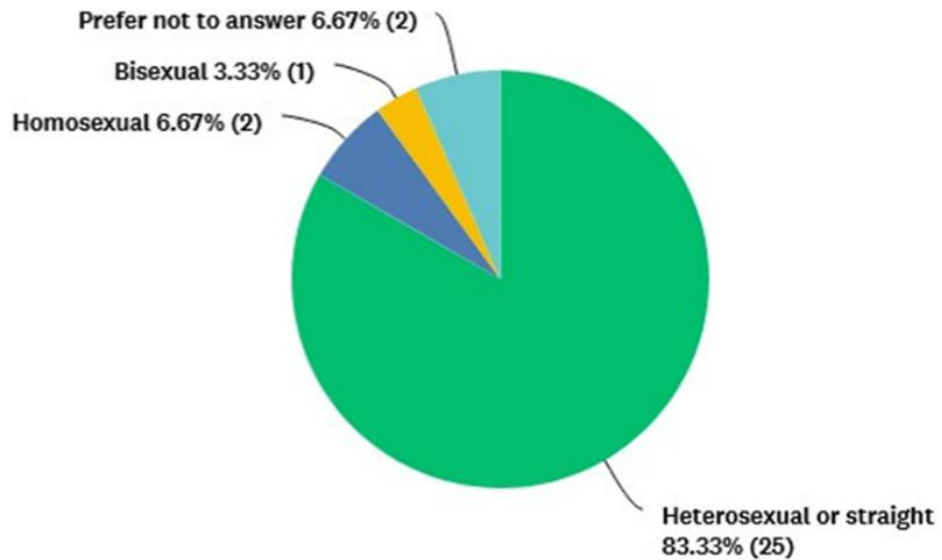
Answered: 30 Skipped: 5



FCC AK Pastoral Search Church Survey

Do you consider yourself to be:

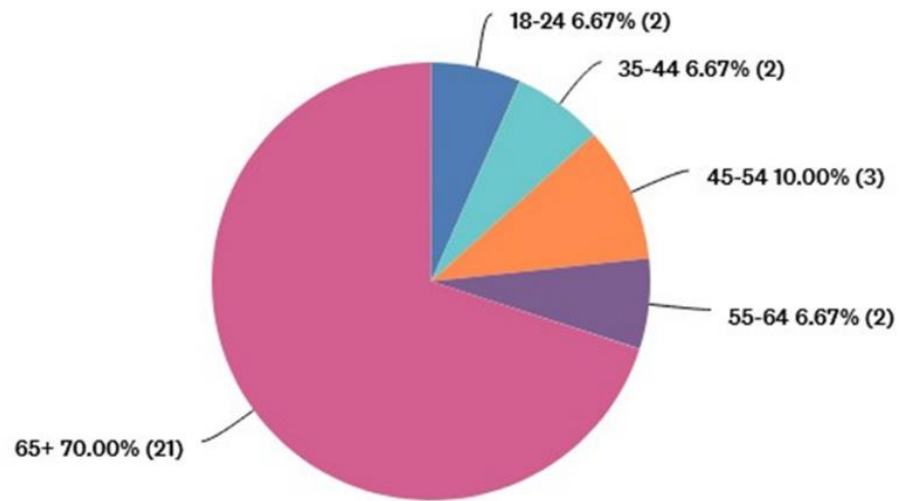
Answered: 30 Skipped: 5



FCC AK Pastoral Search Church Survey

What is your age?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 5



FCC AK Pastoral Search Church Survey

FCCA K STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

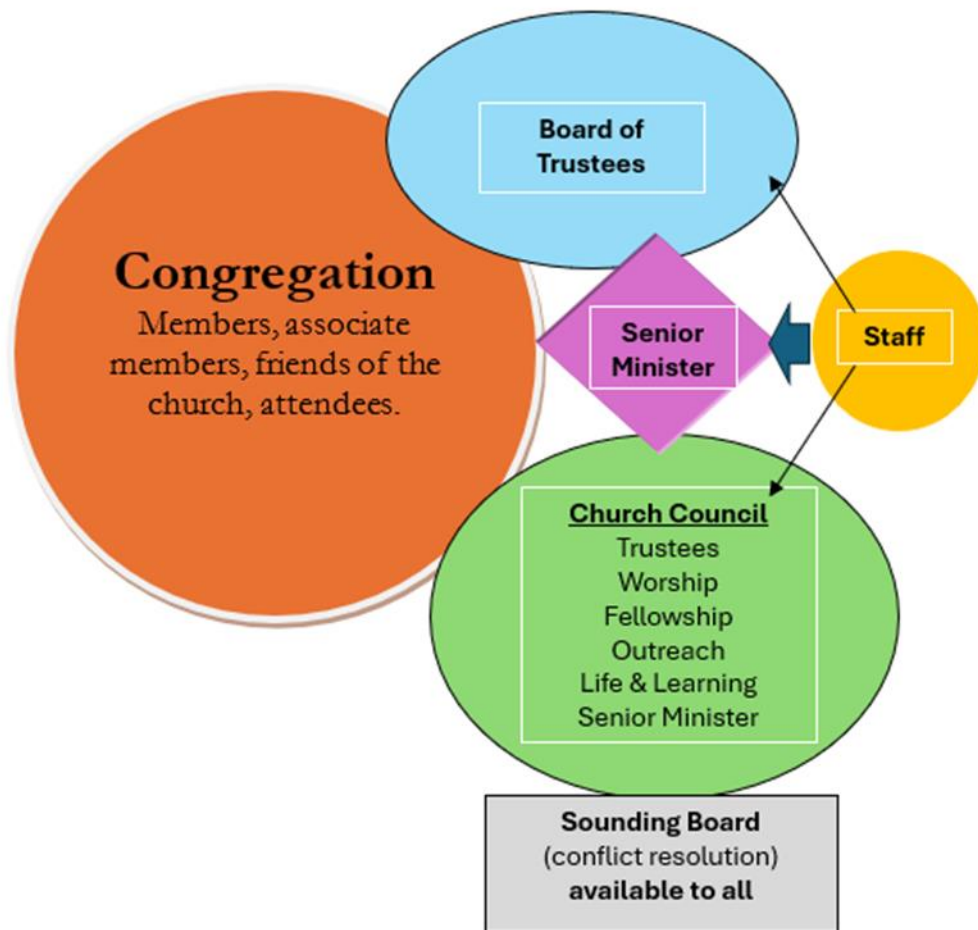
The Congregation (voting church members) makes all significant decisions, including financial decisions and ministerial decisions. Elect trustees, ministry chairs, approve budgets, officers.

The Church Council is responsible for supervising the Senior Minister, for pastoral care, visioning, worship, education, and social.

The Board of Trustees manages the finances, administration, legal, and property.

Senior Minister is the direct supervisor of all staff, oversees the daily operation of the church, and oversees all spiritual matters of the church in consultation with the Church Council.

The Sounding Board is the mediator for any grievances, complaints, or internal conflict.



MINISTRIES

Worship Ministry

- Sunday Worship
- Northern Lights Ringers (Bell Choir)
- Chancel Choir
- Organist
- Soloists
- Special performances and events
- Holidays- Christmas, Easter, etc
- Christmas Eve Service
- Maundy Thursday Meal and Service

Fellowship

- Potlucks
- Picnics
- Progressive Dinners
- New Members
- Movie Nights/Game nights
- Fat Tuesday Pancake Dinner

Outreach

- Volunteers of America- Kinship brunch
- These Two Hands- feeding homeless individuals
- FISH
- Thanksgiving Blessing
- Abused Women's Aid in Crisis
- PanAmerican Student

Life and Learning

- Sunday School
- Youth Group
- Library

Historian

CHURCH COUNCIL

- Chair – Moderator of the Church
- Vice-Chair
- Senior Minister
- Members- Chairs of each ministry established within the bylaws are all voting members (or there representative)
- Ad-Hoc Committees
 - Communications
 - Music Director Search
 - Nursery
 - Nominations Committee

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- Treasurer
- Clerk
- Financial Secretary
- Two ordinary members

STAFF

- Senior Minister
- Organist
- Choir Director
- Bell Choir Director
- Church Secretary
- Bookkeeper
- Janitorial/Cleaning (contractor)
- Wedding Coordinator
- Nursery Attendant

MISC PARTNERSHIPS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CHURCH

Regular Events

- Wednesday Soup Group
- Bible Study (online)
- Monthly Potlucks

Property Rental

- Other Churches- Fa'avae Fou
- Non-profits- Hospice of Anchorage
- AA Groups
- Pipes and Drums
- Spinners and Weavers Guild
- Alaska State Handbell Musicians Gathering
- General Public

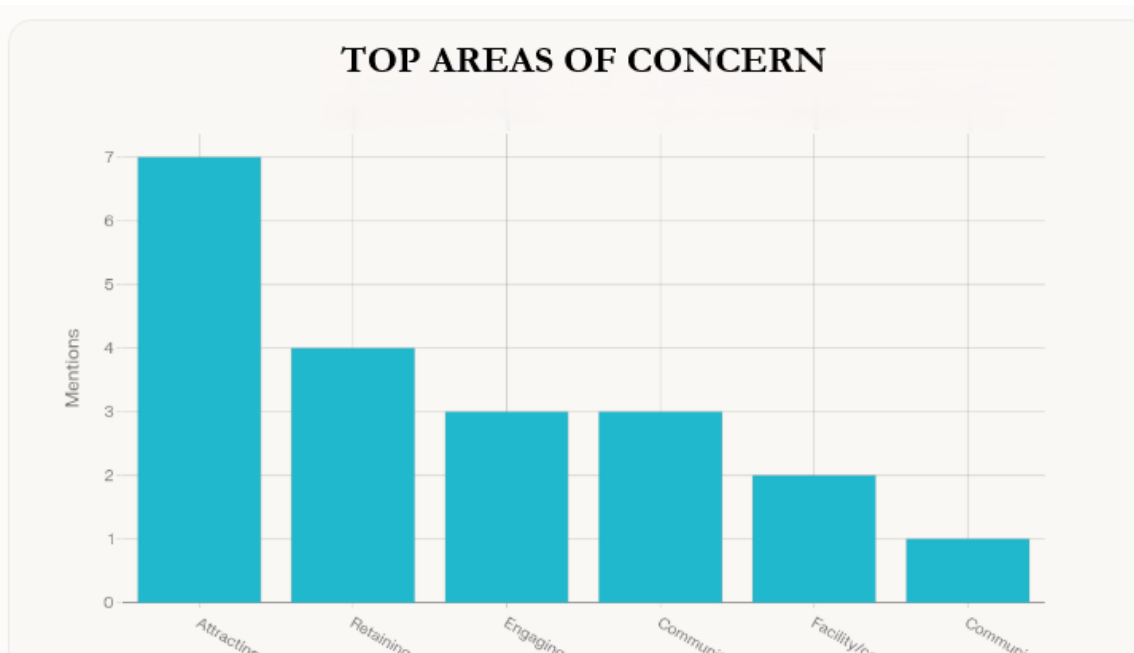
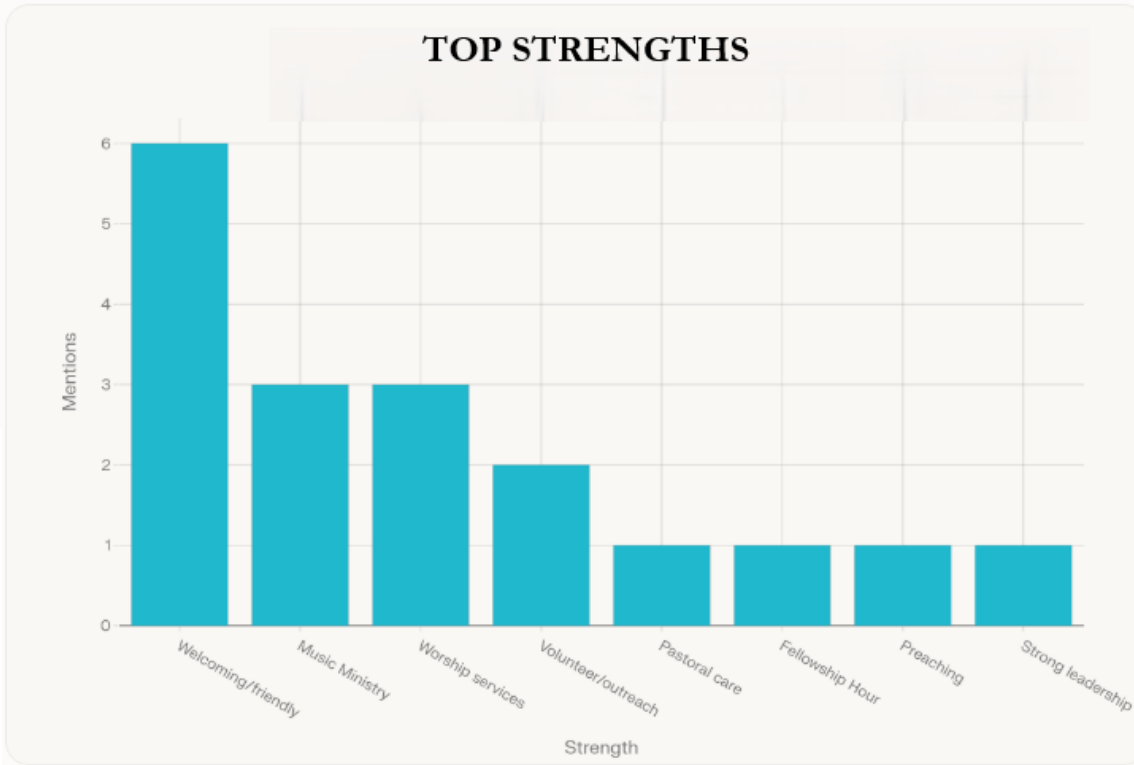
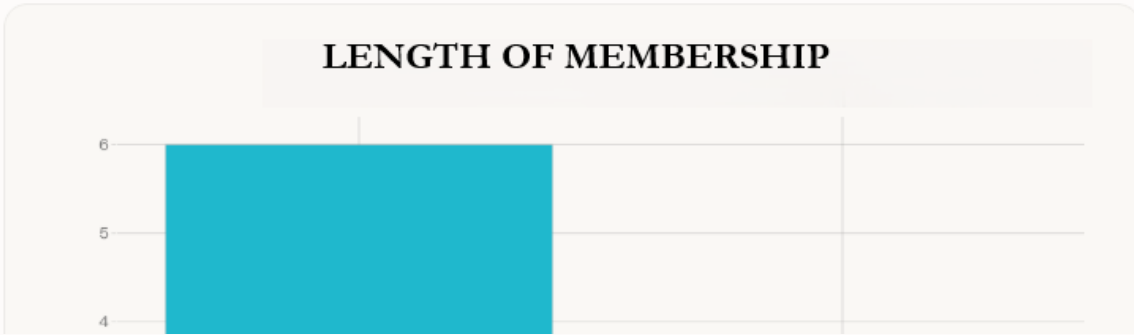
Annual Events

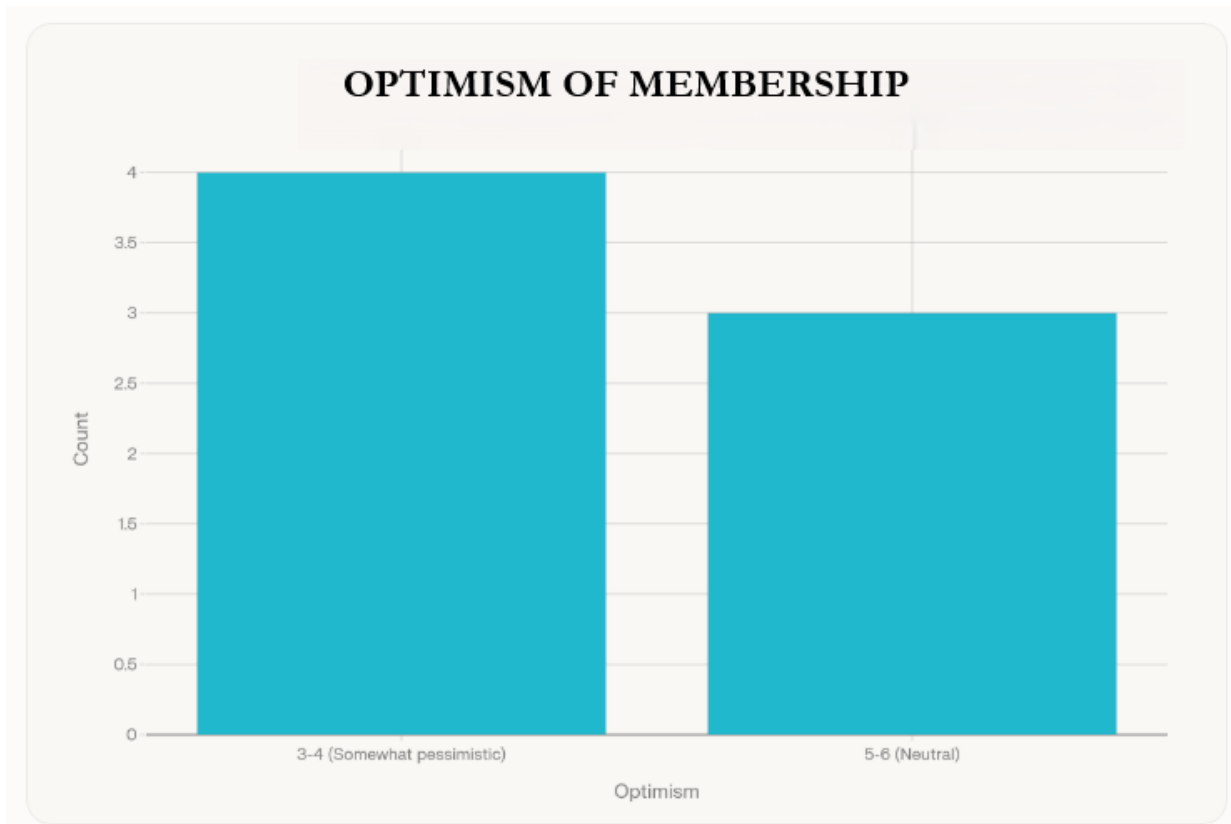
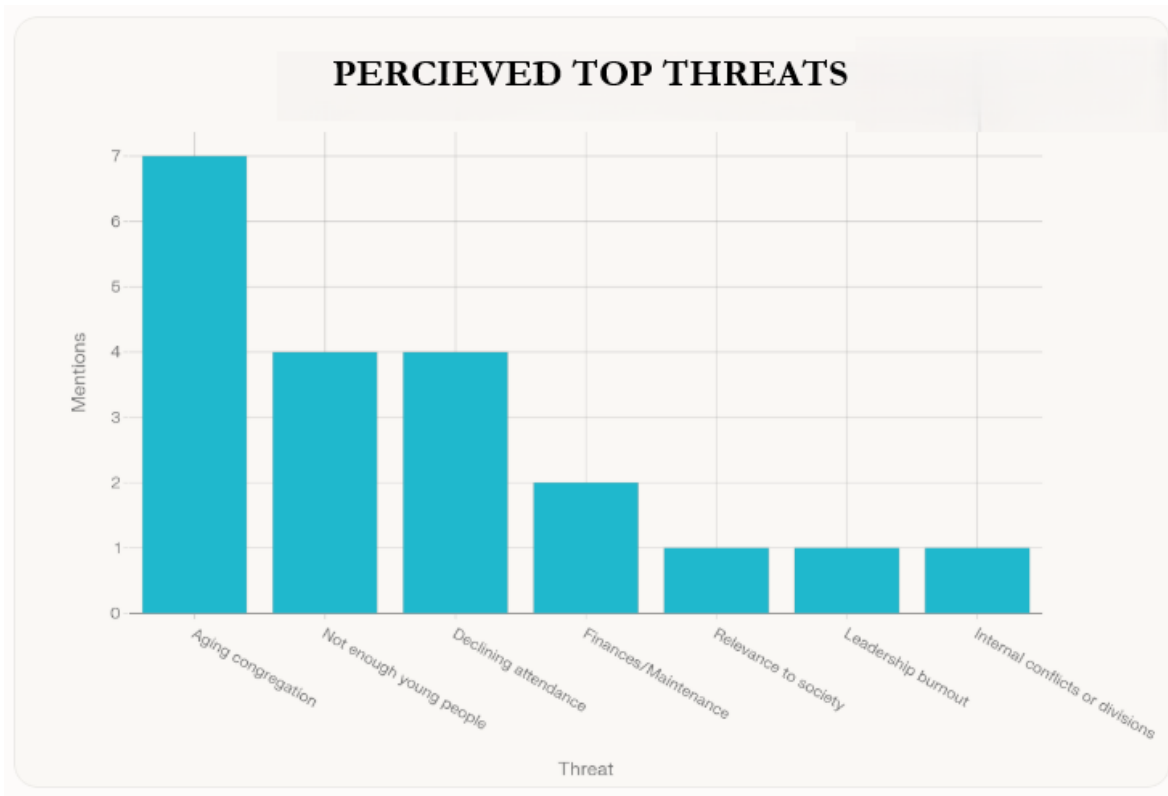
- Pop-up Markets
- Trick or Trunk – Haunted Trails Halloween
- Thanksgiving Eve Interfaith Service
- March Madness/April Aires/May Melodies
- Blessing of the Animals
- Rally Sunday
- Ash Wednesday Service
- Fall Faire/Book Sale

Partnerships

- Chugach Mountain Investors
- Ole (Lifelong Learning non-profit, affiliated with UAA)
- Ladie Waites/Slavonic Music Recitals

APPENDIX B. 2025 SACRED STRATEGIES SURVEY RESULTS ON CHURCH HEALTH





APPENDIX C. REQUEST TO USE FCCAK AS A CASE STUDY

Subject: Request for Permission to First Congregational Church of Anchorage (FCCA) as a Case Study

Jan 10, 2026

Dear Board of Trustees and Church Council,

My name is Rev. Johnathan Jones and I am a student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Chicago Theological Seminary. I am writing to seek your permission to conduct a case study on FCCAK.

Background: FCCAK has a rich history and has existed for roughly sixty-four (64) years. Some of the founding members are still active in the church. The church experienced several decades of strong growth, culminating in a “golden era” during the 1980s under the leadership of Rev. Beth Bingham. What set the church apart from other churches during the 1980s was its willingness to marry mixed race couples and its choice to have a female serve as the Senior Minister. This inclusiveness has continued with FCCAK voting to become an Open and Affirming Congregation in 2022, and then electing an openly gay man as Senior Minister in 2024. FCCAK has many historical archives that are easily accessible. Is the inclusiveness of FCCAK’s leadership mirrored in the laity and in the pews? Is FCCAK and its members more inclusive today compared to the past?



Purpose of the Study: My research explores the dynamics of church life and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, two-spirit, and queer people in the life of FCCAK and the church's leadership.

Study Design: I plan to conduct a qualitative case study and auto-ethnography, which will involve interviews, observations, and archival analysis, along with reflections on my experiences as a member and minister of FCCAK. The study will focus on the interactions and involvement of different individuals within the church, including LGBTQI2S individuals. I will be interviewing members, current and past, asking them their views and experiences concerning LGBTQI2SQ individuals and the church. By examining these dynamics, I hope to gain insights into effective and practical strategies for assessing and promoting the inclusion of LGBTQI2SQ individuals in the church and preventing further exclusion and church decline. This work will apply to FCCAK and similar Congregational churches throughout the US.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent: All information collected during this study will be treated confidentially. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the research, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent forms will be provided to all participants. There will be no penalty or punishment should a member decline to take part in the study, all participants will be kept confidential and their answers will remain confidential and will no way impact or change their relationship with the church or the senior minister.

Request for Permission: I kindly request your permission to proceed with this study. Specifically, I seek approval to:

- Conduct confidential interviews with church members.
- Observe, reflect, assess and report on church activities, including worship services, meetings, and events, removing all identifying data.
- Access relevant documents, such as church newsletters, meeting minutes, and program materials.

I assure you that the findings from this study will be used solely for academic purposes and will contribute to our understanding of church growth, dynamics, and inclusive practices. All individual identifiers will be anonymized with all data aggregated and coded, further guaranteeing confidentiality. All data and information will be securely stored electronically online, with only myself and my academic advisors have passwords. After the study all information will be destroyed per IRB requirements. There will be no financial obligation for FCCAK, although time of staff and members will be required, as will access to archival data and documents.

Timeline: I anticipate data collection to take place during January of 2026, with a finished thesis in February and graduation in April of 2026. A final report will be shared with the church leadership, and I am open to presenting the findings to the congregation if desired.

On Jan 18th at 12 pm I will be hosting an information session after church in the boardroom on my research. Everyone is invited to attend. After that meeting I will be requesting the church council to briefly convene and approve my research plan.

Thank you for considering my request. I appreciate your support in advancing research related to church inclusivity and growth.

Sincerely,

Rev. Johnathan Jones, BTheo, MAAP,
Doctor of Ministry Candidate at Chicago Theological Seminary,
Chicago, Illinois, Online Cohort

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM



Research Consent Form

Research Project: Is First Congregational Christian Church more inclusive today than it has been in the past?
Researcher: Johnathan Jones (BTheo, MAAP)

You have been asked to participate in a research study as a part of the Doctor of Ministry program at Chicago Theological Seminary. What are some things you should know about this research?

This research will explore how inclusive members of FCCAK are of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and two-spirit people of faith. To gather information for the research, members of the First Congregational Church of Anchorage (FCCAK) will be interviewed.

You are being asked to take part in an interview. Participation is voluntary; you may choose not to participate. Completing or not completing the interview will not affect your relationship with the researcher, FCCAK, or Chicago Theological Seminary.

The interview will focus on your membership and history with the church, what your views and opinions are of LGBTQI2S+ are, and how involved LGBTQI2S+ should be in FCCAK.

The interviews will be 30 to 90 minutes long at FCCAK in the minister’s study. You may be asked to participate in more than one interview. You will not be compensated for your time. Interviews are designed to collect information. This information may not benefit you currently but may benefit others in the future.

There are risks in being interviewed. During the interview, you will be asked several open-ended questions about your opinions and past experiences. You will be asked questions about sex and sexuality. You may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed answering these questions. Some questions may trigger memories of past experiences you may not wish to remember. You may refuse to answer any question(s). You may pause or withdraw from the interview at any time, for any reason, without penalty. A referral to a therapist or other mental health professional can be provided if you feel discomfort and wish to discuss your feelings.

Anything you say during the interview will be confidential. Your anonymity will be protected, and no personal or identifying information will be published. All records and information will be stored securely and password-protected, with only the researcher having access. All information will be destroyed after the study is completed. While the researcher has copyright protection and retains all intellectual and commercial rights to the materials, you can have access to cite or quote the work for your own purposes.

For more information, contact the research at Johnathan.Jones@cts.edu or (907)444-0869
IRB Approval and Contact Information: CTS _____

By printing my name and signing this document of my own free will I consent to participate, without compensation, in this study. I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time. I have read, understood, and received a copy this consent form.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E. POST INTERVIEW LETTER TO INTERVIEWEES

Dear Friend,

Thank you for the time you spent answering my questions for my doctoral thesis regarding the inclusivity of First Congregational Church of Anchorage (FCCA). Your insights are incredibly valuable to this project, and I am very grateful for your participation.

As I mentioned during our interview, I recognize that my dual role as both a researcher and a minister may have created some hesitation. It is possible you did not feel comfortable answering every question fully while we were in the room together. I promised to provide a link where you could answer any of those questions online—completely anonymously—to ensure you have the opportunity to speak freely and honestly.

Please click the link below to access the secure survey. I ask that everyone visit the link and select one of the following three options to complete the process:

Option A: If you feel you were able to answer all questions during the interview without hesitation and have nothing more to add, please select Option A to exit.

Option B: If you feel you were not able to answer all questions fully, but you do not wish to contribute anything further, please select Option B to exit.

Option C: If you feel you were not able to answer all questions fully and would like to provide those answers now, please select Option C to proceed directly to the survey questions.

Survey Link:

https://qualtricsxm24qj3q622.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_82liCHwn38q5nDg

Thank you once again for your time.

Rev. Johnathan Jones.

APPENDIX F. MOST FREQUENT AND LEAST FREQUENT MEANINGFUL WORDS
(LEMMATIZED)

| Rank | Most frequent word | Count | Least frequent word | Count |
|-------------|---------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | parent | 4 | action | 1 |
| 2 | people | 4 | actively | 1 |
| 3 | other | 3 | art | 1 |
| 4 | make | 3 | bible | 1 |
| 5 | both | 2 | bring | 1 |
| 6 | world | 2 | celebrate | 1 |
| 7 | church | 2 | clear | 1 |
| 8 | way | 2 | come | 1 |
| 9 | anyone | 2 | commitment | 1 |
| 10 | school | 2 | community | 1 |

APPENDIX G. STANDARD ENGLISH STOP WORD LIST

a, an, the, and, or, but, if, then, so, because, as, of, in, on, at, by, for, to, from, with, about, into, over, under, out, up, down, is, are, was, were, be, been, being, do, did, does, have, has, had, will, would, can, could, should, may, might, I, me, my, we, our, you, your, he, she, it, they, them, their, this, that, these, those, here, there, when, where, why, how, not, no, just, very, too, also, only, own, same, again.

APPENDIX H: THEMATIC ANALYSIS CODES

| Code | Label | Definition | Include |
|-------------|-----------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Wel | Welcoming | Explicit statements that all people are welcome | “Everybody is welcome” |
| Inc | Inclusion-as-Action | Calls for accountability, assessment, or practice | “More than words” |
| ONA | ONA | ONA as label, vote, or statement | “Just a statement” |
| Av | Avoidance | Avoiding confrontation or correction | “I wouldn’t say anything” |
| SX | Sexuality Irrelevance | Sexuality framed as private or irrelevant | “It doesn’t matter” |
| VN | Visibility Negative | Acceptance limited by discomfort with expression | “Don’t flaunt it” |
| VP | Visibility Positive | Visibility framed as positive or necessary | “Visibility is important” |
| Cha | Generational Change | Change attributed to time, age, culture | “Times have changed” |
| Out | Outreach Gap | Failure to communicate externally | “Not reaching out” |

APPENDIX I. INTERVIEW-BY-ATTITUDE CLUSTER MATRIX

Codes:

A1 = Shared humanity

B1 = Low-salience attitudes

C1 = Conditional acceptance

A2 = Inclusive theology

B2 = “People are people” framing

C2 = Discomfort with visibility

A3 = Relational warmth

B3 = Conflict-avoidance / shallow reflection

C3 = Moral/theological concern

| INT | Attitude cluster | A1 | A2 | A3 | B1 | B2 | B3 | C1 | C2 | C3 | Brief analytic memo |
|-----|-------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--|
| 1 | A – Explicit acceptance & support | X | X | X | | | | | | | Celebrates diverse upbringing, Jefferson Bible, and “celebrate differences”; emphasizes a welcoming church shaping how they relate to people unlike themselves; explicitly supports ongoing inclusive commitment and assessment. |
| 2 | A – Explicit acceptance & support | X | | X | | X | | | | | Opens with “All people should be welcome. People are people,” affirms prior gay members and leadership decisions; overall tone is warmly affirming even if not highly analytic. |
| 3 | B – Ambivalent / passive acceptance | | | | X | X | X | | | | Describes church as “very open” and hopes homosexuals would be welcome, but repeatedly says it “wasn’t an issue,” lacks close gay friends, and would likely stay quiet if someone said something negative. |
| 4 | C – Resistant / conditional | | | | | | | X | X | | States “I don’t care what a person does in the bedroom” yet objects to Denise “flaunting it” in children’s moments; accepts presence but places clear behavioral/visibility limits. |

| INT | Attitude cluster | A1 | A2 | A3 | B1 | B2 | B3 | C1 | C2 | C3 | Brief analytic memo |
|-----|-------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| 5 | A – Explicit acceptance & support | X | X | X | | | | | | | Newer attender who finds FCC “more inclusive” than prior context, values ONA identity, gives high inclusion rating (e.g., 8.5/10), and calls for more conversations and classes about inclusivity. |
| 6 | B – Ambivalent / passive acceptance | | X | | X | X | | | | | Frames homosexuality as irrelevant to why they come to church (“has nothing to do with why I come”), emphasizes neighbor-love while treating sexuality as low-salience. |
| 7 | B – Ambivalent / passive acceptance | | | | X | X | X | | | | Says they’ve “never really thought too hard about it,” recognizes divisiveness but typically avoids confrontation and would only intervene if a comment directly targeted someone. |
| 8 | B – Ambivalent / passive acceptance | | | | | X | | | X | | Thinks inclusion is “accepted, but not always totally accepted,” notes older conservative members and mixed feelings about a transgender minister; overall accepts inclusion but with reservations, without outright rejection. |
| 9 | B – Ambivalent / passive acceptance | X | | | X | X | | | | | Affirms that sex is “nobody’s business” and anyone should be able to come but notes never seeing gay members and treats sexuality as largely outside their concern. |
| 10 | A – Explicit acceptance & support | X | | X | | X | | | | | Describes extensive contact with diverse people (race, nationality, sexuality), expresses no qualms about homosexuality, and narrates long history of comfort around queer people; strongly people-focused and welcoming. |

| INT | Attitude cluster | A1 | A2 | A3 | B1 | B2 | B3 | C1 | C2 | C3 | Brief analytic memo |
|-----|-------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--|
| 11 | A – Explicit acceptance & support | X | X | X | | | | | | | Critiques churches for policing “people’s personal lives,” insists “we are learning that people are people and we have no right to treat them differently,” and praises FCCAK’s open-door, anti-control ethos. |
| 12 | B – Ambivalent / passive acceptance | | | | X | X | X | | | | Says it’s “between them and God” and avoids judging; affirms that any person is welcome but stresses personal non-criticism and does not actively engage inclusion questions. |
| 13 | C – Resistant / conditional | X | | | | X | | X | X | | Affirms shared humanity but insists on “include people, as long as you don’t flaunt it,” emphasizing respect and non-controversy while setting explicit limits on queer visibility. |

APPENDIX J. MINISTRIES WITH LGBTQI2S INCLUSION RESOURCES AND
DISCERNMENT PROCESS

| ORGANIZATION | DENOMINATION | YEAR EST. | DESCRIPTION |
|--|---|------------------|---|
| Open and Affirming (ONA) | United Church of Christ (UCC) | 1985 | Queer friendly assoc. of UCC and affiliated para-church organizations |
| Reconciling in Christ (RIC) | Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) | 1983 | Emphasize relational organizing and anti-bullying |
| Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) | United Methodist Church (UMC) | 1994 | Advocacy against UMC anti-LGBTQ policies |
| More Light Presbyterians (MLP) | Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA) | 1981 | Toolkit for inclusive worship and training |
| Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists (AWAB) | American Baptist Churches USA, Alliance of Baptists | 1993 | Bridges moderate Baptist networks |
| GLAD Alliance | Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) | 1970s | Inclusive sacraments and missions |
| Room for All | Reformed Church in America (RCA) | 1996 | Emphasizes scriptural hospitality |
| Brethren Mennonite Council (BMC) | Mennonite Church USA, Church of the Brethren | 1974 | Trauma-informed pastoral care |
| Integrity USA | Episcopal Church USA | 1974 | Liturgical resources for inclusion |
| Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble | United Church of Canada | 1987 | Bilingual (English/French) focus |
| Welcoming Community Network | Community of Christ | 2006 | Prophetic peace witness |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adler, Alfred. "Health Manual for the Tailoring Trade," in *The Collected Clinical Works of Alfred Adler, Volume 2: Journal Articles 1898–1909: The Mind–Body Connection, Social Activism, and Sexuality*, ed. Henry T. Stein, trans. Cees Koen and Gerald Liebenau (Bellingham, WA: Classical Adlerian Translation Project, 2002).
- Adler, Alfred. "The Fundamental Views of Individual Psychology", *Journal of Individual Psychology*, University of Texas Press, n.d. "The Fundamental Views of Individual Psychology," originally published in 1935 in the *International Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol 1, no. 1.
- Adler, Alfred. *Understanding Life*, Edited by Colin Brett, OneWorld Publications, Oxford, England, 1997.
- AdlerPedia. *Horizontal vs Vertical Planes of Movement*. 2017. <https://www.adlerpedia.org>
- Ansbacher, Heinz L. *Correspondence with Dr. Eriksson*, University of Vermont, February 22, 1993.
- Anselm of Canterbury. *Monologion*. Translated by Jasper Hopkins. The Logic Museum. Accessed March 3, 2026. <http://www.logicmuseum.com/authors/anselm/monologion/anselmmonologion.htm>.
- Augustine of Hippo. *On the Trinity*. In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Volume 3, edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887. Accessed March 3, 2026. <http://www.logoslibrary.org/augustine/trinity/1414.html>.
- Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity*. Books 8-15, Ed. Gareth B. Matthews. University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Cambridge University Press, 2002. Book 8, Chapter 7.
- Ayton, Darshini. "Chapter 22: Thematic Analysis" in *Qualitative Research: A practical guide for health and social care researchers and practitioners*. Eds. Darshini Ayton; Tess Tsindos; Danielle Berkovic, 2023, Open Education Resource Collective, <https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/22/>
- Ayton, Darshini. "Chapter 26: Rigour" in *Qualitative Research: A practical guide for health and social care researchers and practitioners*. Eds. Darshini Ayton; Tess Tsindos; Danielle Berkovic, 2023, Open Education Resource Collective, <https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/26/>
- BBC Teach. "What Is the Real Story of the Garden of Eden." *BBC News*, 2022. <https://toybox.tools.bbc.co.uk/activities>.
- Bitter, James, and Griffith, Jane. "Adler's 'The Fundamental Views of Individual Psychology': Context, Clarification, and Expansion." *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol 75, no. 3: 2019.
- Bluvshtein, M. "Individual Psychology as a 'Living Force of Progress'." *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol 76, no. 1 Spring 2020.
- Braxton, Bradley. *Open: Unorthodox thoughts on God and Community*, Broadleaf Books, Minneapolis. 2023. Kindle Edition
- Braun, Virginia, and Clarke, Victoria. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* Vol 3 no. 2. 2006. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
- Burton, Neel. "Same-Sex Relations in the Bible." *Psychology Today*, November 2017. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-peek/201711/same-sex-relations-in-the-bible>
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York: Routledge,

- 1990.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Butler, Judith. *Who's Afraid of Gender*, Farrah, Straus and Giroux, 2024. Kindle edition.
- Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004.
- Butler, Judith. "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Castleman, Michael. "How Much Time Does the World Spend Watching Porn? Depending on One's Perspective, Porn Is Either a Black Hole or a Coffee Break." *Psychology Today*, October 31, 2020. Accessed <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/all-about-sex/202010/how-much-time-does-the-world-spend-watching-porn>.
- Cleage, Pearl. *Deals with the Devil and Other Reasons to Riot*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.
- Coogan, M. Ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Cornille, Catherine. *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*. New York: Crossroad, 2008.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1, article 8.
- Duncan, Kevin G. *The Church and Gender Ideology*. YouTube video, September 22, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJY76RFg_hk&feature=youtu.be.
- Encyclopedia Britannica Online. *Congregationalism*. Accessed March 9, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com>.
- Encyclopedia Britannica Online. *Same-Sex Marriage*. Accessed March 9, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/same-sex-marriage>
- Ferguson, Eva Dreikurs. "Alfred Adler's Profound Understanding of Social Motivation." *The General Psychologist*, Vol 49, no. 2, 2015.
- First Congregational Church of Anchorage, *Service of Dedication of the Church Building: Order of Worship*, August 20, 1967.
- Forst, Rainer. *Toleration in Conflict: Past and Present*. Translated by Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Foucault, Michel. *Michel Foucault: Concepts*. Archived website, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20130723170825/>
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913, Project Gutenberg eBook, p 409. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/66048/66048-h/66048-h.htm>
- Ghaziani, Amin. "The Reinvention of Heterosexuality." *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* Vol 17, no. 3 (May–June 2010). <https://glreview.org/article/the-reinvention-of-heterosexuality/>.
- Green, Melissa S., and Brause, Jay K. *Identity Reports: Sexual Orientation Bias in Alaska*. Anchorage, AK: Identity, Inc., 1989.
- Green, Melissa S. *Anchorage LGBT Discrimination Survey*. Revised ed. Anchorage, AK: Identity, Inc., 2015. (Original work published 2012.)
- Halberstam, Jack. "Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy", *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol 45, no. 2–4, 2003.
- Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

- Halberstam, Jack. *Female Masculinity*. Rev. ed. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Henderson, Amanda. "Political Polarization and Christian Nationalism in Our Pews" *Religions* Vol 16, no. 4, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040507>
- Identity, Inc. *One in Ten: A Profile of Alaska's Lesbian & Gay Community*. Anchorage, AK: Identity, Inc., 1986.
- Institute on Religion and Democracy. *Changed Movement*. 2022. <https://www.juicyecumenism.com>.
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. NY: New York University Press, 1996.
- Jennings, Michael. "The Anglican Split: Why Has Sexuality Become So Important to Conservative Christians?" *Vox* (Trinity College Theological School), 2022. <https://vox.divinity.edu.au/opinion/the-anglican-split-why-has-sexuality-become-so-important-to-conservative-christians/>
- Jimenez, K. "Historic Methodist rift is part of larger Christian split over LGBTQ issues", *USA Today*, Updated Jan 19, 2024, Accessed Nov 8, 2025. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2024/01/19/united-methodist-christian-split-lgbtq/72208440007/>
- John, Karen. "Adlerian Theory and Practice Wisdom Promote Democratic." *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol 76, no. 1 Spring 2020.
- John, Karen. "Basic Needs, Conflict, and Dynamics in Groups." *The Journal of Individual Psychology* Vol 56, no. 4 Winter 2000.
- Jones, Johnathan. "God Loves the Gay Me." In *When Our Children Come Out*, edited by Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, Victoria, Australia, Finch Publishing, 2004.
- Jones, Johnathan. "Queer Theology FCC ONA Class." Lecture, First Congregational Church of Anchorage (Zoom), December 4, 2021.
- Jones, Johnathan. "Sacred Strategies: Voices and Vision." Presentation, First Congregational Church of Anchorage, September 6, 2025.
- Jones, Johnathan, and M. Zimmerman. *FCCAK Pastoral Search Church Survey*. Report for the Pastoral Search Committee, First Congregational Church of Anchorage, June 8, 2022.
- Katz, Jonathan Ned. "The Invention of Heterosexuality." *Socialist Review* Vol 20 (January–March 1990).
- Ketchum, R. "Reparative Therapy is Legal for Adults. Here is why it Shouldn't Be." *Harvard Civil Rights Review*, April 27, 2020. <https://journals.law.harvard.edu/crcl/reparative-therapy-is-legal-for-adults-heres-why-it-shouldnt-be/>
- King Jr, Martin Luther. "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Knight, Rebecca. "Six Common Leadership Styles and How to Decide When to Use Them", *Harvard Business Review*, April 6, 2024. Accessed Oct 10, 2024. <https://hbr.org/2024/04/6-common-leadership-styles-and-how-to-decide-which-to-usewhen>
- Lemonides, John. "Toward an Adlerian Approach to Organizational Intervention." *The Journal of Individual Psychology* Vol 63, no. 4, Winter 2007.
- Littlewood, Kate, and Gardner, Diane H. "A Brief Guide to Qualitative Research in Veterinary Science: Interviews, Focus Groups, Surveys and Reflexive Thematic Analysis for Practitioners and Researchers." *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*, February, 1–11. 2026. doi:10.1080/00480169.2026.2614562.

- Lorber, Judith. "'Night to His Day': The Social Construction of Gender." *In Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, edited by Paula S. Rothenberg, 38–46. New York: Worth Publishers, 2016.
- Marinucci, Mimi. *Feminism Is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/adler/detail.action?docID=625225>
- Mattingly, Terry. "How Do We Define 'Progressive Christianity'?" *Religion Unplugged*. July 24, 2022. <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2022/7/25/what-is-progressive-Christianity>
- Mauro, Elizabeth. *The Art and Practice of the Congregational Way: A Church Guide*, Oak Creek, WI: National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, 2019.
- McCann, Hannah. "Epistemology of the Subject: Queer Theory's Challenge to Feminist Sociology." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol 44 no. 3–4, 2016.
- McCluskey, Mary C. "Revitalizing Alfred Adler: An Echo for Equality," *Clinical Social Work Journal* Vol 49, no. 2, 2021.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 6th ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017
- Merriam-Webster. "Conservative." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Accessed March 9, 2026. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservative>.
- Merriam-Webster. "Far right." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Accessed March 9, 2026. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/far%20right>
- Merriam-Webster. "LGBT." *Mirriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Accessed March 9, 2026. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/LGBT>
- National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. "About Us: The Congregational Way", *Internet Archive*, Accessed Nov 9, 2025 <https://web.archive.org/web/20130121001415/http://www.naccc.org/AboutUs/CongregationalWay.aspx>
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources. *Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit 2.0*. Washington, DC: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources, 2009, 2013. PDF. <https://www.gaychurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/building-an-inclusive-church-a-welcoming-toolkit.pdf>
- National Setting of the United Church of Christ, *Open and Affirming in the UCC*. 2024. Accessed Nov 7, 2025. https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/wider-church-ministries/gsjm/lgbtqia/lgbt_ona/
- Pew Research Center. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." *Pew Research Center*, October 17, 2019.
- Preiss, Amy E, and Molina-Ray, Caroline. "Leadership Training for Managers: An Adlerian Approach." *Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol 1, no. 1, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.20003>.
- Pretorius, Lize. "Demystifying Research Paradigms: Navigating Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology in Research," *The Qualitative Report*, Vol 29, no. 10, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2024.7632>.
- Rouner, Arthur. *The Congregational Way of Life*, Milwaukee, WI: Hammersmith-Breithaupt, 1972.
- Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *In*

- Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, edited by Peter Aggleton and Richard Parker. London: Routledge, 1999.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/adler/detail.action?docID=165449>
- Sanders, Cody J. *Christianity, LGBTQ Suicide, and the Souls of Queer Folk*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020. Kindle edition.
- Stewart, Paul. “Alternating and Alternative Sexualities.” *In Sex and Aesthetics in Samuel Beckett’s Work*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230339279-5>
- Smutny, Zdenek, and Zdenek Sulc. “The Internet and Consumption of Pornography: A Case of Generation Y in the Czech and Slovak Republic.” *In Youth and Sexuality in the Digital Age*, 10.1007/978-3-030-01437-7_7, 2018
- Tsindos, Tess. “Chapter 20: Coding Approaches.” *In Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Health and Social Care Researchers and Practitioners*, edited by Darshini Ayton, Tess Tsindos, and Danielle Berkovic. Open Education Resources Collective, 2023.
<https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/20/>.
- Unitarian Universalist Association, Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns. *Living the Welcoming Congregation: Resources for Continuing the Welcoming Congregation Journey*. Edited by Keith Kron and Barb Greve. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2004.
https://www.uua.org/files/documents/zz.private/obgltc/welcoming_living.pdf
- Watts, Richard E. “La Psicología Individual de Adler: La Psicología Positiva Original [Adler’s Individual Psychology: The Original Positive Psychology].” *Revista de Psicoterapia* Vol 26, no. 102, 2015.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 2003. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>.
- Wilcox, Melissa M. *Queer Religiosities: An Introduction to Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. Kindle edition.
- Wilkins, Mikayla. “Embracing Diversity: Lessons from ‘Hidden Figures’”, *Leadership PSYCH 485 Blog*, April 15, 2024. Accessed Oct 9, 2024.
<https://sites.psu.edu/leadership/2024/04/15/embracing-diversity-lessons-from-hidden-figures/>
- Woodberry, Robert D., and Smith, Christian S. “Fundamentalism et al.: Conservative Protestants in America.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 24, 1998.

PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Doctor In Ministry Deliverable

Congregational Inclusivity in Practice

**Congregational Inclusivity in Practice
Assessment Tool**

**Developed by
Rev Johnathan C Jones, DMin, MAP, BTheo**

© Copyright 2026 Johnathan Jones. All Rights Reserved. This Inclusivity in Practice Tool and all associated materials are protected by copyright. No part may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews, academic work, or certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

This assessment tool would not have been possible without all the wonderful and amazing individuals who make First Congregational Church of Anchorage my spiritual home and refuge.

Thank you to all of you.

(10-24, 10-4, 10-10)

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| CHAPTER 2: GETTING STARTED | 16 |
| CHAPTER 3: OUR STORIES, OUR VALUES | 36 |
| CHAPTER 4: THE RESULTS | 42 |
| CHAPTER 5: TIME TO FLY | 44 |

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Why should your church use this tool?

A few years ago your congregation voted to become an Open and Affirming, Welcoming Congregation, or a More Light Congregation- whatever the denomination or association, your church chose to proudly and publicly include all people, especially those who are members of the colorful alphabet community: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, two-spirit, questioning, allied and more.

Today, your congregation may have become complacent, perhaps tired, or possibly challenged. The queer people have slowly but surely dwindled in number and now you only have one queer member in your church. Maybe your queer study group has folded. Perhaps your church has become more conservative over the last couple of years. Maybe you are simply curious. Whatever the reason, you are questioning whether your church still deserves the status of Open and Affirming. Is your church still a safe refuge for queer folks? This tool will guide you as you endeavor to find the answer.

This tool is a congregational self-assessment tool, designed to help you discern how fully your church practices inclusivity. This tool is for congregations that have already taken the step toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Two-Spirit inclusion and are asking, with true sincerity, are we practicing what we preach?

This isn't a perfect tool, but it is a real tool, grounded in the life of a real church in a real North American town, informed by solid theological and psychological frameworks alongside peer-reviewed qualitative and quantitative research. It uses Adlerian Organizational Psychology to define what it means to be an inclusive church. Adler dreamt of a world where democracy, community, and belonging were the pillars of society. In a word, this world was "Gemeinschaftsgefühl". Adler coined this word in German, and it has no corresponding word in English, but the best way to translate it is as "Social Interest" or "Community Feeling".¹⁰⁷

Gemeinschaftsgefühl is a community that is focused on every individual, for the good of every individual, with the characteristic of caring for every individual, caring about the community, and caring about the environment of the community—not for selfish reasons, but rather because it is the right thing to do.

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Adler, *Understanding Human Nature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927).

With over 25 years in ministry I have found that such a vision—where everyone loves their neighbor, does unto others as they would have them do unto themselves, and see’s the divine in their fellow human beings because we are all created in God’s image—is very much in line with the message of Jesus’s love.

This tool will help you discern and assess how inclusive your church community is of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and two-spirit individuals. It is designed to be used within a community and over a long period of time. It will not produce an answer within an hour or two, instead it will take several months, or even a year, before you come to any definitive determination. This tool is also designed to be practiced two or three times over a period of five years. It recognizes that churches and inclusivity are not static entities, but rather growing and journeying modes of being that change constantly.

In the pages that follow, you will find an overview of inclusivity, an explanation of the Adlerian building blocks, step by step instructions for conducting church-wide surveys and interviews to gather data, guidance for interpreting your results, and recommendations for next steps. I hope this tool will provide you with insights into who you are and how you love. More than that, I trust this tool will help your church become honest, healthy, and whole. May God bless you as you begin this time of discernment and you journey toward being a truly inclusive community of faith.

Expectations

This Congregational Inclusivity in Practice Tool is a structured, congregation-wide self-assessment process. This tool does not offer a pass or fail examination and determination of inclusivity. This tool is not designed to expose, embarrass, or condemn anyone or your church. This tool is relationship. A relationship that is transparent, accountable, forthright, fair, questioning, reflecting, growing, and loving. A relationship that calls your congregation to be its best- honest, healthy, and whole.

With this tool your congregation will:

- Identify core values that currently define your church culture and practices around LGBTQI2S inclusion.
- Assess how those values align with the three Adlerian foundational building blocks
Characteristic of an inclusive congregation: democracy, community and belonging.
- Receive a score that places your congregation on a continuum of inclusivity.

- Receive practical real-life recommendations for growth toward becoming an inclusive community.
- Develop a roadmap for growing from mere acceptance toward the full inclusion of LGBTQI2S people within the life of your community.

Let's be honest

Before we go any further it is important for me to remind you that this tool will only be effective if you and your community are honest. When describing your community, when talking about who you are, make sure that you are not describing who you once were or who you hope to be in the future. Be honest and describe yourself as you are now, warts and all. It is only via honest self-reflection that the CIP can be successful.

The other side of the coin is a willingness to accept the results. Many churches have an ideal sense of who they are as a community. It can be quite a shock to learn that you are not as inclusive as you believe yourself to be. Be open to what is revealed and rather than take it as judgement, take it as a loving suggestion to improve who you are, a nudge to becoming a more whole community of faith. This tool will only be performative if you are willing and able to answer the questions with raw and honest reflection.

To gain the most authentic and reflective results of your community the following conditions are non-negotiable:

Leadership must model vulnerability. If the minister and council members are unwilling to acknowledge areas of growth, the congregation will not do the same. Ministers, elders, trustees all must have the humility to model vulnerability- particularly if the results are not what you expected.

Anonymity must be protected. For honest responses interviewees and survey respondents must feel confident that their answers are safe and will not be disclosed to anyone.

Participation must be thorough. The majority of your congregation must participate. While you cannot force anybody to participate, if you do not get a broad cross-section of your congregation's input, then the picture will be inaccurate. For a truly useful picture you need the support and participation of as many people as possible.

Results must be shared openly. The congregation deserves to know the results of the assessment. Even if the results are difficult to accept or understand, honesty is key. Furthermore, the results need to be explained to the congregation. Results mean nothing if they are not easy to

understand. Follow the KISS principle when explaining your results—Keep It Simple Stupid. But remember—no specifics, no information that will allow others to deduce details, no particulars, and most of all no names, genders, ages, locations, and no hair or eye colors.

The process must be repeated. Inclusivity is not a destination; it is the journey. It is a practice. When used regularly this tool becomes a powerful tool of ongoing and growing discernment.

Inclusivity 101

Before your congregation can assess how inclusive they are, your congregation must have a shared understanding of what inclusivity means, what it looks like, and how it is practiced. *The absence of exclusion does not create inclusion.* Just because your church refrains from turning people away at the door, does not mean you are not turning people away somewhere or someway else.

Inclusion is the active, ongoing, and intentional practice of welcoming all people into the life of the church.

Using the same principles of democracy, community, and belonging that Adlerian organizational psychologists use to determine the health of an organization, this assessment tool will determine just how inclusive a congregation is of LGBTQI2S people. Inclusivity is not an objective or fixed condition but a socially constructed reality shaped by relationships, shared meanings, leadership practices, and congregational culture. Being inclusive in practice means an ongoing commitment to regular self-assessment, critical reflection, and growth. Inclusivity is not attained and placed on the wall like a certificate; rather, it is an ever-growing reality based on the actions of the people who are the church. Inclusivity is as fluid and flexible as the people who can in and out of your church.

The practice of inclusivity is a lived experience, interpreted differently by the members within a congregation. Using Alfred Adler's principles of democracy, community, and belonging this tool will provide the guidance and the building blocks for true inclusivity.

Inclusive Defined- for this tool inclusivity is understood as relating specifically to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Two-Spirit people (LGBTQI2S). This does not exclude others, however it recognizes that LGBTQI2S people continue to be officially and unofficially excluded from the life of the Church universal. Other dimensions of inclusivity- such as race, gender, class, ability, age, and nationality- are still important and must be addressed, but this assessment tool is concerned with LGBTQI2S inclusion.

Inclusive Congregations- Genuine inclusion of LGBTQI2S people in the life of a congregation have the following characteristics:

- Queer people are not only members, but they are visible members and their visibility is not only tolerated but celebrated. Queer people represent your congregation.
- Queer people are involved at all levels of your church's leadership. They sit on boards, they lead worship, they preach, they are choir members, they teach adult education and educate your children, they participate in pastoral care and community outreach.
- Church liturgy, programming, and language all reflect the full diversity of its members. The voices of queer people are evident by the inclusion of queer experiences, artists, theologians, prayers, and stories.
- Same-sex marriages, queer baptisms, and queer funerals all take place with the exact level of care and reverence as any other sacrament.
- The church intentionally spends time, money, and energy specifically serving and reaching out to LGBTQI2S people. Not in a condescending or judgmental manner, but as a matter of justice and empowerment.
- LGBTQI2S have lessons for you to learn, they have a wealth of knowledge that you are actively seeking; it should not be an environment where you have lesson that they need to learn from you; most queer folks have need learning from heterosexual people their entire lives.
- Leadership and membership do not stay silent when homophobia or transphobia are present. Leaders and fellow congregants address homophobia and transphobia openly, with care, and with clear conviction- such values or behaviors will not be tolerated.

Inclusive Glossary- following are a list of terms and their definitions that may be helpful as you work with this tool.

Church and church: “Church” (capital C) ordinarily refers to the whole Christian community or a particular denomination or tradition (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church or the United Church of Christ), while “church” (lowercase c) often refers to a local congregation, building, or specific worshipping community within the larger Church. Otherwise known as the Universal Church or Church Universal.

Conservative Christianity: designates movements within Christianity that seek to retain orthodox and long-standing traditions and beliefs, emphasizing biblical authority, historic doctrines, and

resistance to liberal or progressive reinterpretations. A conservative is a person who tends to preserve established traditions, values, and institutions, and is generally resistant to rapid or radical changes in society or politics.

Exclusion: To exclude or prevent a person, or a group of people, from a particular group, gathering, or activity. In a church or theological context, exclusion refers to formal or informal practices by which certain people or groups (for example, LGBTQI2S people, women, or racial minorities) are denied full participation, leadership, or recognition in the life of the church or society.

Far right: The far right refers to individuals or movements whose political positions lie at the extreme end of the right-wing spectrum, typically marked by strong nationalism, xenophobia, and hostility to liberal democracy, and often associated with reactionary, authoritarian, or supremacist ideologies. Far-right activists often deny the Holocaust and advocate making homosexuality illegal and punishable.

Inclusive: The opposite of exclusion, it involves the inclusion of groups and people who are often excluded from mainstream groups and activities. In church and theology, inclusive describes communities and practices that intentionally welcome and affirm people of diverse backgrounds (including race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class) as full participants and leaders, rather than merely tolerating their presence.

LGBTQI2S: LGBTQI2S is an umbrella acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Two-Spirit people, used in North American contexts to recognize both sexual and gender diversity and Indigenous Two-Spirit traditions.

Liberal/progressive: Liberal or progressive Christianity is characterized by willingness to question tradition, acceptance of human diversity, emphasis on social justice and care for the oppressed, and a central stress on Jesus' command to love one another. It often supports inclusive practices toward LGBTQ+ persons, women's leadership, and interfaith cooperation, including for the full inclusion of historically marginalized individuals within the church and society. Indicates an embrace of change and inclusion. The word can be applied in politics and religion.

Mainstream churches: In the United States, mainstream (or "mainline") churches are the older, historic Protestant denominations such as the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), and others rooted in 18th–19th-century American Protestantism.

People of faith: People of faith are individuals who identify with a religious or spiritual tradition and whose beliefs and practices significantly shape their worldview, often including participation in organized worship or communal rituals.

Same-sex relationships/marriage: A relationship between two or more members of the same gender. Same-sex relationships are intimate or romantic partnerships between people of the same gender; same-sex marriage refers to the legal or religious recognition of such relationships as marriages.

Queer: Queer is an umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual and/or not cisgender and also a critical stance that challenges heteronormative assumptions; historically a slur, it has been widely reclaimed by LGBTQIA+ communities and queer theorists. For this researcher Queer indicates something that is outside of the norms and expectations of society.

There are many other terms that can be found at the end of this tool, titled LGBTQI2S Glossary on page .

Alfred Adler, Adlerian Psychology, and The Adlerian Framework

This tool will use the same Adlerian principles of democracy, community, and belonging that Adlerian organizational psychologists use to determine the health of an organization, to determine the inclusive health of a congregation. Adler continues to influence modern academia, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, social work, community management, judicial practice, and the Church. Adler's signature theory of Individual Psychology is practiced today much more than when he first started sharing his thoughts on the matter. Individual Psychology, Holistic Psychology, or Community Psychology is more commonly known as holistic practice or wholeism. That is, "*individual psychology is the study of interpersonal relationships. People are never considered in an isolated situation, but in light of their actions and reactions to each other. Furthermore, Individual Psychology argues that it takes an entire village or community to create healthy and whole individuals or "Social Interest"*".¹⁰⁸ Adler's approach is appreciated much more today, and in a larger variety of settings, than it has been previously.

Individual Psychology is akin to Crenshaw's Intersectionality. Where Adler advocates for the entire community in creating healthy people, Crenshaw advocates understanding and appreciating that there is more than one part of an individual. Crenshaw developed the understanding that none of us is static or one-dimensional beings; we are the sum of all our

¹⁰⁸ Alfred Adler, *Understanding Human Nature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927).

experiences and backgrounds. We cannot separate who we are depending on the situation or our preferences. Crenshaw developed this understanding in the United States judicial system during the civil rights era. Crenshaw argued that an African American woman can be discriminated against as both a woman and an African American; it is where the two experiences cross that Crenshaw coined intersectionality, and how that intersectionality led to further discrimination. This was groundbreaking because it allowed African American women to pursue legal protection for being both African American and female simultaneously. Crenshaw would also significantly shape how individuals, academics, sociologists, anthropologists, ethicists, theologians, and preachers see themselves and those they work with.

Alfred Adler developed the concept of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, literally translated as community feeling or social interest. Adlerian organizational theory emphasizes *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* and its characteristics as an indicator of a truly inclusive organization. Adlerian organizational theory holds that democratic leadership, community involvement, and an authentic sense of belonging are essential to an inclusive organization or church. To be an inclusive community means turning away from the church's traditional hierarchies and abandoning traditional understandings of power. Adlerian inclusivity means giving every individual an authentic voice and opportunity; it involves power that begins and remains within the community, and it means that every member truly belongs and contributes to their community.

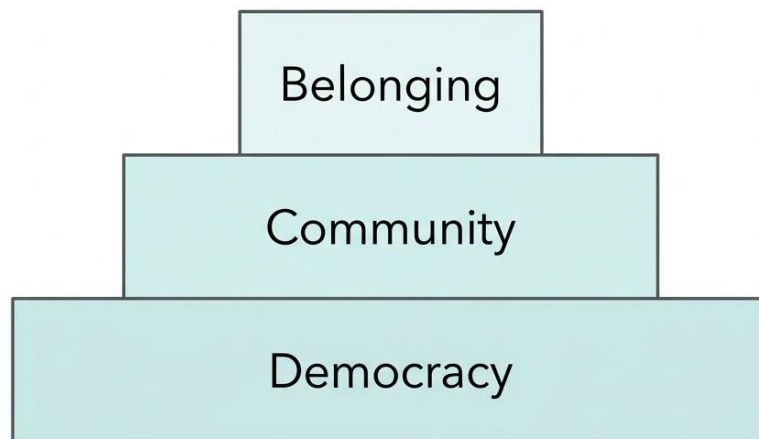
The Congregational Inclusivity in Practice tool will measure inclusivity across the three Adlerian principles of democracy, community, and belonging. Adler's concept of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* will serve as the ideal standard of inclusivity for churches aiming to welcome all God's children into the life of their congregations. A church that has reached *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* is one that, at its core, has an understanding of the priesthood of all believers, a theology rooted in *Imago Dei*, and calls every member into abundant life.

A church that has reached the inclusive standard of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* is best defined as a democratic community in which all have a voice, all are valued, and all contribute. Churches need to be places where;

*We grow; we become; we love; we interpret; and we create ourselves, a style of living, and a meaningful place in the world for our time on earth. Socially useful individuals move toward others with a sense of self-worth that makes it possible for them to feel at home in the world and to be at least as concerned about the well-being of others as they are about themselves.*¹⁰⁹

This tool will ask if your church exhibits— through the lived experiences of its members—the following Adlerian principles or **Building Blocks**:

Building Blocks of Inclusivity



Having built a strong understanding of what it is we are doing, why, and how, it is now time for us to begin. You will begin the process by making a promise with each other, you may use the language that is provided at the beginning of Chapter 2 or you can use the language of Chapter 2 as a jumping board. However, you develop the language it is important that you begin the process with a promise to honor God, value each other, and allow the process to run its course. This is an important moment in the life of your community, and it deserves a degree of gravitas and solemnity.

¹⁰⁹Alfred Adler, *Understanding Human Nature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927).

CHAPTER 2: GETTING STARTED

Step One: The Imago Dei Covenant

We give thanks that we are all made in the image of God. We covenant with God and with one another, affirming that every member of our church- past, present, and future- are wonderfully made in the image of God and is therefore worthy of love.

We covenant that in this process we will:

Be honest with ourselves and with one another, even when the truth is uncomfortable.

Be respectful, refusing to demean, dismiss, or dehumanize any person or group.

Be active listeners, willing to listen more than we speak.

Be sensitive, especially to those who have been harmed by the Church.

Be patient, taking the time needed to look deeply at our practices, culture, and history.

Be authentic and sincere, seeking genuine growth.

We acknowledge that we will make mistakes, that we will feel discomfort, and that we may not always agree.

We will forgive.

We will not walk away from this process and the commitment we make this day.

We make this Imago Dei Covenant trusting that the God who created us, the Christ who loves us, and the Spirit who leads us into all truth will guide our congregation toward a more honest, healthy, and whole welcome for all God's people.

Step Two: Preparing the Congregation

Congregational Inclusivity Discernment Team (CIDT)

The next step is to develop a team of people who will support you and lead with you as you guide your congregation through the discernment process. Let us take a moment to look at who should be a part of this team. First, there is you. Yes, you the person reading this right now. You are asking hard questions, and you are reading this assessment tool. You are most likely a minister in your congregation, perhaps the senior minister. Or you are lay leader or member of the board. Whatever your leadership position, it is important for you to have a team that not only supports you but will assist you with the work required in this tool, and that the team must represent the breadth of your congregation.

Your team should be between 6 to 10 members must include at least one member of your Board of Directors, a senior staff member if you have more than one, a lay ministry leader, a

member of your pastoral care team, a youth representative, a “quiet” member of your congregation, and of course, at least one queer individual, more if possible. You should try to make sure your team resembles your congregation. Don’t make it a team of scholars if your church is made up of mostly plumbers and electricians. Your team must also include a wide time frame. If you can have someone relatively new to the membership of your church and have someone who has been a member since before Noah called the animals to board the ark two by two, you will have a more diverse and thorough picture of your church community.

But most of all make sure your team members know what you are asking them to do, make sure they know that they are expected to commit time, energy, sweat, and tears, to make this discernment process fruitful. They must be people of faith, maturity, curiosity, and commitment. They will be expected to lead with you for the next five years, they will be expected to publicly support you and be able to describe your vision and the process for becoming a more welcoming community of faith.

Your team is responsible for three things:

1. To guide the discernment process and steward the process successfully to completion.
2. To make sure the process is a democratic process that represents the Adlerian building blocks mentioned in part 1, this must be a horizontal process—not a vertical process.
3. Maintain confidentiality yet lead with integrity and transparency.

Charge and Scope

To prepare your congregation you need to let them know what it is you are doing.

1. This is a discernment process of being a welcoming church, with a specific focus on LGBTQI2S people of faith.
2. Your congregation must also know that this is a responsibility for the entire congregation and not just the same ten individuals who are always doing the heavy lifting.
3. This will take time, this process is a multi-year process, for it to be most useful it must be done repeatedly and intentionally. It won’t always be easy, and it will be uncomfortable.

Communication Plan

Never lose fact of one reality during any time of transition or discernment, people need to be informed. You need to be consistently and meaningfully keeping your congregation aware of where you are in the process, where you are going, and who is doing what. You also need to maintain transparency- avoid executive or closed-door meetings. You must have a consistent,

regular, and adhered to timeline for sharing information. This will make sure that the congregation is aware of what you are doing and where you hope to go, thus providing a well informed and aware congregation.

Before you begin your discernment process you will need to create a two-week campaign designed to inform the congregation of what is going to take place. This communication plan should involve defining terms such as Open and Affirming, welcoming, and LGBTQI2S. You also need to inform the congregation who is leading the discernment process (that is, your discernment team), how long it is going to take, and why you are doing it, along with your stated objectives and outcomes; a town-hall style zoom gathering would only work well if all members of your community were able to navigate zoom with ease. A town-hall style meeting also provides the opportunity for members of your church to ask questions and share any thoughts they may have. Remember that communication is a two-way process, if your congregation feels that they have truly been heard, then you have already achieved a major goal.

Maintain Confidentiality

This may seem like a no brainer, however, don't be so sure. You will hear a lot of things. You may feel the need to "get something off your chest", you may hear something that will vindicate yourself or someone you care about, you may find yourself wanting to let someone know the truth now that you've heard it—in all cases, you must maintain confidentiality. By keeping confidentiality, especially during the interview, you will allow the congregation to trust you and they will continue that honesty. If you lose their trust, you will lose their honesty.

One exemption—in most states' ministers are mandatory reporters, although the rules do vary state to state, you would be wise to double check the specific requirements of your state.. This means that in the following circumstances you must break confidentiality and inform law enforcement if:

1. An individual tells you of child abuse and children are currently at risk of being abused, leading you to reasonably believe that a child is being abused.
2. An individual informs you that they may harm themselves or someone else. That is suicide or the assault of another individual.
3. The abuse or mistreatment of vulnerable persons. 'Vulnerable person' includes any minor (under 18), any elder, and any adult who is impaired by disability, cognitive limitation, illness, or dependence such that they are unable to protect their own interests.

Step Three: Listening to the Congregation

At this point of the process, you are ready to start gathering the thoughts of your people. You are going to specifically ask your congregants about their feelings and opinions of LGBTQI2S people. You will ask them how they feel about sex. A word of advice, do not assume that you know how an individual may respond, be prepared for anything. Preparation is very important.

Before interviewing your congregants, contact a trusted psychologist or mental health professional, make sure that they are licensed, respected, well-known, and LGBTQI2S friendly. Inform them about the discernment process and let them know that should any of your congregants feel the need to talk to someone or process something that you will be referring your congregants to them. Be prepared yourself, by having a member of your Discernment Team available for debrief should the need arise. Out of 13 individuals I interviewed over a period of one-week, I received two different reports of sexual assault, I was not expecting this. So be ready!

Administer the Survey

The first step for you to do is begin your inclusivity survey.

1. -Develop a Likert-scale survey to determine the general perception your congregation has regarding its own inclusive practices, you will find an example of one on the next page. You have each respondent score each question from a possible 1 meaning strongly agree to 5 being strongly disagree. It is ok to develop your own questions or a combination of the suggested questions and your own.
2. -You need to think about what survey platform you will use. My suggestion is that you use online survey software, and there are several options that are free. I used qualtrics.com, a safe, well-respected leader in the field of scientific research. Other platforms you could use are Survey Monkey, Google Docs, or Microsoft Forms.
3. -You will need to advertise your survey, be prepared to send it out several times, with follow up reminders, make the process as easy as possible, click one link and they are at the survey, is best. It is not recommended to do the more familiar paper and ballot, but should your people not respond positively, you may want to try the traditional method.
4. -In order to get a thorough picture of your church's inclusivity try to get at least 50 per cent of the worship attendance. If you can get higher, that is great, but not necessary as more than 50 per cent will become redundant. Run your survey for as long as it takes, if

you keep the survey short, easy to get started, and easy to understand, most people will complete the survey in the first few days.

5. -You do not need to share the results with your congregation at this time, but people will be curious, in an effort to be transparent, let your people know when you have received your goal for completed surveys, but let them know that you still need to collect more data before publishing any results.

An example—The specifics

Below is my report on the survey process I undertook with FCCAK.

For two weeks, I posted an online Likert-scale survey on www.qualtrics.com that church members could complete. The survey link was shared in the FCCAK weekly email newsletter titled The Daily Update. The survey was brief, requiring just three clicks to finish. It started with a short introduction, followed by the question “Have you at any time worshipped at First Congregational Church of Anchorage?” If the respondent answered no, they were directed to a thank-you page and exited the survey. If they answered yes, they were shown seven statements on a single page. For each statement, respondents were asked to indicate if they strongly disagreed, somewhat disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, somewhat agreed, or strongly agreed. The questions were:

First Congregational Church of Anchorage is:

- Accepting of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals.
- Actively supports the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer community.
- Incorporates gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer topics or themes in worship.
- Offers specific programming for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people of faith.
- Is known throughout Anchorage for welcoming gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people of faith.
- Has publicly supported and advocated for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer rights and initiatives.
- Has a history of having openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer church members and ministers.

Ten generic questions for the survey

| Item | Survey Statement | Scale |
|------|--|-------|
| Q1 | FCCA K accepts LGBTQI2S people as members | 1-5 |
| Q2 | FCCA K strongly supports LGBTQI2S people in leadership | 1-5 |
| Q3 | FCCA K offers specific programming for LGBTQI2S members | 1-5 |
| Q4 | FCCA K actively celebrates LGBTQI2S members (not just tolerates) | 1-5 |
| Q5 | FCCA K addresses homophobic/transphobic comments when they occur | 1-5 |
| Q6 | FCCA K welcomes same-sex couples in all church activities | 1-5 |
| Q7 | FCCA K has a history of openly LGBTQ members and ministers | 1-5 |
| Q8 | I feel comfortable inviting LGBTQI2S friends to worship here | 1-5 |
| Q9 | FCCA K's Open and Affirming status is visible and meaningful | 1-5 |
| Q10 | I would support LGBTQI2S people serving in all church roles | 1-5 |

Scoring table for surveys. Add the total number of all individual responses for each question. For example, question 1 received 5 strongly agrees, 2 agrees, 2 neither agrees or disagrees, and 1 disagrees. With a total of 10 people responding to the question. Question 2 received 3 strongly agrees, 4 disagrees and 1 strongly disagrees, with a total of 8 responding. Your table should look like the following:

Survey responses scoring

| Survey Item | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total Responses |
|----------------------|----------------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Q1 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 10 |
| Q2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 8 |
| Q3 | | | | | | |
| Q4 | | | | | | |
| Q5 | | | | | | |
| Q6 | | | | | | |
| Q7 | | | | | | |
| Q8 | | | | | | |
| Q9 | | | | | | |
| Q10 | | | | | | |
| CULTURE SCORE | 8 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 18 |

There are two scores that will come from your data which will provide two different types of results (which individually can be presented in a number of ways)-

Score 1: Culture Score – This number reflects the overall perceived inclusivity culture of your church. In the example above the culture score is 8 out of 18. This means-

- 8 out of 18 responses or 44 per cent ($8/18 \times 100 = 44.444$) of the responses strongly agree that the church is inclusive.
- 5 out of 18 responses or 28 per cent ($5/18 \times 100 = 27.778$) of the responses disagree that the church is inclusive.

Score 2: Individual Question Response – These responses describe specifically inclusive practices that are present in your church, or not.

- 5 out of 10 (or 50%) people strongly agree that question one describes our church.
- 4 out of 8 (or 50%) people disagree that question two describes our church.

Keep the responses for your survey anonymous and confidential.

Please note: Several survey websites can present the results of your surveys for you and create graphs and tables. If you are familiar with the software and know how to read the results feel free to use them in addition to the scoring that has been provided in this step.

Conduct the Interviews

This step will be the most time intensive and will require more than 90 minutes of work time for just one interview. However, the burden of time can be shared. Work out ahead of time how many interviews you can realistically do; this is not the only source of data, so you do not need to interview every member of the church, but you do want to get a good representation of your membership. Make sure you interview men and women, straight and gay, older and younger, new members and long-term members, laity and clergy, members of any traditionally minority groups, and other under-represented individuals. Try to get the interviews completed within one or two weeks, try not to draw them out for too long, as time is key for memory.

Develop and document your safety plan. You will need to develop a clear plan for how you will conduct your interviews and then adhere to your plan. Your plan should consider the best ways you can keep your members safe. There are four areas of safety to consider:

1. Physical Safety-

Meet only at your church office, make sure there is another person in the church building with you, but hold the interview in a private space or room. Make sure your space is quiet, comfortable, clean, and secure.

2. Member Safety-

The key to member safety is knowledge and consent.

a) You will find an example information and consent form at the end of the current step, have these ready before you begin advertising. The consent form must be understood and signed by a member who is at least 18 years of age, or their guardian. Keep a copy of the consent form in a secure folder and give one to the member.

b) Before you start the interview you must highlight several important aspects of the interview process. These are:

- The interview could take 30 to 90 minutes.
- The interviews are voluntary and the interviewees will not receive compensation.
- Sex will be discussed, and interviewees may feel uncomfortable and can end the interview at any time.
- The information shared will be kept confidential, no names or identifying information would be recorded or published with the results and then results will be kept in a safe and secure location.
- Should they feel at anytime uncomfortable they can end the meeting and, should they wish, you can refer them to a mental health professional (indicate if the church will pay).

3. Professional Safety-

a) If you will have someone other than yourself complete the interviews, make sure they have some form of professional and suitable experience that involves an understanding of confidentiality, mandatory reporting rules, and professional best practices when working with clients/patients; mental health professionals, licensed psychologists, nurses, doctors, teachers, social workers, are all professions that require training and conditional education when working with others, especially vulnerable adults. Have them provide proof of licensure and/or sign a form stating they will uphold confidentiality. You should do the same.

b) Best practice would also stipulate that the interviewer, like any volunteer in a church, undergo a suitable background check.

4. Personal Information Safety-

To foster more honest and representative results interviewees must know that their answers will remain confidential and anonymous. While this cannot be one hundred percent guaranteed, there are ways to promote it:

a) Have your interviewers, including yourself, complete a form stating that they will uphold the confidentiality of the interview process.

b) The interviewer must understand and convey to the member verbally that the member discloses a desire to hurt themselves or another person, or discloses credible evidence that a vulnerable child is being abused (physically, sexually, or emotionally), their answers and information will not be shared with another person.

c) You will not be recording the interview but will be taking notes, in the notes you will not include any names, ages, gender, nationality, addresses, physical descriptions, dates of birth/death dates, or other information that a person could use to deduce a person identity. Notes will not be kept in the same folder as the consent forms.

Know your interview questions. Interview questions are provided below. These questions are designed so that the best information can be collected during the interview, it is highly recommended that you use these.

Advertise and recruit. You can have administrative staff or volunteers handle this task, brief your workers thoroughly on what will be expected of the interviewee so that they are able to answer any questions that arise. Have interviewees book directly through your church office (not through you- it helps establish boundaries).

Conduct your interviews. Honor your appointments. Do not schedule appointments back-to-back and do not do too many in one day, two interviews per day is recommended, and no more than four. Offer interviewees a bottle of water. Silence phones to minimize interruptions. Only ask the questions you have written down followed by clarifying questions. Do not give your opinions on anything, you want to receive information, not give. Also be careful not to gossip or try to discover any information that is not connected to the interview. It is ok to take notes during your interview. Check in with your interviewee, asking how they are feeling. Immediately after the interview read your notes, clean up the texts, and complete any unwritten notes or pertinent information while you remember.

Below you will find the Semi-Structured Interview Protocol, followed by my report on interviews I conducted for FCCAK.

Semi-structured interview protocol table

| Domain | Interview Prompts |
|-------------------|--|
| Opening | What are your feelings around homosexuality and the church? |
| Personal Response | What would you say to a gay person who attended church for the first time and voiced that they were gay? |
| Theological View | What would be your response if someone said homosexuality was a sin? |
| ONA Identity | What does it mean to be an "Open and Affirming Congregation"? |
| ONA Sentiment | How do you feel about being an "Open and Affirming Congregation"? |
| Assessment | How inclusive do you think we are? (Ask for rating 1-10 if helpful) |
| Growth | How could we be more inclusive? |
| Visibility | Do you think LGBTQI2S people know they are welcome here? How do we communicate that? |
| Conflict | What would you do if you heard someone make a homophobic comment at church? |
| History | Have you noticed changes in the church's attitudes toward LGBTQI2S people over time? |

Interviews at FCCAK

To find interviewees, I placed another advertisement in the FCCAK Daily Update. Interested members were invited to contact the church office secretary to make an appointment. Initially, the secretary received just two responses, and only one was to make an appointment. The church secretary shared this information with me, and we decided that we would need to approach people directly and ask whether they would be willing to take the interview. Over the next two days, the secretary recruited 14 individuals who would take part in the interviews. Out of the 14 appointments, we had only one cancellation. I successfully completed 13 interviews (n=13).

Interviewees were encouraged to attend the interview in person at the church. Two people were out of state and requested to be interviewed via FaceTime. I conducted one interview in their home and another telephonically, as another member was ill. At the beginning of each interview, each interviewee received a consent form (Appendix C) and was asked to read and then sign it. Initially, my plan was to record all the interviews; however, I found that the interviewees were more relaxed without being recorded, and the conversation flowed more naturally. Before asking

the first questioned I verbally reiterated several paragraphs from the form. I informed them that the interviews-

- could take 30 to 90 minutes.
- the interviews were voluntary.
- we may discuss sex, they may feel discomfort, they may end at any time.
- the information they shared would be kept confidential.
- if they feel uncomfortable sharing something, they will be offered an opportunity to submit their answers online anonymously if they chose to.

The interviews were open-ended. I used some of the following prompts, rather than a standard set schedule of questions, to begin the conversation.

- h) What are your feelings around homosexuality and the church?
- i) What would you say to a gay person who attended church for the first time and voiced that they were gay?
- j) What would be your response if someone said homosexuality was a sin?
- k) What does it mean to be an “Open and Affirming Congregation”?
- l) How do you feel about being an “Open and Affirming Congregation”?
- m) How inclusive do you think we are?
- n) How could we be more inclusive?

Most of the interviews were between 45 to 90 minutes long. However, after I reached the point of saturation (the tenth interviewee) the interviews became shorter and took between 30 and 45 minutes to complete. I did not record the conversations to avoid specifics being revealed and took notes throughout the interview and immediately afterward. I completed all the interviews over a two-week period. After I completed the last interview, I emailed all participants a link that led to a Qualtrics.com webpage. The webpage gave them three options to choose from:

Option A: If you feel you were able to answer all questions during the interview without hesitation and have nothing more to add, please select Option A to exit.

Option B: If you feel you were not able to answer all questions fully, but you do not wish to contribute anything further, please select Option B to exit.

Option C: If you feel you were not able to answer all questions fully and would like to provide those answers now, please select Option C to proceed directly to the survey questions.

All respondents selected Option A, and no additional data were gathered.

Interview consent form

PUT CHURCH LOGO HERE

Research Consent Form

Research Project: Congregation Inclusivity Practice

Researcher: *ABC Church*, and leader of discernment process

You have been asked to participate in a research study at *ABC Church* on inclusivity. What are some things you should know about this research?

This research will explore how inclusive members of *ABC CHURCH* are of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and two-spirit people of faith. To gather information for the research, members of *ABC CHURCH* will be interviewed.

You are being asked to take part in an interview. Participation is voluntary; you may choose not to participate. Completing or not completing the interview will not affect your relationship with the researcher, *ABC CHURCH*, or any individuals participating in the research.

The interview will focus on your membership and history with the church, what your views and opinions are of LGBTQI2S people are, and how involved LGBTQI2S should be in *ABC CHURCH*. The interviews will be 30 to 90 minutes long at *ABC CHURCH ADDRESS* in the minister's study. You will not be compensated for your time. Interviews are designed to collect information. This research may not benefit you but may benefit others in the future.

There are risks in being interviewed. During the interview, you will be asked several open-ended questions about your opinions and past experiences. You may be asked questions about sex or sexuality. You may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed answering these questions. Some questions may trigger memories of past experiences you may not wish to remember. You may refuse to answer any question(s). You may pause or withdraw from the interview at any time, for any reason, without penalty. A referral to a therapist or other mental health professional can be provided if you feel discomfort and wish to discuss your feelings.

Anything you say during the interview will be confidential. Your anonymity will be protected, and no personal or identifying information will be published. All records and information will be stored securely and password-protected, with only the researcher having access. All information will be destroyed 3 years after

the study is completed. While the researcher has copyright protection and retains all intellectual and commercial rights to the materials, you can have access to cite or quote the work for your own purposes.

**For more information, contact the researcher at ph.
123456789 or address@email.com**

By signing below, I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older and that I have read (or had read to me) this information and voluntarily agree to participate, without compensation, in this study. I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant (18 years or older) Signature _____ Date _____

If the participant is under 18 years of age, I affirm that I am the participant's parent or legal guardian and that I have read this information and voluntarily give permission for my child to participate in this study.

**Parent/Legal Guardian Signature
(for participants under 18): _____ Date: _____**

Scoring Your interviews

Your first task is to create a general picture of how your respondents view homosexuality and the Church. To do this you will give each interviewee a general score. The scores will be E, A, and R. Using the interview Score Table and the Global Code Definitions, score each interview and record the score in the table provided. Use the Thematic Coding Rubric for Interview Analysis for further guidance.

Thematic coding rubric for interview analysis

| Cluster | Definition | Example Phrases |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Cluster A: AFFIRMING | Explicitly accepting and supportive of LGBTQI2S people; advocates for full inclusion | "We are all children of God," "Everybody is just a human being," "I celebrate differences," "All people should be welcome" |
| Cluster B: AMBIVALENT | Passive acceptance; supports in principle but considers issue low-salience or irrelevant | "People are people," "It's not something I think about," "I don't see sexuality as a religious issue," "It doesn't matter to me" |
| Cluster C: RESISTANT | Conditional acceptance; expresses discomfort, hostility, or moral concern | "Not flaunting it," "Except when doing the children's moment," "The pulpit isn't the place," "I didn't like it being pushy" |

Interview score table

| Interview | Score (E, A, or R) |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| #1 | |
| #2 | |
| #3 | |
| #4 | |
| #5 | |
| #6 | |
| #7 | |
| #8 | |
| #9 | |
| #10 | |
| #11 | |
| #12 | |
| #13 | |
| #14 | |

Global code definitions

- ***E – Explicit acceptance***

Clear affirmation of LGBTQ people and relationships; uses positive moral language (good, just, faithful, holy), supports full participation (membership, leadership, marriage), and often critiques homophobia or exclusion.

- ***A – Ambivalent acceptance***

Says LGBTQ people are welcome or loved, but adds qualifiers, discomfort, or conflict-avoidance; may stress “both sides,” “agree to disagree,” or “love the sinner” language without challenging anti-LGBTQ claims.

- ***R – Resistant***

Frames homosexuality as sinful, disordered, or contrary to God’s will; emphasizes limits on visibility or leadership, “don’t flaunt it,” “not from the pulpit,” or prioritizes the comfort of non-affirming members.

Next tally the number of interviews that fall into each cluster. Record in the Score Cluster Table.

Score cluster table

| Clusters (E, A, R) | Interview Score by Cluster |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Explicit Acceptance | |
| Ambivalent Acceptance | |
| Resistant | |

Understanding Your General Score

Your next task is to take the total number of interviews for each cluster and determine the percentage of interviews per cluster. For example, you have 5 interviews in cluster A, 3 in cluster B, and 2 in cluster C, meaning you have graded a total of 10 interviews. A has 50%, B has 30%,

and C has 20%. This score would indicate that 50% of your members are Explicit Acceptance, 30% are Ambivalent Acceptance, and 20% Resistant.

CHAPTER 3: OUR STORIES, OUR VALUES

Step One: Now is a good time to fulfill your promise about transparency.

Make a formal report to the congregation.

1. Write an article, hold a workshop, host a Q and A, or preach a sermon on the process thus far. Do not offer a preliminary score or analysis, just let them know what's going on.
2. Let people know that:
 - All interviews and surveys have been completed.
 - Give them numbers – ie, 75 people completed surveys, 30 were interviewed.
 - You are now moving into analysis and interpretation of the data, using rigorous research methods.
 - You will share themes and next steps with the congregation once the analysis is complete.
 - Let them know how they can help (prayer, cook for the retreat, encourage members of the CIDT).
 - Thank them profusely, let them know how integral they have been.

Step Two: Its time for a retreat.

1. Schedule an all-day CIDT retreat at an off-campus location that is quiet, inspiring, and low-distraction.
2. Clarify that the primary goal of the day is to identify:
 - Three core values of the church that are revealed in the interviews and surveys.
 - How each value measures up against the Adlerian building blocks of democracy, community, and belonging.
3. Agenda- Develop an agenda for your day. Step three provides the meat for your agenda.

Step Three: The Retreat Instructions

Begin with a team building spiritual exercise that builds trust, centers participants in God's presence, and grounds everyone in Imago Dei and Christ's love. After the exercise, invite a guest speaker to offer a 30–45 minute presentation on a topic that will inspire the team (e.g., discernment, collaborative leadership, LGBTQI2S history, or team ministry).

Individual reading of the Master Interview Corpus.

1. Provide each CIDT member with the Master Interview Corpus (all interview transcripts compiled into one clean document).

2. Ask each person to:
 - Read the corpus slowly and carefully, at least twice.
 - Note repeated ideas, values, statements, questions, and concerns related to the congregation's identity and practice.

Small-group value identification.

1. After lunch, divide the CIDT into small groups of two or three people.
2. In each small group, ask members to:
 - Share the values they noticed in the corpus (reflections, statements, opinions, questions).
 - Compile a list of values that appear across multiple interviews and seem important to the interviewees.

Whole-group selection of three core values

1. Bring the full CIDT back together and have each small group report the values they identified.
2. As a whole group:
 - Cluster similar or overlapping values together.
 - Discern which three values most strongly resonate with:
 - The interviews and survey results.
 - The personal experiences, stories, and beliefs of CIDT members.
3. Emphasize that this stage is descriptive, not evaluative:
 - The task is to name and confirm the values that actually show up in the data, not to decide whether they are "good" or "bad."

Centering break

1. Take a short break.
2. Offer a brief centering activity that returns the group to prayer, Imago Dei, and Christ's love, preparing them for evaluative work.

Adlerian Building Blocks Assessment

1. Present the Adlerian Building Blocks Assessment Framework: democracy, community, belonging.
2. For each of the three values:
 - Ask: "How well does this value embody democracy?"

- Assign a score from 0–3 (0 = does not meet the demand; 1–2 = partially fulfills; 3 = clearly fulfills).
 - Ask: “How well does this value embody community?”
 - Assign a score from 0–3.
 - Ask: “How well does this value embody belonging?”
 - Assign a score from 0–3.
3. Record the scores for each value on a shared worksheet or flip chart.

Adlerian Building Blocks Assessment Framework

| Building Block | Assessment Questions |
|---|--|
| 1. DEMOCRACY \quad Demand 1 \quad Demand 2 \quad Demand 3 | Do LGBTQI2S people feel encouraged to express themselves fully? Do LGBTQI2S people contribute to worship in meaningful ways that reflect their journeys? Are there LGBTQI2S leaders and people speaking on behalf of the church? |
| 2. COMMUNITY \quad Demand 1 \quad Demand 2 \quad Demand 3 | Are LGBTQI2S people celebrated (not just tolerated)? Do LGBTQI2S people play integral, vital, and visible roles in church life? Does the church spend time and money on ministries for LGBTQI2S individuals? |
| 3. BELONGING \quad Demand 1 \quad Demand 2 \quad Demand 3 | Do LGBTQI2S people feel at home in this congregation? Can LGBTQI2S people offer their gifts without fear of being mocked or excluded? Does the church regularly feature liturgy by and worship led by LGBTQI2S people? |

Tally and interpret the scores

1. Add the scores for all three values across all three building blocks.
 - Maximum total: 27 points (3 values × 3 building blocks × 3 points each).

2. Reflect together:
 - Higher scores suggest that the congregation's current values are closely aligned with its stated commitment to being Open and Affirming.
 - Lower scores indicate opportunity and need for growth in democratic practice, community life, and belonging, especially for LGBTQI2S people and other marginalized groups.
3. Capture key insights and questions to share later with the congregation and leadership.
4. You will tally all of the points awarded and have a final score out of a maximum 27 points. The higher the score the closer your community is to practicing what it preaches, that is, being an Open and Affirming Congregation.

At this point you have the scores of your surveys, you have discovered the overarching attitude of your members regarding the inclusion of LGBTQI2S peoples in the life of the church, and you have coded the interviews and identified three main themes within the interviews using the Adlerian Building Blocks as the lens, or to root, the three themes you identified.

I am going to take some time to offer you some general advice for facilitating your retreat.

- Involve the CIDT in every stage of the analysis so that the results reflect the congregation's lived experience, not only the perspective of one leader or researcher.
- Choose a retreat location that supports deep listening and discernment (comfortable seating, natural light, room for prayer and movement, minimal distractions and interruptions).
- Design the opening spiritual exercise to:
 - Build psychological safety and trust.
 - Frame the work as holy discernment rather than "just" data analysis.
- Select a guest speaker whose content directly supports the retreat's goals (e.g., a queer theologian, an expert in discernment, or someone with experience facilitating inclusive church transformation).
- Ensure the Master Interview Corpus is clean (de-identified, consistently formatted, free of typos that might distract) so participants can focus on meaning rather than mechanics.

- Coach small groups to name values in the language of the interviewees as much as possible, instead of immediately translating into institutional or theological jargon.
- Guard carefully the distinction between “naming what is” (descriptive thematic analysis) and “discerning what should be” (normative evaluation and planning). The retreat should do both, but in sequence.
- When introducing the Adlerian building blocks, offer clear, accessible definitions of democracy, community, and belonging, and relate them explicitly to congregational life and LGBTQI2S inclusion.
- Normalize disagreement in scoring and use it as a prompt for deeper conversation about the congregation’s culture and practices.
- Close the day by confirming next steps: how the results will be summarized, who will draft the report, how and when the congregation will hear about the findings, and how this will inform future action.

Example Agenda for Retreat

8:30-9:00 - Arrival and sacred space setup

Participants arrive, grab coffee/tea, and settle in.

Quiet music, candles, or visual symbols of Imago Dei and LGBTQI2S affirmation set the tone.

Facilitators check tech, handouts, and the Master Interview Corpus packets.

9:00-9:30 - Opening prayer and centering exercise

Welcome, brief overview of the day, and covenant-building (confidentiality, respect, curiosity).

Opening prayer or liturgy grounding the group in God's presence, Imago Dei and Christ's love.

Trust-building spiritual exercise (e.g., pair sharing on "where have you experienced belonging in church?").

9:30-10:15 - Guest speaker (30-45 minutes)

Introduction of guest speaker and their connection to the retreat's goals.

Presentation on chosen topic (discernment, collaborative leadership, LGBTQI2S history, or inclusive congregational transformation).

Brief Q&A focused on "What does this mean for our congregation?"

10:15-10:30 - Break

Restroom and coffee break.

Informal conversation; encourage light, grounding interactions.

10:30-11:30 - Individual reading of the Master Interview Corpus (Round 1)

Hand out the Master Interview Corpus to each participant (if not already distributed).

Quiet reading time: ask participants to read slowly, highlighter or pen in hand.

Invite people to:

Circle or underline repeated ideas, values, and statements.

Jot notes in the margins or on sticky notes about what stands out.

Close with a brief check-in: one word or phrase that is resonating so far (no analysis yet).

11:30-12:00 - Individual reading (Round 2) and personal note-taking

Invite a second pass through key sections, focusing on:

Patterns they missed the first time.

Values that seem to carry emotional weight (hope, grief, anxiety, excitement).

Ask participants to:

List 5-10 values or themes they see recurring across interviews.

Use interviewees' own language as much as possible.

12:00-1:00 - Lunch (informal processing)

Shared meal on-site or nearby.

Encourage informal conversation, but no structured analysis yet.

Optional prompt on tables: "What surprised you in what you read?"

1:00-1:10 - Re-gathering and re-centering

Short prayer or breathing exercise to re-center after lunch.

Brief reminder of covenant: honoring interviewees' voices, listening deeply to each other.

1:10-2:00 - Small group value identification

Form small groups of 2-3 people.

In each group:

Each person shares 5-10 values they noticed.

Group compiles a combined list of values that:

Appear multiple times across different interviews.

Seem especially important or emotionally charged.

Groups write their list on large paper or a shared document, using interviewees' language.

2:00-2:45 - Whole-group clustering and selecting three core values

Full group reconvenes.

Each small group presents its list of values.

As a whole group:

Cluster similar or overlapping values (using a board/wall to group them).

Name each cluster with a simple phrase that captures the shared value.

Through facilitated discussion (and possibly a quick round of dot-voting or hand-raising):

Identify the three values that:

Are most prominent in the interviews and surveys.

Deeply resonate with CIDT members' own experiences.

Explicitly name this work as descriptive: "We are naming what is, not yet judging it."

2:45-3:00 - Centering break before assessment

Short physical break (stretch, water, restroom).

Brief centering practice:

A short prayer, silence, or a simple responsive reading about being led by the Spirit in truth and love.

Re-commitment to honesty, humility, and care for one another.

3:00-3:20 - Introducing the Adlerian Building Blocks

Facilitator presents clear, accessible definitions of:

Democracy (shared power, voice, and respect).

Community (mutual care, cooperation, and working for the common good).

Belonging (feeling valued, needed, and truly "at home" "in the community).

Connect each to congregational life and LGBTQI2S inclusion:

Whose voices are heard?

Who receives care?

Who feels they truly belong?

Explain the scoring scale (0-3) and the purpose of the assessment.

3:20-4:00 - Scoring the three core values

For Value #1:

Ask the group: "How well does this value embody democracy in our congregation?"

Discuss briefly, then assign a score 0-3 (aiming for consensus or noting range).

Repeat for community and belonging.

Record the three scores visibly.

Repeat the same process for Value #2 and Value #3.

Normalize disagreement:

Invite people to share why they might score differently.

Treat differences as windows into the congregation's diversity of experiences.

4:00-4:20 - Tally, interpret, and name insights

Add up all scores:

Total possible= 27 points.

Reflect together:

What does the total score suggest about how closely your practice matches your Open and Affirming commitments?

Where do you see strength (high-scoring combinations of values + building blocks)?

Where do you see clear opportunity or urgency for growth?

Capture key insights and questions on a flipchart or shared document:

"We talk about welcome, but decision-making is still centralized'."

"Belonging is strong for long-time members, weaker for newer or LGBTQI2S members:'"

4:20-4:45 - Naming next steps and ownership

As a group, clarify:

How today's results will be summarized.

Who is responsible for drafting the report (1-people, with a clear timeline).

When and how the congregation will hear about the findings: worship, congregational meeting, newsletter small groups, etc.

How this will feed into ongoing planning for policies, education, and practices that deepen democracy, community, and belonging.

Invite brief reflections: "What hope are you carrying from today?"

4:45-5:00 - Closing ritual and blessing

Closing prayer or liturgy:

Give thanks for interviewees' courage and honesty.

Ask for the Spirit's guidance as the congregation moves from description to transformation.

Optional brief ritual:

Each person names one word of commitment (e.g., "courage," "truth-telling," "belonging") and places a stone, candle, or other symbol on a central table.

Benediction and sending forth.

CHAPTER 4: THE RESULTS

Now is the time when you start offering to your community the results of your assessment. But, this is not just a time for you to report, it is also time for you to listen. People will want to discuss with you and the DICT your findings. If you present your findings in a manner that promotes conversation, you will be much more productive and be able to achieve more than transparency, but you will be receiving feedback.

Reporting

Break your reporting into three separate stages or events.

Church wide presentation- a town hall style, question and answer format, do two if you need to.

Congregational Feedback Focus Groups- invite folks at the town hall to join a focus group, so that you can receive feedback and have further conversation. The focus groups can meet one or two times with a member of the CIDT and they can share what they hear with the larger CIDT.

Leadership, Staff, and Stakeholder Roundtable- Bring together those people who will actually do the work of shaping what inclusive looks like. This Roundtable develops, in conjunction with the CIDT, the final assessment and the next steps the church must take to move in the direction of being Open and Affirming. Once more the CIDT is expected to keep the congregation fully briefed and invite them on the journey toward inclusivity. This must be organic and for each congregation the path would be different. The CIDT will develop a plan for the next three to five years on how they will become a church that embodies the Adlerian values of democracy, community, and belonging. The Church as a whole should vote and affirm the plan that they are offered, and then after a year, the church begins the process of assessment and discernment again. And again. And again. Being inclusive isn't a destination, it is a journey and your journey is now at the stage where I say to- you have the tools, you know where you want to go, you know how to get there, you know the path to take, and now it's time for you to get going.

CHAPTER 5: TIME TO FLY

In Antarctica thousands of Emperor Penguins gather at the top of a 67 foot ice-cliff, where they have been nesting and raising their chicks. The time has come to leave the safety of the ice cliffs and the familiarity of the nesting grounds – the only homes the chicks have ever known – to hunt. Like one body, thousands of these majestic creatures leave behind their nests and they gather just a foot or two from the edge of the cliff. Each and every single penguin is facing the cliff. They stand still. They fall silent. They wait.

Then one of them, seemingly at random, honks, leaves the group, and jumps off the cliff. It is not a pretty jump. The penguin falls over and over again, its head sticking out one way, the next second the head is replaced by a foot, as it falls over and over and then splashes much like one might imagine a cat splashing into the ocean, which (imagining once more- I say would have to be all over the place and not at all, yet undeniably and very defiantly dunked) into the icy cold water.

It seems like forever, the two or three seconds I'm holding my breath waiting to see if the penguin will pop up in victory or continue down to an icy grave. But, just like the cat with the nine-lives, the emperor penguin, much like its name might suggest, nonchalantly and royally looks up to the penguins still waiting above and then dives down in search of a tasty fish or two.

The show isn't over though. Faster than a cat pouncing on its prey, the penguins who were left behind start to jump. Honking, squawking, falling, tumbling, plopping, and splashing these emperor penguins waste no time as they regroup faster than they jumped and begin their hunting season.

One wouldn't describe what the penguins do as flying, it's very much the opposite, but what they do is perhaps the most beautiful display of the messiness and the wonder of live, of taking those first steps, of trying something not knowing the outcome, but giving it a try, and flying in the process, even if your falling.

For a church that is growing, changing, learning new ways, taking a different journey, going down a path it's never trod before, life will get messy. It will hurt. There will be growing pains. Sometimes people get hurt, sometimes we experience trauma. That's because the church is made up of the exact same things our lives are; humans. Humans are messy, churches are messy, but life and living is noble and breathtaking and extraordinary and terrifying.

As you journey through the messiness of church life and transition, look for the opportunity to jump and leap, you may tumble more than fly, but you'll be living, growing, learning, and dancing through the sky and then the water in search of the next great meal to nourish your relationship with those around you and with your God.

It's now time for you and your congregation to fly. Just watch out for those cats, they really don't like swimming or birds (aquatic or otherwise).