

Edina Morningside Community Church  
United Church of Christ  
Rev. Howard Bell  
Sunday, August 7, 2016  
*Risking Openness*

Today's theme was originally planned to cover the Prophetic Theme of sex and sexuality. This was stimulated by the decision that this church has made to offer Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality training to our seventh, eighth and ninth graders during the coming year. I thought that if we were offering this program to our youth, it would be important to also be able to at least have some conversations among adults of the congregation on the topic of sex and sexuality. It also allowed me to schedule my "Prophetic Witness – Coming Out as a Gay Male Story" after being bumped from giving it on June 26. (I was bumped for a good reason – for the report from the Pastoral Search Committee.) I do want to share the five areas that OWL covers. They are: Sensuality, Intimacy, Sexual Identity, Sexual Health and Reproduction; and Sexualization. Rather than trying to address these issues today, I encourage you to engage in discussion with the leaders (Janet Anderson and Larry Williams), the parents and the participants of OWL during this year to learn more about the value this program can have in this church's faith formation ministries this year and into the future.

The theme for today has morphed into a theme of "Constructive Openness". The theme of "Constructive Openness" certainly applies to the process of health sexuality, but I will apply it today primarily to openness in communication and building meaningful relationships beyond those relationships that may have sexuality as a component.

Please pull out your insert of the Johari Window. I have used this throughout my career in non-profits and in my life. I was a bit disappointed when I learned the origin of the name. I thought it sounded like "Johari" might reference some powerful Eastern spiritual path. In reality, it is named after the two founders – Joe and Harry.

I love its simplicity. It contains two columns. One column - on the left side - is everything (thoughts, feelings and behaviors) known to self and the other – on the right side - is everything (thoughts, feelings and behaviors) unknown to self. It also contains two rows. The first top row is everything known about you to others, and the second bottom row is everything about you that is unknown to others. Thus the four boxes: Open (the white box) is "Known to Self and Known to Others", Blind (the green box) is "those things others see or perceive about you but that are unknown to you"; Hidden (the pink box) are "those things you know about yourself, but you choose to keep hidden"; and Unknown (the black box) is "things unknown to both you and to others". The goal of the Johari Window is to demonstrate how to increase the Open box. Simply put, there are three ways to increase openness.

The first is that we can move things into the open box from the hidden box through self-disclosure. Secondly, we move things into the open box from the blind box by asking for feedback from others. A phrase that signifies the importance of feedback is: "Would that God

the gift would give us, to see ourselves as others see us.” Thirdly we can move things into the open box from the unknown box through risk-taking and play. I love that idea of the role that creative play might have in deepening our relationships. It also helps us to not think that deepening relationships has to always be hard work. It may also be a process of playful exploration together.

The article from Mantua Consulting read this morning, gives helpful insights about the risks of openness. That is why I titled this message: “Risking Openness”. I believe that, generally speaking, the benefits to increasing openness outweigh the risks, even though it is important to be aware of the risks. Openness allows for the building of trust and intimacy. Self-disclosure is encouraged within safe boundaries. As an example, I would not have felt comfortable sharing my coming out story in the first few months of our ministry together, but our time together encourages me to share it today. Openness also lowers the likelihood of conflict and misunderstanding.

In the same article from Mantua Consulting, we read these words about giving and getting feedback. *“Feedback is a way of seeing the impact on another of what you say and do. Feedback on your behavior, on how you come across, can help you consider alternative ways of behaving. If it is not given constructively, it can encourage defensiveness, or simply be destructive. Feedback is constructive when:*

- *It is asked for rather than imposed*
- *Is well timed*
- *Is not saved up and dumped all at once*
- *Is checked to insure accuracy*
- *Is checked to validate against the perception of others*
- *Is intended to be helpful*
- *Is specific rather than general.”*

I invite you to think about the Johari Window as a possible tool as you welcome Rev. Oby Ballinger as your new settled Pastor this September. I believe that the body of Christ known as Edina Morningside Church will be enriched by more openness among the members; between the members and the lay leadership of the church, and with Rev. Ballinger. Yes, we are a very welcoming church, but we have not always demonstrated good communication skills especially when conflict arises.

An important new ministry team is being formed to encourage openness as a congregation with your new pastor.

It is the Pastoral Relations Committee. Cathy Baldwin, Laurie Cory and Larry Williams have agreed to serve on this ministry team after the Pastoral Search Committee has completed a transition process. The Pastoral Relations Committee’s mission is “to foster a healthy relationship between the Pastor and the congregation in order to enhance the effectiveness of the church and its mission”. I want to lift up two duties listed in the description for the committee: 1.) To establish and maintain a regular channel of feedback and communication between Pastor and congregation; and 2.) To manage and resolve conflicts. Since conflicts inevitably arise even in a highly successful pastoral ministry, I believe the

establishment of this committee may be one of the more important tasks that we have accomplished in our interim time. However, it will only be valuable if it is utilized. Please look for more to come from the Pastoral Relations Committee.

Finally, I cherish the image in the New Testament text today of stripping ourselves of old ways and clothing ourselves in new ways. We can use this image as another understanding of increasing the open box of the Johari Window. If we insist on the old ways of being and doing, we will limit openness. However if strip ourselves of old ways of failing to communicate; of old ways of avoiding conflict; of old ways of reacting defensively to feedback form others; and if we clothe ourselves – according to Colossians, in “compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience” we will allow for greater reception of feedback and greater likelihood of self-disclosure for ourselves and others with whom we enter into relationship. The Apostle Paul in the letter to Colossians encourages us to forgive each other since Yahweh has already forgiven us. Above all, Paul says, love binds us together. When peace rules in our hearts, we are truly one body. You are the beloved body of Christ. May your openness with one another, with your pastor and with those you serve increase as your future ministries unfold. May it be so. Amen.