



June 15, 2022  
A Note from Pastor April

**Dear Friends,**

This past weekend, we celebrated our first anniversary of being a Reconciling Congregation (<https://hilliardumc.org/reconciling-ministry-discernment-team/>). On Saturday, we had a joyful time at the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Hilliard Pride event.



As one of the sponsors of the event, we were present with our God Loves You... No Matter What tee shirts talking to folks throughout the afternoon with one primary message...

**YOU BELONG.**

**Few things can be more healing to a person than to have a sense that they are included and seen as a valuable part of the community.**

On the other hand, few things can be more damaging than to be intentionally excluded or told that one does not belong. I'm sure that all of us have painful memories from childhood or adulthood about moments when we were left out or received a message that something about us wasn't quite enough.

Deep down, all of us want to know that we are loved, affirmed, and valuable, especially to those who matter most to us.



**We can assume that this basic human need was also present for the ancient Israelites, as they were learning how to live in relationship with God and with one another.**

The audacious goal of building a social order rooted in the values of God and the ethic of love was never going to be easy. The stories in Exodus and Leviticus are clear that most of the time, the people missed the mark... hurting one another and failing to honor the commitments they made to God.

**What the book of Leviticus provided them was guidance on how to take these values and ethics and translate them into the day-to-day rhythms of community life.**

The sections we focus in on this week in chapters 4-6 offered the people clear guidance on what to do when they had messed it up. The guidance was for individuals and for the entire community.

When you've harmed another person, violated the commandments of God, or been dishonest to the community, there were clear steps on how to seek forgiveness and make it right.

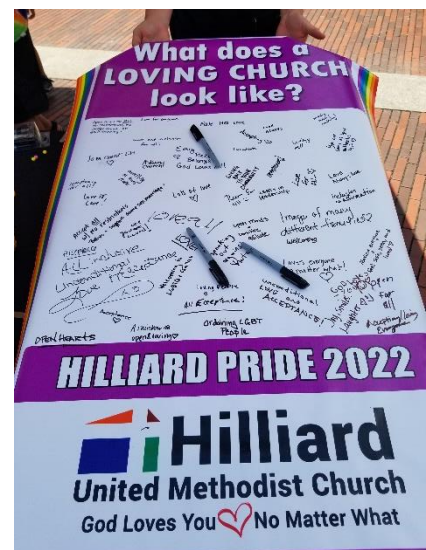
**These guidelines ensured that no one would be excluded from the community, either for their actions or for hurt that had been done to them. Each person mattered, and reconciliation was always the goal.**

I can imagine how practical and helpful these guidelines must have been for the Hebrew people. To have a clear and understandable path of how to make things right again, how to restore community and how to offer forgiveness and reconciliation... what a gift!

So often, the hurt that happens never gets addressed. The person who has been hurt often feels that their pain is invisible or not valued by others.

And the offending party misses out on a tremendous opportunity to grow, either through an expanded awareness or the receiving of forgiveness to help release their shame.

**In many ways, our work as a reconciling congregation is seeking to embody these practices: to help create a**



community where people can feel seen, can heal from the hurt, and can find ways to live in love, forgiveness, and freedom.

That means that we aren't afraid to have hard conversations and try to be honest about the ways that the church has caused hurt and how we can seek to bring healing in the future.

**Our reconciling work has never *just* been about inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. It has been about the affirmation and belonging that is extended to *all* of God's children, especially those on the margins.**

We'll be reading these passages on an important day in the history of our nation: **Juneteenth.** On June 19, 1865, the news of emancipation from slavery finally reached the enslaved persons in Galveston, Texas.

Since then, it has been a day of celebration, particularly for black Americans, of liberation and freedom — and also a day to remember how far we have to go to ensure that this is fully realized in our country.

**What would it look like to take seriously the principles of Leviticus in finding ways to seek forgiveness as a community for the ways that people of color continue to experience less than full liberation?**

How do we do this in a way that isn't at all about shame, but is all about restoring *all* of us to a place of healing and love together?

Both services on Sunday will begin with a corporate confession and time of prayer on this special day.



**I'm delighted that this week's message will be shared by my dear friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Brian Maguire.** Brian is the lead pastor at Fairmont Presbyterian Church and has been my primary partner in planning and executing this Great Story series on the Old Testament. His brilliance and wisdom when it comes to biblical history and theology is surely going to be an enormous blessing to us all, as we continue to lean into being the people that God has called us to be.

I'm so grateful to be on this journey with each of you, and I look forward to being with you in this ongoing work of becoming the church that the world needs right now.

Blessings!

Pastor April



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The logo features a stylized 'H' composed of colorful geometric shapes (triangles and squares) in shades of green, yellow, orange, and blue. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font.