We, members of Parents Reconciling Network, believe in the Bible and the authority of scripture as a guide to our lives. We strive to maintain faith as followers of Jesus and desire to be obedient to Jesus’ teachings. We long for our children to be able to maintain their faith, to live their lives obedient to Jesus’ teachings as well. While being followers of Jesus when we learned of our children’s LGBTQ status, we have read, questioned, studied, prayed, and had conversations with our pastors.

We have learned to trust God and to leave judgment to God. We know God loves our children and we know God created all beings good. We know God would not want our children, any children, to be victims of suicide, homelessness, sex trafficking, drug use or poor health. We also know our children deeply searched their own souls and endured church inspired self-loathing before they ever shared their sexual orientation or gender identity with us. Ultimately, we have found the teachings of Jesus and the grace of God’s love to be fully compatible with the lives of our LGBTQ children. As parents of LGBTQ children, we have found grace, love, validation and joy in our children as they were created.

In this issue of Kindred Connection are our stories as parents and the Biblical sources of inspiration and instruction that has made us advocates for our own children and for all LGBTQ persons in the United Methodist Church. We share them with you. We hope they make the pathway easier for other parents whose children have faced rejection. Read and see the faces behind their stories.

Rethinking Gender

I have a transgender daughter. Her experience of life is very different from mine. Love for my child has led me to a fresh study of sexuality and to thinking about what the Bible teaches about sexuality. This article is about how I reconcile scriptural authority and my journey as a father.

Reading the Bible necessarily involves interpretation. God did not dictate it word for word to the Biblical authors. It is divine truth revealed to humans whose understanding is limited by the facts they are working with and their perspective. Some passages are more valuable than others. The values advocated by one text can conflict with those of another. Jesus like all rabbis before and after him interpreted scripture. His understanding of justice based on the law was tempered by an emphasis on mercy. Jesus advocated for a higher righteousness (human wholeness) than what can come from legalism. Important parts of the Torah were abandoned entirely so that the community of God’s people could include Gentiles. As Methodists we value the authority of scripture but understand that it must be interpreted using tradition (what the church has taught), reason (what we have learned and what makes sense) and experience (both our own and that of others).

When dealing with faith issues related to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people around us, many Old Testament texts get argued back and forth. What I have been doing is asking questions about the whole understanding of sexuality that informs all of the texts. Current scientific studies of human sexuality based on human development and

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In chapter 22 of Matthew’s gospel, we read how a lawyer (one of the Pharisees) asks Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment?” Jesus quoting from Deuteronomy declares, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Then Jesus continues by quoting from Leviticus and he says, “… a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

When put on the spot, Jesus succinctly sums up all we need to know as followers of Jesus today: Love God; love your neighbor. Importantly, for parents of children who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer, we see the ethic of love that permeates the gospel set forth here. The greatest commandment calls us as followers of Jesus Christ to love God and to love our neighbors.

Who is our neighbor? Jesus made it clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) that our neighbor is anyone who is in need. There is no asterisk here that sets apart any differences among us (racial, economic, religious, sexual orientation or gender identity).

Today we hear politicians talk about building walls, and many see the barriers that separate us from one another. However, in the gospel message, we hear a counter cultural message of Jesus with the command to love God and to love our neighbor. As followers of Jesus, we, as parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) children believe that all are welcome to the table. All are welcome in the kingdom.

Jesus came to break down the barriers that separate us. The Apostle Paul declares in Galatians 3:28-29, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Through these words, Paul proclaims the breaking down of the barriers that divide and separate people.

These words would set in place the eventual end to the evils of slavery. They foreshadow the time when the rights of women would be recognized.

Today, our church sets up a wall that says that our LGBTQ children are of sacred worth, yet because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, the way they live their lives is “incompatible” with Christian teaching. It’s time for this barrier to come down. This wall of separation needs to be broken down just as other barriers to the kingdom have come down.

The ethic of love we find in the gospel as proclaimed by Jesus Christ reminds us that we are to love God and to love our neighbor. For we know that our loved ones are God’s loved ones too.

Written by Rev. James Waugh, who worships at Broad Street United Methodist Church (UMC), Columbus, OH
brain function call into question the Biblical understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman.

The Old Testament clearly backs the idea that created things fall into neat categories. Read the food laws (Lev. 11) which make shrimp unclean because they swim but don’t have scales, pigs and camels because they chew the cud but don’t have hoofs, and bats because they fly but don’t have feathers. Creatures that don’t fit categories are unclean. In addition people who are deformed or sick are unable to fully worship God because they are less than perfect. Often they are called sinners. Today we would never declare a differently enabled person unclean because they don’t fit ancient categories or ideas of perfection. (See Acts 10:9).

In the Bible, gender is one of these categories. Male and female are strict categories with expectations given based on anatomy. Men are supposed to desire women and vice versa. Men are in charge, women are like property. Those who don’t fit the categories or expectations are declared unclean or sinful. A review of current studies in sexuality shows that gender categories are more complex and fluid than simple ideas of male and female. A small percentage of those born don’t conform to strict categories: some physically, some in who attracts them, some in their internal sense of who they are. These variations in gender are present in all cultures and across time. We could view them as abnormal or accept that they are part of the diversity of human creation. Added together, these folk make up about 10 percent of all people. If so many people don’t fit the categories, maybe the categories themselves are the problem. What does it mean for God’s people to declare 1 in 10 of those God has created unclean or sinful and to reject them from full participation in worship based on a faulty understanding of gender?

We have had to reinterpret scripture before based on new perspectives (Is the earth flat or the center of the universe? Do creatures evolve? Are women property? Is slavery acceptable?). Reason is calling us to reconsider the inadequacy of Biblical ideas of gender. The truest values of our faith and the truth and authority of scripture are not threatened by rethinking our interpretation based on reliable scientific knowledge. Biblical values like love, faithfulness, and respect in relationships remain critical. The problem isn’t with God’s truth but with our limited understanding.

Written by Rev. Jim Philipson, First UMC of Albany, OR

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I find comfort in Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Haven’t we all, at some point, been the Prodigal Son — so very blessed when the Father welcomed us home? Haven’t we all, at some other point, been the Elder Brother — angry at the Father’s mercy shown to those who haven’t followed the same rules as we have? So, having experienced both roles, may I suggest the UMC as a denomination is even now caught up in this parable? The Father has open arms for his gay children. And yet the institutional church is playing the Elder Brother — so jealous of our Book of Discipline which we treated as an idol set above God’s grace. God is calling the UMC to reconcile. “Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (NIV)

Written by Dave Nuchols, Minnetonka, MN
I have started a “funeral file” that contains poems, quotations and scriptures to help my family and minister put together funeral services for me when my time comes. My file contains items I would like to be remembered by at the end of my life, including specific verses from the Bible. Micah 6:6-8 has always appealed to me as a scripture that pretty much sums up the life of a faithful disciple of Jesus and a servant of humanity. This article’s focus is to be how this favorite scripture has spoken to my family after we found out that we have a gay child. So what does the actual Micah scripture say?

This scripture became especially important after finding out that my son was gay. I then began learning what the traditional church teachings in support of and against that identity were. I had to decide which church traditions made sense in what I was seeing and learning about sexual orientation and committed relationships between same gender couples. The more LGBTQ people I met the less condemnation and exclusion made sense.

Much of Jesus life and mission were focused on people who were on the margins; women, lepers, people who had disabilities, tax collectors and the poor. On a regular basis, Jesus ate with those who society called sinners. He went to bat for them and showed society that their lives mattered.

In our society today, one of the groups who experience oppression on a regular basis is the LGBTQ community. Not only do LGBTQ persons experience judgment and condemnation but they are kept from being fully included in the life of their churches by attitudes and UMC law. When my gay son lamented that he didn’t know if he could be gay and Christian, I had to join the justice movement, Parents Reconciling Network, to make sure that he could. Therefore, I had to “do justice.”

Unfortunately, many of our LGBTQ children have experienced discrimination from society and the church. Having been deeply involved with LGBTQ people has made me more aware of other minority groups who are mistreated, as well; people of color, persons of various religions, folks who are disabled, Seeing this mistreatment has given me a heightened awareness of how important “loving simple kindness” is to everyone, but especially those who are targeted by prejudice.

One of the most difficult things I have to do is to deal with other Christians who see things differently than I do on this issue. Loving the LGBTQ community and their allies is easy for me and has been a true blessing in my life. However, trying to love other Christians whose worldview is one of exclusion takes all the patience I can muster. It’s hard to keep my anger and judgment under control. To fulfill the third part of my favorite scripture I have to “walk humbly with your God” and keep on gently plugging away to win their hearts for full inclusion of everyone in the church. I must never give up hope.

Written by Beverly Cole, Trinity UMC, Salina, KS
I have a gay child and often welcome her friends to our house for holidays, especially friends who have no family reaching for them anymore. Ones who have been cast off. Or ones who are so hurt they can’t bear to go home.

In my house is a print called “Christmas Peace” by Lynn Bywaters Ferris. It depicts an angel striding confidently forward, a candle in her right hand, her left hand on the head of a pacing lion. On her other side a lamb keeps pace. It’s a hopeful picture. They are all looking ahead, going forward in peace, moving together with purpose. It has sparked many comments from visitors.

From LGBTQ guests the comment is often along the lines of “If only...” If only it could be like that.

If only we could do what the Lord requires of us.

If only, when we meet an LGBTQ individual who is spiritually longing, we could act in mercy and invite them to our church.

If only nothing mattered except that they longed for a church home.

If only ours was a safe and accepting church for them. A just and merciful church.

If only it was enough that someone was trying hard to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.

If only we could do the same.

Written by Janet Duke, Bee Creek UMC, Austin, TX

Our daughter came out to us as a lesbian while she was home on vacation from a US-2 mission appointment (a two year, US based, United Methodist Church sponsored mission program). Her father and I had had our suspicions but her statement was still not easy to hear because we were aware that her long-time dream of becoming an ordained UMC pastor was being put in jeopardy. My first instinct was to strongly suggest she could continue her dream but stay closeted. This was my struggle alone, I learned. She had made the decision to trust God and had applied to and been admitted into the Masters of Divinity program at Garrett Evangelical. She had also made the decision to not hide her God-given sexual orientation while attending. Where God would lead her in the future, she would follow. I struggled with my frustration and concern but I knew that as Proverbs 3:5 says, I had to “trust in the Lord with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding”. I was confident God knew and loved my daughter and she had given her life to God. Romans 8:28 reassured me that “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love God, who have been called according to his purpose.” It was my responsibility to get out of the way.

My daughter did receive her M. Div. and at graduation made the decision to seek ordination in the United Church of Christ. She did not want her sexual orientation to ever interfere with her ministry. She is serving as a gifted UCC chaplain in hospice care but still misses her UMC.

Written by Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR
Prepared for the Wilderness

I don’t know if you believe God puts events and people in your life to teach you a lesson or prepare you for something in your future, but that is the feeling I have had throughout my life since becoming a parent 34 years ago.

First, God gave me twins. How better to learn compassion for other parents with many children!

As a physician, I noted that God sent me many lesbian and gay patients, some of whom called my bluff on my preconceptions of their lives and medical needs.

Then, God sent me a transgender woman in need of treatment for high blood pressure and her ongoing need for female hormones. I knew nothing of balancing these needs and discounted the wisdom of continuing the hormones that were raising her blood pressure. She gave me a book that explained that no one would choose to endure the costs, the time, the social pressures, the losses needed to change from male to female...unless her life depended upon this change. Her life did. God sent this woman into my life to teach me.

God sent an older transman into my medical practice. He taught me about his fear of discovery whenever I needed to refer him to a specialist or for a medical procedure. I learned. God had prepared me for my own son’s journey from female into being a man. Although I felt like I was in exile from friends, family and church for several months, I heard God calling to me in the words of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29: 7-9) in which he instructs the exiles from Jerusalem to seek the peace and prosperity of the community into which they have been exiled. God had prepared me to enter the world of LGBTQ people and to work for their peace and prosperity, their wellbeing.

I knew my child to be a kind and ethical person. How, then, could I doubt the one whom God created in God’s own image and pronounced good? I recalled Matthew 18:4-6 which tells us the great sin of placing struggles to be whole persons in front of any child created by God. Clearly, my job was to simply love my child and help him be God’s good creation, to continue being kind, ethical, giving, forgiving, and whole.

Finally, I was reminded of Isaiah 43:19.

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

God had made all things new and I began to perceive it, and God made a way in the wilderness, the wilderness for which God had prepared me to do my part.

Written by Carol Waymack, MD, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA
Thank You for Being My Mom

“Train a child in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” Proverbs 22: 6 NRSV

As our son, Nathan, started to grow we noticed that he was just a little different than most other boys. He was gentle and kind to everyone. So polite as a three-year-old his preschool teacher had to tell him it was OK to take his turn on the sliding board. Nathan would let all the other children go in front of him; never getting to take his turn!

Nathan rarely missed Sunday School and loved to go to Vacation Bible School during his elementary years. We managed to work baseball practices around most of the church-sponsored events so Nathan was able to participate in a wide variety of activities. Our church leadership encouraged teens to help teach the Sunday School classes. Working with the two-year old class, Nathan was mentored by two talented teachers who modeled an open, loving classroom.

When it came time to select a major for college, Nate and I discussed several options. He really wanted to teach, but hesitated to say he enjoyed elementary-aged students perhaps more than high school students. I reminded him of the great times he had with the Sunday School classes and how the kids at VBS really enjoyed his approach to learning.

Nathan has had quite a career of teaching third and fourth graders. The staff enjoys the technology skills he brings and the kids love the respect he gives them as they learn together.

We reared him in a way that was encouraging and respectful, honoring his gentleness and nudging him when he needed that extra boost to take his turn! The role models from his childhood are shining through as an adult. Nate is grateful, too, as he realizes we were intentional about rearing our child who was just a little different than other boys. For my birthday he wrote:

Thank you for being my mom.
Thank you for showing compassion to all people.
Thank you for taking something on that you were never asked to do, but did it anyway because you knew it was right.
Thank you for facing ignorance head on.
Thank you for protecting me from it.
Thank you for telling me it was OK to be gay...in 1992. (he was 8)
Thank you for making me proud to be your son every day.

I never knew that joining RMN in the mid-80’s would help me to be the parent/person I am today. I learned to take a stand for what I expect my church to be and help me to rear my gay son, long before he came out. We trained the child and he has gown ... grateful that his mom loved him and let him know it was OK to be who he is.

Written by Faith Geer, St Paul’s UMC, Alison Park, PA
We envision a world that accepts LGBTQ persons free of any form of discrimination in their life experience. We work as a movement in communion with other like organizations to this end. Further, as the heart of The United Methodist Church (UMC), our vision includes changes in the policies and practices of the UMC that empowers the full inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in all aspects of their religious life experience.

Parents Reconciling Network unconditionally walks with the parents and families of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities until all are fully accepted in their families, in their churches, and in society by advocating for acceptance, providing education, and promoting welcoming communities of faith.

(search of Facebook for Parents Reconciling Network)