



We are practicing God's radical, inclusive, real love **together**.

TO: Jackson County Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee
FROM: Rev. Shanna Steitz, Senior Minister, The Community Christian Church
DATE: March 15, 2023
SUBJECT: Ordinance #5711

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for this important legislation that is a step in making our community a safer place for all our residents to live, work, and thrive. As an ordained minister with a graduate degree in theological studies and over 20 years of ministry experience, it is important for me to stand with our LGBTQIA+ siblings against conversion therapy in our community.

As an Open and Affirming Congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The Community Christian Church professes weekly our calling to be a “congregation practicing God's radical, inclusive, real love together. In Community, we welcome and celebrate people of all ages, abilities and identities to be known as God's beloved.” This welcome statement, affirmed by our entire congregation, is a celebration grounded in some of the first verses of scripture that are clear in stating that each of us is created in the image of God and created not just good but very good (Genesis 1). Every. Single. One of us. Our congregation celebrates the rich diversity of our shared humanity, and we affirm the brave courage of our queer siblings to live into the fullness of their truest selves. Living in community with the full spectrum of humanity helps us know God in a more complete way that often takes us outside our narrow comfort zones into the fullness of God’s presence in the world.

Our congregation is comprised of residents not just from Jackson County but also from Clay, Platte, Wyandotte, Johnson, and Leavenworth Counties. We have members and friends from across the midwest who worship with us weekly to know more fully this inclusive and hope-filled message of God’s unconditional love. Together, we are cisgendered and transgendered, lesbian, gay, and bisexual, and much more on the spectrum of God’s grace.



We are a congregation committed to intergenerational work with members that span from a few months to over 90 years old. I say this only to emphasize that we represent a wide-spectrum of Christians.. Too often there is a narrow understanding of the “Christian perspective” or “Christian vote” that does not represent communities like ours. We are here to claim the gospel of Jesus in a way of love bigger than any one perspective or vote.

I have personally heard the traumatic stories from those in our community who have been through this kind of “therapy” and have struggled to recover from the long-term negative effects that more than a decade later are still very real. These programs are dangerous and live in opposition to our commitment to the commandments of our brother Jesus who teaches “you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

I pray for the days when all God’s children can know their belovedness and live into the promise that God loves them just as they are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139). Until that time, I will continue to preach, teach and work for this reality of kin-dom of God made real in our world.

Thank you for your time. Blessings on your work.



I'm a friend & colleague of Shanna, and she passed along information about tonight's hearing. I can't make it in person either, but I wanted to offer the brief written statement below:

Thanks ou to the DEI Committee and all who have supported Ordinance #5711 to ban conversion therapy in Jackson County. My identity includes my belonging both to the Christian faith and to the LGBTQ+ community. I'm a gay man, a pastor, and a Kansas Citian who believes that we can create a better world for all people in their spectrums of body and spirit.

By banning conversion therapy for minors, this ordinance offers one more step to guaranteeing a world in which people can grow up to be their most full self. Regardless of what one believes, there is ample evidence that conversion therapy does harm and does not heal participants. No religious belief should be the reason that anyone, especially a minor, is forced to undergo the trauma of conversion therapy. Some things cannot be changed, and by banning this damaging practice, all are invited into more whole ways of practicing their religion and being human in our county.

As a Christian pastor in particular, though, I am eager for legislation like this ordination to continue banning programs like conversion therapy. The practices and purpose of these damaging programs do not represent what Christianity really is or can be. The religion is rooted in stories of someone who taught and healed about a world in which all belong, as they are, and can flourish in their full humanity. The damage done to LGBTQ+ youth by forcing them into being someone they are not is antithetical to the message that started the movement we now know as Christianity. As a LGBTQ+ pastor in particular, I am eager for a world in which all are truly free to be who they are and believe in what they believe in— or don't believe in. By banning conversion therapy, this ordinance does not restrict anyone's religious practice but creates a more open opportunity for people to embody their genuine religious experiences without the harm that is done by the pseudo-psychology masquerading as theology at work in conversion therapy.

I can name many youth from my own church who have benefitted from being a part of religious world that embrace them for who they are, and I can name many more youth who would have undergone much less harm had they not been forced to undergo experiences with conversion therapy. Thank you.

—

Rev. Tyler Heston (he/him/his)
Minister to Youth and Young Adults
Country Club Christian Church
816-381-9257



My name is Rev. Valerie Austin (MDIV), ordained Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) clergy serving in Smithville, MO.

My strong conviction is that a ban on conversion therapy would not only serve to benefit those at risk of undergoing and facilitating this process, but also the whole of the community. Conversion therapy is a form of spiritual and psychological abuse that perpetuates fragmentation in the individual and society. By undermining and damaging the mental and spiritual well-being of individuals that identify as LGBTQ, conversion therapy is traumatizing in a way that has ongoing and lasting effects not only on the personal lives of those involved but also their public lives as it negatively affects how well they can actively and beneficially participate and contribute to society. Any psychological and spiritual trauma erects a barrier to a life of good mental health and readiness for individuals to fully engage in positive and life-giving ways for their benefit and the benefit of their community. These practices are based on faulty theology that ignores the historical contexts in which various Biblical passages were written and therefore has been used to abuse and justify fear of difference and diversity as well as mislead the faithful and well-meaning, destroying and straining countless relationships and households. I would implore you to ban this cruel process and protect the health and well-being of your community and contribute to a more healed and safe place where individuals can thrive. Thank you.

Rev. Valerie Austin

My name is Rev. David McDaniel. I am the Senior Pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church, and I support the proposed ban of conversion therapy for minors in Jackson County, MO.

It was with great joy that I learned of the proposed Ordinance in Jackson County, MO to provide protection for our minors, specifically our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or questioning youth from the life-threatening harm of conversion therapy.

(As has already been clearly documented, many medical organizations oppose conversion therapy, including: American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Nursing, American Academy of Family Physicians, to name a few.)

As a pastor, I view life through the lenses of theology and morality. When discerning the moral from the immoral, my faith leads me to consider several questions: “What does it do to the least of these? Does it contribute to the common good and beloved community or does it hinder it? Does it tell the truth and is it based in reality?”

I believe that conversion therapy fails each of these basic moral questions.

My friends and colleagues from the faith community who oppose this ban do so from the basis of theology.

But, this Legislature is not charged to conduct the work of theology. Rather, this Legislature is charged to lead and protect the people of Jackson County, especially her citizens who are vulnerable.

The statistics are clear. When minors are exposed to conversion therapy, they are at a higher risk for attempted suicide and are more likely to report high levels of depression. This is a health issue.

So as a pastor, as a Baptist pastor, as a faith leader, a husband, father, and brother of this community, I stand in solidarity of support with the ban of conversion therapy for minors in Jackson County.

I urge you to pass this ban. When you do this, you are leading Jackson County into a more just, righteous, and inclusive future.

Dear Manny:

I urge you to support a county ban on conversion therapy. This practice is pure quackery and an unscientific attempt by religious zealots to persecute members of the LGBTQ community.

Gender identity is a choice, not a disease or psychological disorder. Not only does conversion therapy not work, but it can inflict serious psychological harm, especially on younger people who are still trying to make their way in the world, socially and sexually.

Respectfully Yours,

Jonathan Rand
First District
816-682-4804

Hello,

I'm a Jackson County resident reaching out regarding Ordinance 5711. Conversion therapy is abusive. It increases mental health issues and suicide rates. Please make sure not to bring back the archaic use of conversion therapy. Missouri can do better.

Please do the right thing.
Rebecca Stewart

Dear Sir,

I believe it was you I heard speak today on KCUR about a proposed ban on 'conversion therapy' in Jackson County. This sounds like a great idea to me.
Please pass this ordinance. Young people should not be subjected to such things anywhere, let alone in our city.

As a Fairway Kansas resident who works in Kansas City and pays the 1% income tax I hope my opinion counts and I hope you will also hear from many of your constituents in support of this measure.

Sincerely,

Joe Alburty
Fairway, Kansas

Dear Legislators

I have only just learned of Ordinance No. 5711, which would ban sexual orientation and gender identity conversion therapy for minors. I understand you will very soon be considering his ordinance. I strongly urge you to pass it.

Such so-called conversion therapies were around decades ago when I was first coming out as a gay man. I talked with individuals struggling with these issues and being coerced into such programs while I was a peer counselor with the Gay Talk hotline. These "therapies" were still around and became especially problematic when AIDS came along, during which time I served on Mayor Richard Berkley's Task Force on AIDS and the AIDS Council. Then and since, there has been no credible evidence that they work and much evidence that they can do severe harm. I can personally attest to individuals I know who have been submitted to or threatened with such programs, and I have seen their tremendous harm. I have seen no one whose gender identity or sexual orientation has actually changed, but have seen those traumatized by such programs. It is especially important that minors not be subjected to such traumatizing "conversion" treatments. Certainly, there are those who will struggle with sexual issues, but there are many legitimate counseling services available to those individuals. In addition, many of these conversion programs have been run by individuals and organizations with agendas beyond true support for any individuals.

Please vote in favor of Ordinance No. 5711.

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