



October 4, 2023

A Note from Donna Bradley

**Dear Friends,**

Walking into church many years ago, our then three-year-old son Elliot became obsessed with a deceased squirrel we passed crossing the street. During a quiet time of prayer, the questions rang from his mouth, not yet pronouncing "squirrel" properly.

"Mommy, is the dead girl still in the street?"

"Why can't I touch the dead girl?"

"Who will clean the dead girl up?"

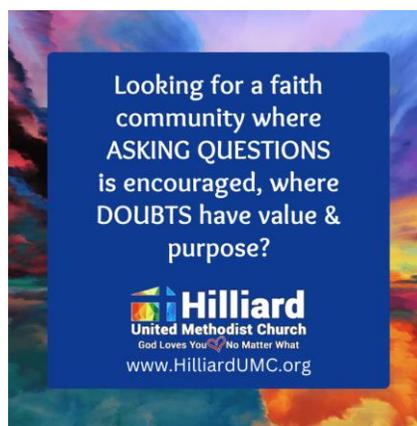
I remember trying to stifle my laughter and sheepishly clarifying "squirrel" to the people behind us.

**We raised our kids to be curious.** As an elementary school teacher, I value questions and journeys toward understanding. In contrast, I was raised in the spirit of obedience. I'm sure this was exhausting for my parents. I was expected to follow rules and not question or challenge ideas but accept them as truth.

Not long after that "squirrel Sunday," God graciously nudged my husband Brian and me to become faithful in our financial giving to the church. We prayerfully increased our gifts in an act of obedience.

That is not the story Pastor Jon asked me to tell today, however.

For a season we stayed the course as our three children grew. As teens, they asked harder questions about faith, God, and loving our neighbors. As result, Brian and I became open minded and more accepting of others. God stirred in us. He gave us the wonderful gift of generous hearts.



Occasionally issues surfaced that our family questioned. We were quietly in disagreement with treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in the church. We carried on, not agreeing, and not acting.

**Our kids were relentless! They would not accept the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals. God worked through our kids, who helped us realize our complacency was part of the problem.** Eventually, we found our voice, we spoke up.

And we found a new church. It seemed like an accepting environment and a great fit. Over time we found that the LOVE was conditional to a certain demographic. We questioned exclusive practices. We initiated difficult conversations around women's rights and the LGBTQ+ population.



Meanwhile, the pandemic hit. It shined a bright light upon inequities in our community. Families in Hilliard City School District struggled with food insecurity, racism, and lack of community support, and they faced online learning without Wi-Fi access. People became divided as everything became political. I wanted to help. The needs were overwhelming. I felt defeated.

I wondered whether organized religion might no longer be for me. I questioned. I prayed for God to restore my faith in church and for us to find His church.

The church search commenced.  
Online.  
Amid a pandemic  
Not a fan, btw.

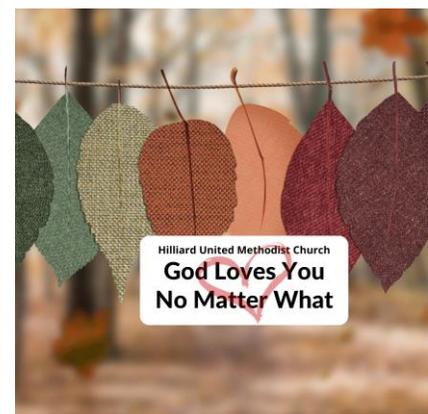
I Googled "LGBTQ+ friendly churches near me."  
HUMC was first on the list.  
I admit, I was skeptical.  
I wasn't sure we'd find a church where we belonged.

We listened online.

"God loves you no matter what," rang Pastor April's voice.

I wasn't a skeptic for long.

**We found HUMC to be true to the tagline.** We heard sermons of inclusivity. We noticed the down-to-earth styles of Pastor April and Pastor Jon. They are authentic people who are comfortable being themselves.



Attending in person, we felt welcome. We learned of Godly Play, Farm Market, community dinners, Seams that Bind quilting, and Trunk or Treat.

**This is a place where questions are welcome and curiosity is appreciated.** Exploring together can lead us to better understanding of ourselves, each other, and God.

We participated in the identity and branding work. Being a relevant church and a church of action is important to us. I am eager to work further on establishing a non-profit. Brian has found his niche running sound in Warehouse 839. Our grandson, Leo, was baptized, and little brother Ethan's baptism is coming up this month. Knowing that our children and grandchildren have this church to learn about the abundant love of God brings me joy.

**HUMC is willing to live boldly and kindly in the community with a heart for the marginalized.** We are all in! Let's go!

Being financially invested in this work is one way to get involved. We are energized by being part of something bigger than ourselves. Brian and I could never accomplish these goals on our own, but together as a Christian community, there's no limit to what can be done. I urge you to pray for a generous heart.

We searched for a church that reflected God's love for ALL people. Praise God! And shout out to Google.

This is the church where we belong.

This is where we want to leave our legacy.



Donna Bradley  
Donna\_Bradley@hboe.org

