



First United Methodist Church

Points to Ponder

The New Hip Churches...

Excerpted from: <https://medium.com/solus-jesus/the-new-hip-churches-are-fooling-google-they-pop-up-as-gay-friendly-its-a-hoax-6d8c4ae1764c>

In our town, a Google search for “gay-friendly church” proves dangerously misleading. Most of the churches that pop up on page 1 will have (cleverly hidden) policies that discriminate against LGBTQ+ people (no weddings, no clergy). These churches consider themselves “friendly to gay people” — but they mean, “We’re happy to have you so long as you live celibate or marry someone you’re not attracted to.” Same story if you change the search to “LGBTQ inclusive” or even “affirming.” It’s likely the case in your town too.

Most of these churches use descriptors like “non-denominational” or “contemporary” or “culturally relevant.” Their pastors (men) wear untucked shirts and the sermons are filled with pop culture references and are ably-illustrated with video clips (PowerPoint is so 1990’s). These are some of the most savvy churches known to Google. The websites are littered with words like “welcome,” “diverse,” and “loving” — all true if you believe gayness is “intrinsically disordered” (the modern lingo that replaces “perverse”) or don’t care how the church regards its LGBTQ+ members and visitors.

Chances are the newer and hipper churches in your town hide their policies. They may even tell the inquiring gay couple, “Of course you’re welcome!” while failing to inform them that, in the eyes of the church, their relationship is something to repent of. The unsuspecting couple enjoys the awesome culturally-current church, falls in love with the people. A year or two later they learn of the policies that discriminate against them — the age-old bait & switch.

The better the church is — with engaging worship, relevant sermons, great kids programming, wonderful outreach — the more likely it is that the church will hide its policies. That means the LGBTQ+ people who come into the church’s spiritual orbit feel more connected when the other shoe drops ... and the psychological harm is even greater. So it’s the good churches you have to look out for — not the lame, boring ones.

These newer breeds of church are not just great marketers. They are often really good at doing church. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam calls their pastors, “social capital architects” who are genius at helping people make social connections.

These growing churches dialed back their rhetoric on the hot-button issues, because they were interested in reaching people who didn’t care about the issues like they did. And then the Supreme Court decision for marriage equality happened. At the same time, the polling was shifting dramatically. Now lots of people who might be attracted to these great-if-you’re-straight churches believe same-gender sex can be healthy and life-affirming for gay people. So the policies — still in effect — became a little embarrassing and now they are shared only on a “need-to-know” basis.

An increasing number of straight people in these churches pat themselves on the back for their love of the LGBTQ+ community, their support for marriage equality, and so on. If that’s you, just be honest with yourself: you are willing to enjoy a faith community that is great for you, even though it is potentially hazardous for your LGBTQ+ friends — the ones you love so much and are so supportive of. As a straight person you are free to make that bargain, but at the very least, you could let your LGBTQ+ friends at church know what the church policies are that affect them.

In case you’re not sure what the policies are your church are, do a little research for your LGBTQ+ friends. Ask the lead pastor “Do you perform weddings for gay couples?” If the answer isn’t, simply, “yes,” ... if it begins with a lengthy prelude like “Now that’s complicated issue, let’s step back for minute to unpack it,” you have your answer: NO.