

Press Release

“A gay man, a grandma, a musician, and a teacher walk into a room.” It sounds like the set-up for a joke, but it is actually people setting up for a new kind of church in Murfreesboro, TN.

In November 2015, Open Table Christian Church was founded to respect personal and theological differences for the united purpose of worship and healing a broken world. There is no building with a steeple, no creeds or articles of faith that visitors are expected to adopt, no traditional memberships, and they won't even ask for your money. This isn't a typical church.

“I love sitting next to a Conservative, singing with an immigrant, and listening to a gay pastor,” says Jennifer Richardson, who coordinates the church's ministries. “It inspires me to see such diverse people coming together to make the world a better place. That unites us more than any specific theological dogma.”

There is no pressure to join or become a member at Open Table Christian Church. Anyone is welcome whenever they can attend, whether that means each week, in supplement to another church, or as an occasional drop-in. “Each of us feels a call to be part of a congregation in the Murfreesboro area that is dedicated to social justice issues such as racial reconciliation, relief of poverty and homelessness, and being open and affirming to all persons regardless of sexual orientation,” says Pastor George Cunningham. “OTCC also aspires to be a Christian congregation where various theological and spiritual perspectives may be respected and shared.”

There are no salaries, budgets, or committees at Open Table Christian Church, which allows them a flexibility many find appealing. Instead of starting brand new and time consuming ministry programs, Open Table Christian Church has decided to contribute to and collaborate with organizations that are already successful in helping others. In November and December, for example, they purchased wish list items for adults with intellectual disabilities served by Journeys in Community Living and compiled *Welcome to America* baskets for refugees to be distributed by World Relief. They are currently adding to and organizing the food pantry and clothing closets of Journey Home, which serves the homeless and disadvantaged of Rutherford County.

In the spring, Open Table Christian Church will be supporting MT Lambda, MTSU's only All-Inclusive LGBT+ association, in their annual Spring Out event. “After hearing some of the young men and women tell their stories of being raised in church and then being rejected by family and church, it is more important than ever to support MT Lambda,” noted Jo Nelson. “We can show these students that there is a church that knows and teaches that we are ALL equally loved by God as we work to promote understanding in the community.” Later in the year, Open Table Christian Church will reach out to local veterans, hold dinners with other faiths and races to encourage dialog, and extend compassion by ministering to inmates and their families.

The name Open Table Christian Church was chosen to emphasize the fact that this church and the communion they share are open to anyone who would like to come. "Open Table Christian Church is living out its mission of being welcoming to all people and includes folks of different ethnic backgrounds, economic levels, ages, and sexual orientation. Our group includes people from many different religious backgrounds including: Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, Baptists, Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalists, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church," says Pastor George Cunningham. If you have been searching for a church that will accept you for who you are, Open Table Christian Church has a space for you.

Open Table Christian Church

When: Gathering starts at 5:30pm with service at 6:00pm

Location: Journeys in Community Living, 1130 Haley Road, Murfreesboro, TN 37130

Contact: Pastor George Cunningham at 615-319-1589 or Jennifer Richardson 615-962-7366

www.OpenTableChristianChurch.org

Open Table Christian Church

WHO WE ARE

We are a community united in our desire to share God's love and peace through worship, service, and unconditional acceptance.

STATEMENTS OF VALUES

We value diversity.

We value service, social justice, and equality.

We value unity not uniformity.

We value cooperation with other denominations and faiths for greater good and harmony.

We value open communion.

We value the participation of laity regardless of gender, sexual orientation, etc.

We value study and deep discussion.

We value asking questions as a way to strengthen our faith.

We value people more than dogma.

WE STRIVE TO

Seek justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

Share God's unconditional love for all of creation

Create a welcoming atmosphere for all, especially the marginalized, oppressed, and disillusioned

Provide a safe place to say what we think and be who we are in a spirit of love

Ask questions without fear of judgment or the expectation of easy answers

Serve one another and our greater community with an emphasis on social justice

STATEMENT OF INCLUSION

Open Table Christian Church seeks to be a people of grace and welcome to all God's children. We affirm the faith, baptism, and spiritual gifts of all who follow God, and we are glad to welcome into fellowship and service all people – no matter what race, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, physical or mental ability, economic status, political stance, and theological perspective. We celebrate that ALL are part of God's good creation.